CHAPTER VI
Soviet Policy Towards Communism in Afghanistan During Gorbachev's Period, 1985-89

In March 1985 when Gorbachev assumed power in the Soviet Union following the death of Chernenko his government re examined the Soviet foreign policy, including Soviet Union's Afghan policy. His policy to restructure the Soviet economy forced the government to rethink about the expensive foreign policy initiatives in the Third World, especially its involvement in Afghanistan. Moreover, this was very necessary to improve the relation with the United States. Therefore, it is right to say that the decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan was the product of the general Soviet policy of glasnost, perestroika and new thinking.

In this chapter the policy and events which led to the Soviet decision of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan is examined on the assumption that the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan primarily due to its own domestic compulsions followed by a new phase of Soviet polity under perestroika and glasnost which needed larger global cooperation and international peace.

While perestroika was a process of total restructuring of the established socialist society, glasnost or openness
provided for debates, discussions, question-answer session in the mass media, etc.¹

Gorbachev explained that "perestroika means overcoming the stagnation process, breaking down the braking mechanism, creating a dependable and the effective mechanism for the acceleration of social and economic progress and giving it greater dynamism.

"Perestroika means mass initiative. It is the comprehensive development of democracy. Socialist self-government, encouragement of initiative and creative endeavor, improved order and discipline, more glasnost, criticism and self-criticism in all spheres of our society. It is utmost respect of the individual and consideration for personal dignity."²

Gorbachev further explained that perestroika is "the all-round intensification of the Soviet economy, the revival and development of the principles of democratic centralism in running the national economy, the universal

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introduction of economic methods, the renunciation of management by injunction and by administrative methods and the overall encouragement of innovation and socialist enterprise.

"Perestroika means a resolute shift to scientific methods, an ability to provide a solid scientific basis for every new initiative....

"Perestroika means elimination from the society of the distortions of Socialist ethics, the consistent implementation of the principles of social justice". 3

Gorbachev's reform programme contains four elements: military, political, economic and humanitarian. In the military sphere, his policy aims at the renunciation of nuclear or conventional war, prevention of arms race, reducing military budgets, etc. In the political sphere, it was for the respect of the independent status of other nations, measures to settle the international crises and regional conflicts. In economic sphere his objective was to support the formation of a new world economic order in which there will be an equal economic security to all countries. He linked the economic development with disarmament. In the humanitarian sphere, perestroika aims

3. Ibid., pp.34-35.
at the cooperation in culture, art, science, education, and medicine irrespective of any kind of apartheid or discrimination. 4 In fact, with perestroika and new thinking change came to each and every arena of Soviet polity.

Perestroika programme was brought in the Soviet Union by the 27th Congress of the CPSU in March 1986, in such circumstances in which a series of crises troubled the Soviet society. By the mid 1980s it is understood that the Soviet economy was undergoing a very low rate of economic development. The standard of living and purchasing power of the people were deteriorating. Diseases, mortality rates (especially infant mortality rates), poverty, etc were increasing. In addition to this alcoholism, crimes, corruption etc. added further momentum to social delay. In short, when Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, he had to face a stagnant economy and a decaying society of deteriorating standards of civic moralities.

The economic condition in the Soviet Union became incomparable even to the standards of certain less developed countries. It is reported that in the world

level the USSR ranked between 50th and 60th with many Less Developed Countries (LDCs) ranking higher. In these circumstances it was difficult for the Soviet Union to attain the world standards of economic development, high technology and productivity growth. Hence, perestroika was an economic and social necessity in the Soviet Union at that time. Gorbachev wrote in the party programme that "the 1970s and the early 1980s saw certain unfavourable trends and difficulties in the country's development. To a great extent these were due to the failure to assess appropriately and in good times changes in the economic situation and the need for profound transformations in all spheres of life and to a lack of persistence in carrying them out".

Gorbachev introduced his new policies to save the Soviet society from its domestic problems and change the authoritarian bureaucratic system into one of humane, democratic socialism. After the initial cautious approach, Gorbachev soon started taking an active posture expressing


the need for an overhauling of society. This all-round nature of reform is clearly expressed in his address to the party activists in Khabarovsk on 31 July 1986 during his visit to the Soviet Far East where he said:

"The question today is of transformation on no less a scale. The current restructuring embraces not only the economy, but all aspects of public life - social relations, the political system, the spiritual and ideological sphere, and the style and methods of party work, and of all our cadres. Restructuring is a word leaden with meaning. I would equate the word 'restructuring' with the word revolution. Our transformations and the reforms mapped out in the decision of the April plenum of the party central committee and its 27th Congress are a revolution in the entire system of social relations, in the hearts and minds of the people, in the psychology and understanding of the modern period and above all of the tasks engendered by rapid scientific and technological progress".7 This shows Gorbachev's bold decision to take all steps to reform the existing administrative problems.

Gorbachev realised that greater international peace and cooperation is needed for the successful implementation

of perestroika. To attain the global economic status, Gorbachev had to revitalize the stagnant Soviet economy. This concerns made Gorbachev to change his foreign policy also. In this respect, the main principles set on the foreign policy area were:

(a) to be militarily and strategically respected by the United States.
(b) to play a greater role in solving the international disputes, particularly in the third world.
(c) to strengthen and to maintain the coherence of the socialist nations.
(d) to render "necessary" support for internationalist movements and struggles without any danger to Soviet security.
(e) to end the war in Afghanistan, with the survival of the Afghan Communist Party. 8

Gorbachev's approach to foreign policy was more conciliatory and flexible compared to his predecessor. This was because of the necessity of world peace for the success of profound social and economic changes undertaken.

in the Soviet economy. That is why Gorbachev connected development with disarmament.

By achieving disarmament Gorbachev thought of relieving the military burden on economy. If they were relieved of the heavy military burden, the perestroika reform would be far easier to bring about. If highly trained personnel could shifted from the military to civilian, research, development and production areas and if "perestroika" and "glasnost" were likewise implemented in the armed forces 9 also, then the reforms would be a success.

Nuclear disarmament emerged as an effective path to success in Soviet foreign affairs. His arms control proposals and negotiation with the United State for nuclear arms control turned the attention of world to him as an international peace-maker. Gorbachev's arms control proposals were mainly aimed at the normalisation of relations with United States and the consequent interdependence in the development of economy. By maintaining good relations with the US, the Soviet Union thought of using the American high technology for Soviet

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economic development. This was the objective behind the signing of the INF Treaty and START negotiations in 1987 and 1988 respectively. For reducing the arms race in the third world, the principles of nuclear non-proliferation and efforts for establishing nuclear free zones throughout the Third World were followed. 10

The new Political thinking touched all aspects of Soviet foreign policy, especially regarding third world regional conflicts. The traditional views of colonialism and imperialism were not important in the new thinking. "Deideologizatsiia" (deideologisation) was the principle underlying the new thinking. The Soviet foreign policy analysts and thinkers ruled out the military solutions to the regional crises and favoured peaceful negotiated settlement. The Soviet thinkers held that the causes of the inter-state or intra-state conflicts are lying within the system in its indigenous factors like ethnic cleavages, religion, tribalism, nationalism, etc. 11 This assessment later led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, as the


result of Soviet suggested three-stage process for the resolution of regional conflicts. They were 1) the policy of encouraging national reconciliation 2) dialogue between super powers about important issues or disengagement of superpowers from intervention and 3) the United Nation Secretary General to hold peacekeeping activities. The settlement of regional conflicts was a pre-condition to end cold war rivalry with the United States. Throughout the 1985 to 1988 period Soviet foreign initiatives reflected this aim.

A shift in the general policy towards Third world gave it a low priority and this affected specifically the policy on Afghan issue also. This shift from the earlier policies can be seen when Gorbachev tried to stand non-committed to countries with a "Socialist orientation". Gorbachev made an effort to reduce the Soviet presence in the military conflicts in which it was already involved. Soviet aid to Third World countries was reduced.

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Gorbachev's decision to pull out from Afghanistan was an outcome of his new foreign policy initiatives to the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific region got much more importance in Gorbachev's policies, due to the strategic and economic importance of the region. Gorbachev observed the growth of Japan and realised the importance of developing good relation with China. In his Vladivostok speech on 28 July 1988, Gorbachev emphasised the importance of Japan. He said: "Japan has turned into a power of foremost importance. It has achieved outstanding success in industry, trade, education, science and technology." \(^{14}\)

Gorbachev realised that without friendly relation with Asian countries, any political or economic gain was impossible in the Asian region. As all the Asian countries opposed the Soviet war in Afghanistan (Soviet Union was the only power which was at war in Asia),\(^{15}\) it had to settle the situation in Afghanistan for maintaining good relations with major Asian countries like China, Japan and India. In his speech at the 27th Congress of CPSU, Gorbachev said:


"The significance of the Asia-Pacific region is growing... it is expedient to begin with the coordination and then pooling of efforts in the interests of a political settlement of painful problems so as, in parallel, on that basis to at least take the edge off the military confrontation in various part of Asia and stabilize the situation there".16 In 15 January 1986, Gorbachev declared that "Ensuring security in Asia is of vital importance to the Soviet Union, a major Asian power".17 This obvious concern for the general security in Asia had an impact on the Soviet Afghan policy.

Regarding Europe, including Soviet bloc of East Europe, Gorbachev's new thinking was for a "Common European Home". Regarding the Soviet-East European relations Gorbachev modified the principle of "Socialist internationalism" and there was no relevance left to the


"Brezhnev Doctrine". More autonomy was given to the communist parties of East Europe. The dominance of Soviet Union in the socialist world was not accepted. According to Gorbachev, the relation between socialist countries were based on the principle of "equality and mutual responsibility" and he stated that "no one has a right to claim special status in the socialist world".¹⁸

About the modifications made in the Soviet-East European relations Gorbachev told in 1987: "First and foremost we proceed from the premise that the entire system of the socialist countries" political relations can and must be built on the basis of equality and mutual responsibility. No one has the right to claim special status in the socialist world. We consider the independence of every party, its responsibility to the people of its own country, and its rights to decide the questions of the country's development to be unconditional principles.

"At the same time, we are of the firm conviction that the community of socialist nations will be successful only if every party and country is concerned not only about its

own interests, and only if every party and country treats its friends and allies with respect and is sure to take their interests into account." Gorbachev gave less importance to the Eastern Europe compared to the other Soviet leaders' approach to this region. Under perestroika, the "Brezhnev Doctrine" and its application to socialist nations were abandoned. When Gorbachev set up a new commission on International policy in place of earlier Department for Liaison with communist and workers' parties of Socialist countries, for the purpose of co-ordinating the Soviet foreign policy towards East Europe and around the world made it clear that the East Europe has lost its special case treatment from the Soviet Union. In the Soviet agenda geo-political and international considerations gained more importance rather than ideology.

Among the other factors that influenced the Soviet policy change, the impact of the Afghan war on the Soviet military was remarkable. It had posed new challenges to Soviet military establishment. The conditions of Afghan


war worsened the ethnic conflicts within the military.  

The Afghan war not only exacerbated the ethnic conflict, but it also jeopardised the assets of the Soviet structure in central Asia. The immediate discontent to Afghan war was more prominent among central Asians due to the similarities in culture, religion and ethnicity of their Afghan counterparts. Therefore, the central Asians were not comfortable with the Soviet Afghan policy. Apart from the central Asians the Afghan war created anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments among other ethnic minorities. Many Central Asian soldiers were reluctant to take part in the Afghan war and several of those who served Soviet military turned disloyal.

The war in Afghanistan continuing without any political or military gains opened up ways for a new thinking in the Soviet Union. It had proved difficult to fight a prolonged war, unlike a large war where seasoned soldiers continue fighting and the army gets further combat


experience. This was not the case in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan soldiers did not have to fight continuously, but every now and then they had to confront with guerrillas. But, at the same time the need for fresh supply of professional soldiers trained in rural combat created problems for the Soviet government.23

The international and regional concerns as well as the Soviet domestic and military factors got reflected on the Soviet policy towards Afghan conflict. Gorbachev's reference to Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound" 24 (Krovotochashchyu ránu) for the Soviet Union was a clear evident of the glasnost on Soviet Afghan policy coming into practice. Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze admitted that they have violated the national legislation with their intervention in Afghanistan.25 In this connection he said, "I have in mind the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. It should be noted that in this our (Soviet Union's) own legislation and party and civil standards and ethics, had been grossly violated."26 All these

24. Mikhail Gorbachev, No.2, p.177.
26. Ibid.
reassessments paved the way for a new policy on Afghanistan.

The new policy of Gorbachev on Afghanistan had three main features. First, Afghanistan would be an independent non-aligned country, friendly towards USSR. Secondly, it would have a government of national reconciliation in which the Marxist PDPA would share substantial power with non-Marxist groups including resistance groups that might join the process of national reconciliation. And finally, the Soviet Union needed the friendly cooperation of Pakistan to make both national reconciliation and troop withdrawal possible. 27

For Gorbachev, Afghanistan became the crux of his new foreign policy. A year long debate in the CPSU yielded several points of agreement. the new realisations arrived at were very significant. First, the military intervention was understood as a political mistake of the first order caused by a very serious misreading of the political reality prevailing the entire south Asian - Persian Gulf region. Second, the political cost of this mistake had been assessed as enormous. Third, disengagement from Afghanistan was approved as an important step to mollify

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the West Europeans, the Arabs and Japan, countries with whom Gorbachev hoped to do good business before he could penetrate Reagan's iron curtain. Lastly, the political climate in Pakistan was assessed as developing favourable for a fruitful dialogue.28

More glasnost on the Afghan problem could be seen when opposition to the war within the Soviet Union, increasing economic problems, moral deterioration of Soviet army etc were resulted due to the war. The war resulted in a great economic and human resources drain for the Soviet Union. By 1988, almost 10 billion dollars were spent in the Afghan war. Approximately 15000 Soviet soldiers were killed 29 and 40000 men were wounded. In 1989, the Soviet net

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In Pakistan, opinion about Afghan conflict began to change. In Feb 1985, during elections, political elements in the country started suggesting alternative means of settling it. It is reported that 1/4 of the new parliamentary members and 12 out of 14 political parties opposed Lia's Afghan policy and favoured direct talk with Kabul. See Samina Yasmeen "Facing the Realities : Pakistan's Afghan policy" in Coral Bell ed., Politics, Diplomacy and Islam : Four Case Studies (Canberra : The Australian National University, 1986), p.39.

economic aid disbursed to Afghanistan was $820 million.\textsuperscript{30} Because of these problems the Soviet public opinion and resistance against won increased.

A Soviet domestic opinion poll conducted in 1989 mentioned that 61% of the Moscovites considered the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan a mistake.\textsuperscript{31} In terms of casualties as well as social problems like cynicism among youths who had served in Afghanistan, the Afghan war had a far-reaching impact on the Soviet society. Residents in both Russian and non-Russian republics expressed their disapproval of official Soviet policy on Afghanistan. Even in the party, members became less confident of the Soviet success in Afghanistan. A Belorussian worker who was a party member also expressed; "I don't like this war and neither does anyone else.... Going into Afghanistan was an error, but ending it is a matter of prestige."\textsuperscript{32}

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The war was becoming less popular in the Soviet Union because of its notorious deeds and also because of the rumours and stories passed by Soviet Afghan war veterans (Afghantsi) who went home as invalids with the stories of horrors of war.\textsuperscript{33} Some of these veterans gave interviews to underground publications. In 'Samizdat' contemptuous expressions of soldier's experience were given.\textsuperscript{34} Ryshkov and Voronin, the soldiers who served in Afghanistan, said about a briefing before they were sent to Afghanistan, "It was very inspiring, they told us we were going to Afghanistan to defend our homeland. The two great enemies of our country, America and China, were working together, building aggressive bases in Afghanistan in preparation for the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Soviet army could not stand idly while these imperialist plans were so blatantly carried. The Defense of the homeland must take place in Afghanistan itself. We were to be among troops.

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honoured to carry out that sacred mission."  

Ryshkov and Voronin recalls that what actually had happened in Afghanistan. They said "What they had told us was not true. We know we were fighting the Afghan people but, even more important we knew they were not going to invade the Soviet Union. They were only defending their country the way we in Russia did in 1941."  

The Soviet army that served in Afghanistan lacked incentives, had a low morale and was affected by problems like drug addiction, disease, crimes etc.  

Zakharov, a farm worker from Moldavia explained that poor living conditions were present in Afghanistan. While ordinary soldiers were not given adequate food, the officer were given enough through special shops. The problem of accommodation, low standard of hygiene, and poor food caused serious epidemics of hepatitis, cholera, typhoid and a high suicide rate. Zakharov mentioned that the soldiers  


36. Ibid.  

even sold bullets to civilians for drugs.  

Soviet ex-servicemen were treated with indifference and insufficient respect by institutions and officials responsible for their resettlement. The bureaucrats of the war departments and state departments behaved mercilessly towards the soldiers who were in Afghanistan and those who returned home as invalids. To an appeal for help the bureaucratic even said, "I did not send you to Afghanistan". These kinds of ill treatments made the 'Afghantsi' to form their own organization to fight against bureaucratic corruption and for their rights. Campaigns to severe the services for the disabled were organised the 'Afghantsi' opposed the practice of not sending the sons of the upper status groups to Afghan war.

Dissent by parents of the soldiers were mounting in protest against assignments of their sons to Afghanistan.

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Many parents voiced their fears in the form of demonstrations as those in Armenia and Tbilisi in the mid 1985, which the government suppressed very easily. The political dissident movement also opposed the Soviet policy on Afghanistan. Such opposition was more strong in Baltic and Central Asian republics. Various samizdat journals were circulated to inform the residents to oppose Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. One such journal which published very radical documents resisting Afghan war was an Ukrainian journal, the chronicle of the Catholic church in Ukraine. The chronicle emphasised that Ukrainians are being sent to Afghanistan to fight and die. It provided the Ukrainian casualty figures in Afghanistan as 179 deaths and 411 wounded. It asserted that the Ukrainians were being used as "Cannon fodder" for the benefit of Russians imperialist interests.

In short, the human casualties, economic costs, loss of image in the Soviet Union itself and abroad compelled

42. Nicholas Daniloff, "Afghan War Finally Hits the Soviet Home Front" US News and World Report, 16 December 1985, p.42. Due to total control and repression by the government, these mass protest did not develop into a mass anti-war movement as in America during the Vietnam war. But in Central Asia a larger opposition developed compared to other areas. Also see, A Bennigsen, "Mullahs, Mujahiduns and Soviet Muslims" Problems of Communism November-December, 1984, pp.28-44.

the Soviet Union itself and abroad compelled the Soviet Union to disengage militarily from Afghanistan. Hence, Gorbachev initiated diplomatic efforts to settle the Afghan issue and tried to escape from a great economic and political burden.

During the course of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, a Pakistani resolution calling, for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was passed by a vote of 122 to 19 with 12 abstentions. It shows that the strength of the international opinion heavily weighed in favour of ending the Afghan crisis. In a speech at Vladivostok on 28 July 1986 Gorbachev announced that six regiments will be withdrawn by 31 December 1986. In November 1986, when


45. The criticism from the Third World was also on the rise. Many Third world regional organizations expressed their concern over the problem. The Non-aligned Movement (NAM), Organization of Islamic countries (OIC), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) were some of such organizations which consistently called for soviet withdrawal. See Louis Dupree, "The Soviet Union and Afghanistan in 1987", Current History, Philadelphia, October 1988, p.335.

46. S.V. Nair Afghanistan : Perspectives for Reconciliation and Peace (New Delhi : Panchsheel Publishers, 1988) p.11. In an interview Najibullah revealed the details about discussion between Karnal and Gorbachev on troop withdrawal. At one point when Gorbachev said: "We must think together about withdrawing Soviet from Afghanistan", Karnal responded negatively and said: "If you were to pull out now, next time you would have to move in a million troops". See Boris Pyadysev, "Najibullah, The President of the Republic of Afghanistan"
Gorbachev visited India he promised that "we are not going to have any bases in Afghanistan".\textsuperscript{47} This shows his awareness of the strategic implications of the Afghan problem and readiness for the settlement of the issue.

By 1986 the domestic political scenario in Afghanistan has also changed with the takeover by Najibullah as President. The waves of Gorbachevian glasnost got reflected in Najibullah's policies also. The evidence of this was his initiative for national reconciliation calling for an agreement on troop withdrawal, political liberatisation and a coalition government which his predecessor did not want.\textsuperscript{48} When Najibullah became the President of Afghanistan the policy of national reconciliation become the state polity.

According to Najibullah, the concept of national reconciliation aims at "Renouncing the military means.... of monopoly of government .... and seeks the establishment


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
of a coalition government. After attaining the national reconciliation, Najibullah intended to form a 'national government' representing all segments of the society including those of resistance. Three conflicting interpretations emerged on the formation of national government. Firstly, Gorbachev suggested for the formation of the joint PDPA-Mujahideen government willing to hand over power to the ex-King Zahir Shah. Secondly, Hekmatyar objected the inclusion of PDPA and Zahir Shah in the national government. Thirdly, Gilani and Mojadiddi opposed the coming of PDPA and Hekmatyar's Hizbi Islami to the national government.

Though the rebel leaders were sceptical about the national reconciliation policy, the Najibullah government went on with its efforts in conformity with its policy, for a peaceful settlement. Gorbachev appreciated Najibullah's policy of national reconciliation as a reflection of the new political thinking on the Afghan side. He saw this policy as a political platform which provides for peace in Afghanistan and makes the Soviet possible to begin

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The Afghan government continued its proclaimed policy with its content and spirit and many reforms were brought in the internal political front. A unilateral ceasefire by the armed forces of Afghanistan was declared on 14/15 January 1987. On 21 January 1987 the amnesty decree regarding the acquittal of political prisoners was issued.

During 1986 and 1987 the Soviet Union kept on praising the concept of national reconciliation policy of Najibullah. But by early 1988, they found this policy as an ideological justification to withdraw its assistance to Afghanistan. The Soviet media periodically reported the


52. Some analysts observed it as the policy aimed at fracturing the bonds linking the different constituents of the resistance to each other and connecting the resistance as a whole the civilian population of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, such fragmentation was not occurred, and the resistance leadership denounced the proposal as a fraud, and the ceasefire collapsed in February 1987 when Soviets intensified operations against the resistance. See William Maley, "Political Legitimation in Contemporary Afghanistan" *Asian Survey* Vol.27, No.6, June 1987, p.273.

Afghan renunciation of its revolutionary programme, making use of the changes made in the PDPA programme. Changes were made in the programme of the PDPA where the April revolution was defined as a national democratic revolution ensuring the country's progress through wide-scale democratic transformations. President Najibullah emphasised in his report: "Our revolution is not a proletarian or socialist revolution, and whatever our opponents say, our party is not a communist party."  

As a result of the national reconciliation policy, Loya Jirga (traditional National Assembly) was convened in April 1988. It had approved a new constitution and elections to the local and parliamentary positions were held. Several non-party people were elected to the new


government. A coalition government of national reconciliation formed in 1988. The left democratic forces in addition to the PDPA, such as the revolutionary Association of the working people of Afghanistan, Toilers organization of AFghanistan and the peasant party of Justice of Afghanistan were unified into a single block. All these were gains of Najibullah's policy.

After years of fruitless indirect talks since the beginning of eighties during Brezhnev to settle the Afghan issue, Gorbachev pursued a more open approach towards settling the Afghan question. He tried to make direct talks with Pakistan. He held bilateral discussions with the United States on the Afghan problem. During US-USSR summit (Dec. 7-10, 1987) the two superpowers discussed a time-table for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. And at the end Gorbachev made it clear that he would not link the troop withdrawal with the establishment of an interim government of Soviet choice. 58


On 14 April 1988, a formal agreement was signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Geneva regarding the settlement of the Afghan issue. The US and the Soviet Union were guarantors of the Geneva accord. According to the Accord the Soviet Union agreed to the complete withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan within nine months starting from 15 May 1988.59

The Geneva package comprised of five accords. Among these were two agreements between Pakistan and Afghanistan on bilateral relations, especially on non-interference and non-intervention in each other's internal affairs, agreement on voluntary return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, a document of the interrelationship of the political settlement and an agreement establishing a verification mechanism.60

The signing of the Geneva Accord showed a new line of Soviet policy on regional conflicts. It expressed the cooperative superpower approach of Soviet Union towards regional conflicts. After the signing of the Geneva Accord, the Soviet press highlighted the fact that the super powers 'for the first time, acted jointly as

59. Ibid.

intermediaries and guarantors of the settlement of a regional problem.  
Pravda claimed that this could become a key to unblocking such "fossilized" conflicts as say, the Middle East one, and called for a realistic interaction of Washington and Moscow rather than total rivalry."

The Soviet troops withdrawal took place in two stages. The Accord provided for the withdrawal of half the Soviet troops in the first three months of the pull out. During this period the troops retreated to garrisons along the ring road linking the main cities and along the roads leading to north from Kabul and Herat, the main exit routes to the Soviet Union.

After the first phase of withdrawal of troops Pakistan started air violations. This has prevented further Soviet pull out as agreed on the basis of the Geneva Accords. Several regime held garrisons and towns were occupied by the Mujahideens. Pakistan continued supplying arms to


64. Ibid.
Mujahideens. In some 85 protest notes it had so far filed with the United Nations Good office Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Afghanistan had accused Pakistan of violating Geneva Accords. 65

Therefore, the Geneva Accord could not achieve the effectiveness of international guarantees aimed to stop the escalation of tense situation around Afghanistan. The agreement of Afghanistan and Pakistan on non-interference of each other's affairs as provided in the Accord, failed to end the bombing campaign and cross-border infiltration in North Pakistan. Thus, the ethnically based clashes and tensions between the two countries remained potent 66 despite the accord.

By November 1988, the process of withdrawal of troops got jeopardized due to the deterioration of the conditions in Afghanistan. On 5 November Moscow suspended the withdrawal process and increased its supply of sophisticated weapons to the Afghan army. 67 Talks between Soviet Union and rebel officials started for an agreement


on internal condition. Talks were held in Islamabad, Saudi Arabia, etc, but failed. Attempts for talks to encourage the rebel leaders for a more conciliatory stand on the Afghan issue were continued from the Soviet side. In a speech delivered in Kabul on 16 January 1989 Shevarnadze mentioned that all Soviets would be withdrawn by 15 February 1989.68

There were many reasons for the Soviet Union to withdraw the forces on 15 February itself. The worsened situation in the Soviet Union and the anticommunist revolution developed in East Europe threatened the disintegration of the Soviet Socialist System. This compelled the Soviet Union to pull out from Afghanistan at any cost.

In the Soviet Union, the consequences of perestroika became uncontrollable. Aversion to perestroika appeared when high rate of inflation, price rise, general strikes, inter-ethnic clashes, rapid political and social polarisation destabilized the country 69 as a result of glasnost.

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68. Ibid.
The nationalities problem posed a serious threat to the stability of the system. The rise of nationalist movement for independence in the Soviet Union went beyond the control of Perestroika. In 1988 and 1989 the leadership was confronted with inter ethnic conflict and unrest in Baltic Republics and Caucasus. The criticism to perestroika increased. All these made the regime to seek new approaches for solving crises.

Gorbachev decided to withdraw some of the Soviet troops from East Europe, and declared that on the basis of Brezhnev doctrine Soviet Union would not protect its allies in the region. This was due to the criticism he faced in the Soviet Union for deteriorating situation in Soviet Union as well as Eastern Europe.

In the East Europe they rejected any form of reform and communism. The existing communist regimes were overthrown. In Poland the crisis which developed with the formation of solidarity in 1980, got heightened by 1988 with mounting economic and social problems. Mass unrest was developing there. In Hungary also crisis developed in 1988 when its leader Kader was removed by a radical reformist team. All these changes in East Europe had an adverse impact on the Soviet system also. Therefore, despite, the continued harassment of retreating forces, the

About the Soviet withdrawal Pravda reported on 15 February 1989 that "This is a victory for common sense, the triumph of new political thinking and a move which has received the solid support of the Soviet people". 70

Afghanistan proved that it was a political mistake of Soviet decision makers and contributed to the crisis of Soviet Union in 1988-1991.

After the Soviet troops had gone, Najibullah dropped all non-PDPA members from the council of ministers. Emergency was declared in the State. A new 20 member Supreme Council for the Defense of the Homeland was created. 71

The rebels also continued their resistance for an Islamic State. They proclaimed the formation of an interim government, headed by Sibghatullah Mojaddeddi. Coup attempts to topple Najibullah were tried.

The withdrawal of Soviet troops changed the political balance in Afghanistan. Factionalism in the PDPA became

70. Times (London), 16 February 1989.
less and Najebullah could consolidate his position for a while. Though the rebels could win few territories, the intensified conflict among them made them incapable of providing a united political alternative to Najbullah's regime till April 1992.