INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union completed its phased troop withdrawal from Afghanistan on 15th February 1989, leaving that nation in total chaos and confusion. The decision of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan was a sane decision of Gorbachev and was a result of the prolonged diplomatic parleys that took off after the introduction of his policies of perestroika, glasnost and new-thinking, designed to overhaul the whole Soviet system. When he assumed power in 1985, he had to confront a number of problems, both in domestic and foreign policy areas. He could grasp the reality of domestic economic stagnancy and other problems created by the miscalculations and misjudgements of his predecessors on domestic and international issues. Eventually, he followed a new policy towards the third world and regional conflicts.

Gorbachev considered Afghanistan as a 'bleeding wound' on the Soviet Union. He understood that Afghan war is an important economic drain on Soviet Union. He admitted that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was a serious mistake. He also stated that Afghanistan was neither a country of Socialist orientation and nor was there any revolution. In a speech on 8 February 1988 he pointed out that in Afghanistan, "there is not even a state, but there
is a variety of forces, some of which are favourable to the USSR and others which are more hostile."¹

Gorbachev's Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze explained the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a violation of both the Soviet national law and international law. He said: "When over 100 UN members had condemned our action for several years in succession it was enough for us to understand that we had opposed ourselves to the world community, violated accepted standards of conduct, and defied all human interests.... It should be noted that in this our own legislation, and party and civil standards and ethics, had been grossly violated."²

When Gorbachev introduced perestroika, the tensions between the army and the party came out on the fore. The army veterans who returned from Afghanistan were complaining against the inadequate living facilities and by late 1987, they tried to form an organization to take up these issues. Disillusioned with the denial of the promised promotions, the war veterans were forced to demand better living, job


and pension facilities. Simultaneously, the poor performance of the Soviet army in Afghanistan was criticized by civilian experts and they had accused it of "poor tactics", "unnecessary operations that led to many casualties" and so on.  

For Soviet Union, the war in Afghanistan became one of the important foreign policy failures. The war in Afghanistan was fought at its own material and economic costs. The situation reached a stage where Soviet Union had to spare at least one aircraft everyday. Many Soviet soldiers were killed in the fighting with the resistance groups (counter-revolutionaries in Soviet language) and the weapons snatched from Soviet army were used by the Afghan insurgents, and thereby fortifying their fight against Soviet Union with its own weapons. Furthermore, the insurgents were supplied highly sophisticated war weapons by the US, China, Egypt and other Islamic neighbours. Sometimes, the technological supremacy of these weapons rendered the Soviet weapons ineffective.

The indifferent and cruel behaviour of bureaucrats towards the war veterans antagonized some of them and they even aided indirectly the Afghan resistance. The Central Asians who were expected to fight against the Afghan resistance changed sides and started helping them due to religious affinity and Muslim brotherhood. The prevailing disturbed situation in Soviet Central Asian Republics, their desire for independence and their changed attitude caused tension and concern in the Soviet Union as it became a threat to Soviet southern border. Therefore, Afghanistan's peace and stability became important for Soviet Union's own internal security in the South. The only option left to USSR was the confession of mistake and the withdrawal of troops.

Now it has become clear that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was based on miscalculations and the total misreading of the then international situation by Brezhnev. The pro-Soviet PDPA (Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan) regime and the alleged invitation by them of the Soviet troops were only excuses for Soviet Union to defend their military intervention.

Panicked by the possibility of an American control over Afghanistan and the consequent threat to Soviet Central
Asian Republics and angered by Amin's play of independence, Brezhnev ordered the Soviet troops to enter Afghanistan on the pretext of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1978.

From the very beginning itself one can see an expansionist trend as an instrument of spreading Socialist revolution. For instance, annexure of Bukhara, with the Soviet Union, the Soviet intervention in Poland, Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979) are pointers to its expansionist tendencies.

For the USSR, Amin the Afghan president who took over the reins after assassinating Taraki, was an unreliable and uncontrollable personality, though he had praised time and again Soviet Union and October Revolution. During Taraki's presidency, when Amin worked as a foreign minister and prime minister, the Soviets disliked him due to his independent policies and acting on his own way. After coming to power, Amin tried more or less a policy of non-alignment and made efforts to establish good relations with all the neighbouring countries as well as the US. In this situation, after understanding that Amin was becoming uncontrollable and rising against the Soviet wishes and is paving the way for US imperialism to act, the Soviet Union sent General Viktor Semenovich Paputin to woo Amin and
convince him of the need to invite the Soviet troops to control the resistance against the government and step down in favour of Karmal. But Paputin's mission failed and Soviets decided to control the developments in Afghanistan through political and military intervention to prevent the emergence of an Islamic government and the Soviet troops entered in Afghanistan on 27 December, 1979. And they justified the military intervention with the ploy of an 'invitation' for Soviet help by the Afghan government.

Here the 'invitation' is very much disputed. When we assess the circumstances it becomes obvious that Amin can never invite his own executioner. The Soviets were not satisfied with Amin's performance and policies, irrespective of Soviet advices and when they tried to counsel him he demanded that the Soviet Union should recall and replace the then Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan Alexander Puzanov. Naturally, this might have led to punitive action against Amin, even to the extent of executing him. Also, statements of both Soviet and Afghan side did not mention clearly who invited the Soviet troops to Afghanistan. The circumstances prompt us to believe that the 'invitation' strategy was an afterthought of Soviets to justify the intervention. The deployment of Soviet military units, army as well as air force, in Afghan border and Begram air base and discussion
about the intervention in the Soviet politburo could be seen as a preparation for their deliberate intervention. There is enough ground to believe that all was not well between Amin and the Soviets.

In the present thesis, attempt is made to place the Soviet-Afghan conflict in the overall foreign policy scenario of Soviet Union, especially in its relation to the Communist movement in the third world. For this, a review of Soviet policy towards world Communist movement in general (Chapter I) as well as a depiction of the historical and political context in which the Communist movement has emerged in Afghanistan vis-a-vis the Soviet-Afghan relations (Chapter II) are tried.

The third chapter is dealing with the split in the Communist movement (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan - PDPA) in Afghanistan (1967-77) and the reunification of PDPA (1977). The fourth chapter analyses the Saur Revolution (1978). In these chapters, effort is made to analyse Soviet policy toward both the Afghan state and the PDPA factions or the united party. Space is given to find the special relationship of Babrak Karmal with both the Soviet and Afghan states.
Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has evoked strong criticism all over the world. In the fifth chapter, circumstances are analysed to establish the Soviet intervention as a case of invasion. The last and sixth chapter deals with the political and diplomatic processes leading to the troop withdrawal.

In this thesis, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is explained as part of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine' of limited sovereignty for the case of 'proletarian internationalism' and as an expression of expansionist designs of Soviet Union. The incompatibility between the idealism of the Communist elite and the unpreparedness of the socially backward ethos of Afghan society which has been disciplined for centuries by the Islamic law is given some thought in this work. The Saur revolution is explained as more a coup than a revolution. The reduction of communism into 'pro-Sovietism' is also analysed to a certain extent. The dynamism behind the slow and steady intensification of socio-political conflict between the Soviet backed regimes on the one side and the people and the resistance groups on the other gets some space in the latter half of the thesis. Gorbachev's efforts to dissolve the Afghan crisis are taken as characteristic of a very positive and courageous attitude
linked with his magical slogans of perestroika, glasnost and new thinking, despite the later domestic repercussions in Soviet Union.