CHAPTER III

SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN: FROM SPLIT TO REUNIFICATION, 1967-77

The split in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan - Communist Party - had been completed with the publication of the journal "Parcham" by Karmal faction of the party in 1968. The differences in personalities, social origins and tactics escalated the split between the two factions - Khalq and Parcham.

Both these factions were pro-Soviet and both considered Soviet Union as their ideological mentor. However there were differences in their practical interests. Taraki wanted to pursue class warfare, within an Afghan national context. Karmal wanted to follow a United Front strategy¹ by aligning with the bourgeois nationalist leaders. This strategy of Parcham was very much identical to the Soviet policy of national democracy.

Khalq was for a "people's democracy". Therefore, Khalq declined to support Daoud government, though Soviet Union was giving aid to them in abundance. But Parcham supported Daoud and they were also following the policy of collaborating with "bourgeois nationalist" leaders of

Pakistan such as Wali Khan and Ghaus Bux Bijenjo of National Awami Party. Khalqis tried to establish communist cadres under their aegis to make co-operation links with existing communist factions. Due to its co-operation with the government, the Parcham faction even became known as the "Royal Afghan Communist Party". The knowledgeable circles in Kabul regarded Parcham as Sardar Daoud's own "Communist Party".

The Khalqis took a committed stand on the 'Pushtunistan' issue, while the Parchamites had a soft stand on the same because of its Pakistan link. The Khalq declared in April 1966 that the Durand Line had been imposed upon Afghanistan "against the wishes of the people, and as a result, a part of the territory of the country was detached from its body." The programme also said, "in accordance with their belief in the right of self-determination, the people of Afghanistan support the

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4 "For the Oppressed People of Afghanistan", Khalq (Kabul), 11 April 1966, quoted in Selig S. Harrison, n.2, p.143.
liberation movement of the people of Pushtunistan." Parcham followed its policy in tune with the Soviet regional objectives and at the same time it was interested in achieving Pushtun rights within Pakistan. Louis Dupree writes about this period of split that "Babrek and Parcham appear to be agreed that a milder revolutionary approach to socialism is to be preferred to violent overthrow. Parcham believes that all sectors of the Afghan population can contribute to the defeat of 'feudalism and imperialism' and promotes the creation of a 'united democratic front' to work for change within the framework of the constitutional system."  

To understand the basic differences in the two factions of the PDPA, one has to go back to the social origins of the two leaders - Taraki and Karmal. Then it could be seen that the Taraki-Karmal break was also a by-product of the tribal, ethnic and nationality contradictions of Afghanistan.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Taraki represented a poor Pushtun family of the Ghilzai tribe. Born in 1917 in Mukur, he could not go to school beyond the elementary grades. He was forced to seek a job and thus he came to Bombay in 1930 to work as a clerk.8 Taraki is in a way a self-made man.

Babrak Karmal belonged to a very rich family of Kabul elite.9 His father Muhammad Hussein was a Lt. General who was respected even by the royal circles. Karmal was well educated. Mir Akber Khyber from whom he learned about Marxist ideology was his intimate friend. Khyber's influence greatly helped him to become a communist. Karmal was a good orator and an outstanding parliamentarian. He attracted the Dari speaking progressive people of Kabul to his party.10 While Taraki was a good writer, and his recruitment to the Party was almost from the Pushtun tribe alone. Most of the members of the Karmal's Parcham


But some sources claim that his family belongs to Pushtun, though speak Dari as its first language and which might have been of Tadjik accent. His ethnicity is controversial. Some claim that he is of Kashmiri or Tadjik origin. Often, he is projected as a Pushthun also.

belonged to the Kabul elite, high-ranking middle class, with different tribal leanings.

The Soviet Union was giving help to both the administration and the Marxists during the period of split. It was reported that secretly they were giving the necessary assistance to the Marxists. Some sources pointed out that Taraki and Karmal were agents of KGB. Both of them were frequent visitors to the Soviet Embassy in Kabul.

Facts drive one to think that Karmal was well connected with Soviet authorities and with KGB in particular. It is reported that he made uninhibited use of official Soviet medical facilities in Kabul. Besides, he had lived in the modern, Soviet-built Microrayen housing complex, the official home of government officials, army officers and Russian advisors. But enough evidence is not there to confirm the extent of Taraki's Soviet connections.

It seems that while backing both factions of the PDPA, the Soviets preferred Parcham to Khalq. This is because the Parchamites were following a strategy similar to that of the Soviet Union that aims to seize control of the State apparatus and develop a leftist government by penetrating

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11 Ibid.
into the government circles. Another reason was that the KGB wanted to install Karmal as Afghan leader, when opportunity comes, because he might have been recruited by KGB during his student period. Later, it became very clear with the statement of KGB Chief Vladimir Kuzichkin during the 'Saur Revolution' period that Karmal was a KGB agent of long standing.

But on the Soviet government's part, Brezhnev could not see anything unreliable in supporting Taraki. Therefore, Taraki and Khalq faction got support from the Soviet Union. According to Olivier Roy, this might be due to the Soviet thinking that they could use Khalq if Parcham penetration strategy failed and therefore, they pleased both the rival factions. The tensions and conflicts in the Soviet leadership also might have affected Soviet policy towards Afghan Communist Party. Besides, the changing international situation also have affected Soviet policy.

During the 1964-71 period the Soviet policy and involvement in the Middle East and Asia was to encircle China. Therefore, it reduced the importance of Afghanistan

15 Olivier Roy, N.13, p.94.
in the overall perspective of Soviet foreign policy during this period. As a result, the assistance to Afghanistan also decreased.\textsuperscript{16} This affected the productive enterprises in Afghanistan. Added to this, Afghanistan was facing a lot of domestic problems too, like inflation, unemployment, starvation, disease, people's struggle to improve the situation, etc. The draught and famine conditions aggravated the situation day by day.\textsuperscript{17} This severe condition is well described in the following portion of a World Bank Report. It reads:

The past fifteen years have been frustrating and disappointing for those concerned with the development in Afghanistan. A relatively large volume of aid sustained high levels of investment to little visible purpose in terms of higher standards of living for the majority of the population.\textsuperscript{18}

The report continued that:

to some extent it was inevitable that the major share of investment would be needed for basic economic and social infrastructure, with longer gestation periods.\textsuperscript{19}

The report added:


\textsuperscript{17} D. R. Goyal, \textit{Afghanistan Behind the Smoke Screen} (New Delhi: Ajanta Publishers, 1984), p.272.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
The responsibility of this situation lies with the inadequacies of the administrative structure. This is reflected in the government's failure to manage the large number of public enterprises efficiently, to allocate funds within projects so as to secure the maximum return, to gear up its administrative capacity to prepare new projects and to promote the institutional and legislative changes needed to create an appropriate environment for private agricultural and industrial development.  

During this period of increasing popular discontent, the amount of assistance to the Communists - Khalq and Parcham - from the Soviet Union was also not sufficient. Local communists in Afghanistan complained that Moscow's policy was too cautious and they were not giving enough financial assistance to them. This was because, the two hostile factions did not show considerable increase in their recruitments from villages. But the Parchamites who were working with the army decided to exploit the worsened political situation in the country. They worked for Muhammad Daoud, to topple King Zhir Shah. The chance of a palace coup and coming of Daoud, once a close friend of the Soviet Union, as head of government, prompted some

20 Ibid.

Soviet trained military officers, some of them with Parcham connections, to act on their own.\textsuperscript{22}

It was a time when Communists became less popular in Afghanistan. Though Parcham was allowed to continue its publication, it did not have a wider circulation. In the Wolesi Jirga (Parliament) also, the leftists had no strength. Only Karmal and Amin\textsuperscript{23} were elected to the Twelfth parliament in 1969. Therefore, the communist victory in future elections was considerably of less prospects.\textsuperscript{24}

Though this period shows a decreased Soviet interest, the Afghan students and military officers continued to be trained in the Soviet Union. At the training centres, they were bombarded with Soviet propaganda and they fell under long term scrutiny of Soviet intelligence services.\textsuperscript{25}

By 1972-73 China started making good relations with the United States and this irritated the Soviet Union. This prompted them to build close relations with Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, various social forces within

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Some sources say that Amin was defeated in the 1969 elections.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
and outside the state apparatus, were struggling against the ineffective leadership of Zahir Shah. They used their power for different purposes: the traditional elite wanted to preserve the status quo; the modernizing elite and the students wanted a rapid modernization of Afghanistan; and the government wanted to stay in power.\footnote{Christine K. Rideout, "The Authority Patterns and the Afghan Coup of 1973", Middle East Journal (Washington, D.C.), vol.29, no.3, Spring 1975, p.175.}

The Parcham was very much active in the conspiracy against Zahir Shah's government. They organized party cells among army officers and the civil bureaucracy. They could influence students and some sections of the people of Kabul. Thus in December 1972, active conspiracies to overthrow King Zahir Shah and his government were in progress. Then the Soviet Union felt confident in the activities of Parchamites to bring Daoud to power during whose period a close co-operation began.

While Zahir Shah was in Italy for medical treatment, the conspirators staged an almost bloodless coup in 17 July 1973 and declared Daoud as Afghanistan's president. On 24 July 1973 Daoud declared Afghanistan a Republic.\footnote{Raja Anwar, The Tragedy of Afghanistan: A First Hand Account (London: Verso, 1988), p.70.}

Both Khalq and Parcham factions of the PDPA declared their support to Daoud's regime. Khalq justified its
support in the words of Taraki: "we thought that may be Daoud will already take some action in the interest of the oppressed class of people.... He delivered a speech called 'Address to the Nation', which compared to the objectives of the monarchial regime, was progressive. We were satisfied with this speech and we were right in supporting Daoud in the light of this speech."  

Parcham has already extended their support.

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28 Hafizullah Emadi, *State, Revolution and Superpowers in Afghanistan* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), pp.65-66. See part of Daoud's "Address to the Nation" below. It runs: "Democracy or the government of the people was changed into anarchy and the constitutional monarchy to a despotic regime. All these forces struggled against one another and the people, and in pursuing the principle of divide and rule, fire was lighted throughout the country. So in this turbulent and dark atmosphere impregnated with misery, poverty and misfortune they (the ruling class and official bureaucrats) were able to attain their material and political ends. the patriots, wherever they were, watched with deep sorrow and anguish the horrible state of their nation. But they were constantly aware of the situation, especially the Afghan armed forces who felt this agony more than anyone else exercising extreme patience hoping that today or tomorrow the vide and rotten system in Afghanistan would become aware of the misery of the nation and endeavour to reform itself. But the result proved that these hopes are impertinent, and the regime and the system became so corrupt that no hope or expectation for its reform existed. Consequently, all patriots, especially the patriotic armed forces of Afghanistan, decided to put an end to this rotten system and deliver the nation from their plight... the system has been overthrown and a new order which is the republican regime has been established which conforms to the true spirit of Islam."
After coming to power initially Daoud appointed many people from both Parcham and Khalq factions into his army and gave promotions to many officers who belonged to these factions. But later Daoud sent the Parcham and Khalq members to work in the villages as they demanded to initiate social reforms. With this step Daoud foresaw that by pacifying the Khalq and Parcham factions he would be able to prevent the chance of any counter coup by them.

Again, he did a few more things to crush any threat against him. The young Khalqis and Parchamites who came to complain about the resistance they faced in the villages were jailed for derelicting the duty of even fired. Though Daoud initiated some democratic reforms in the beginning, he became soon dictatorial. He retained or transferred as he willed the ministers from Parcham faction who had come to power with him and he even demoted the officers who oppose his slow pace of reforms.29

It was Daoud's cunningness and tactic to get maximum support from the Soviet Union when he categorically denied the involvement of any foreign power in the coup, and this justified the ground of this coup that the former "corrupt and effete" government was no more than a "pseudo

democracy" that had pursued bankrupt economic and social policies.\textsuperscript{30}

The Soviet Union recognized Daoud's new government and considered the developments in Afghanistan as "domestic affairs of Afghanistan". The Soviet Union offered enormous aid to Daoud's Afghanistan which included, "hydroelectric stations; nitric fertilizer factories; a new road; irrigation for Jalalabad province; and the jewel of the whole complex - a natural gas industry in Mazari-i-Sharif."\textsuperscript{31} Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed several agreements on these projects.

Daoud accepted a seven year plan for the period 1976-83 which was drafted with the help of the Soviet specialists. On 14 April 1977 he signed a treaty in Moscow on wider economic co-operation. This treaty provided for "the development of gas, oil, petrochemical and chemical industries, agriculture, irrigation and other sectors of the economy, public health and veterinary science."\textsuperscript{32} This treaty also had geopolitics provisions, prospects, the construction of power plants and transportation and

\textsuperscript{30} Times of India, 20 January 1943.

\textsuperscript{31} Alvin Z. Ribinstein, Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), p.137.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p.138.
communication facilities, vocational and technical training at all levels. This treaty helped Afghanistan to establish again a good relationship with the Soviet Union.33

However, the foreign policies pursued by Daoud in accordance with his policy of 'neutrality' invited the dismay of Soviet Union and the Soviet backed factions of PDPA. Though during the early years, he had pursued pro-Soviet policies, later he had tilted towards the U.S. and its allies. Likewise, when Daoud came to power, he supported the cause of Pushtunistan. But, later he agreed to an agreement of normalization of relation with Pakistan on this issue. This helped him to consolidate his position in Afghanistan when Pakistan started anti-Afghan propaganda in Pakistan. But was completely relegated with the successful friendly visits of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then president of Pakistan, to Kabul. This shows that he was moving towards the Pro-Pak, Pro-US, rightist direction. In one of his speeches he even said that he would be delighted if he could light his American cigarette with his Russian matches.34

When Brezhnev's "Asian Collective Security" proposal was discussed at the international meeting of workers and

33 Ibid.
communists in Moscow in 1969, Afghanistan had responded to this very positively. But Daoud's policies and desire of reducing Afghanistan's dependence on Soviet Union and its allies and his acceptance of aid from Iran, Saudi Arabia, US and its allies, etc. made this proposal irrelevant. This proposal was specifically for encircling China; but when China started receiving arms from U.S., the importance of this proposal was reduced to just a fact of history.

Along with the acceptance of aid from Iran and Pakistan Daoud signed three agreements worth a total of $40 million with the US. This depicted his desire to join the Western bloc. In a sense, his joining with the anti-Soviet camp was intended mainly to avoid the danger of overdependence on Soviet Union.

Between 1973 and 1976, he sent many Soviet advisors back to Soviet Union. And Daoud had done many political assassinations and purges. He visited a number of

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36 Raja Anwar, N.27, p.70.
37 Ibid.
38 Edward Girardet, N.12.
neighbouring countries including Pakistan to make friendly relations. He was also expected to visit US in 1978.

The Soviet Union was watching these developments, especially the changes in Daoud's policies and his efforts to make alliance with the West and its allies. The move of Daoud was intensely resented by PDPA and its Soviet mentors. Daoud was invited to Moscow by Brezhnev to discuss about the developments in Afghanistan. At the meeting he was offered great amount of assistance to replace the western capital. The Soviet Union's displeasure with Daoud was very clearly expressed in this meeting. During the discussions Brezhnev ordered Daoud to "get rid of all those imperialist advisers" from his country. Then Daoud replied that "when Afghanistan had no further need of foreign advisers, they would all be asked to leave." Daoud meant that this would include the Soviet advisers also. Wilhelm Dietl gives a direct account as told to him by a member of Afghan delegation about the meeting between Daoud and Brezhnev. To quote him:

We were sitting in the Kremlin and Brezhnev opened the discussion. In a reproachful tone he asked Daoud, whether it was true that he wanted help from the USA and from Arab nations friendly to Afghanistan. Thereupon Daoud got up and replied irritated: "I am the president of an

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41 Anthony Arnold, N.24, pp.64-65.
independent country. Nobody has the right to put such questions to me'. He turned around and left. Later Brezhnev requested him to meet him once more, but Daoud refused. That is why at the time of our departure, Brezhnev came to the Vnukovo airport - he had arrived thirty minutes before time in order to negotiate further with us. Daoud knew what Brezhnev intended to say to him, and therefore, arrived very late. He merely threw a glance at Brezhnev waiting there and said: 'I am sorry, I have to go'.

In the midst of the discussion, Daoud understood that Brezhnev considered Afghanistan, a Soviet satellite coming under his infamous "Brezhnev Doctrine" of 'limited sovereignty.' Brezhnev realized that Daoud had turned the enemy of PDPA as well as the Soviets. Through Daoud it was not possible to influence Afghanistan. Thus Brezhnev and Soviet Union found the need of another pro-Soviet alternative to come to power in Afghanistan. If PDPA gets united, they will be able to annihilate this new found enemy and bring a pro-Soviet regime into power. Therefore, Soviet Union insisted these factions to unite.

In the domestic economic front, Daoud was facing problems. He could not solve the problems of unemployment, inflation, land reforms, etc. Along with this a leftist

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43 According to this doctrine Soviet Union is obliged to defend socialism, by force of arms, if needed, anywhere in the world that it is threatened. This doctrine was formulated after the "Czechoslovak intervention" in 1969, to justify it.
conspiracy against Daoud was also in progress. Naim, Daoud's brother, asked him to reshuffle the cabinet to include some moderate leftists and to broaden the base of the National Revolutionary Party. Instead, in March 1977, Daoud tried to make a new constitution which provided for a presidential form of government. By this the PDPA understood that Daoud is closing all opportunities for a democratic government. Taking this opportunity, PDPA also made plans to topple Daoud.

The Soviets themselves were pulling strings from behind avoiding an open break with Daoud, at least partly, because they still had doubts about the PDPA's ability to succeed without a greater unity between its factions. A Soviet source asserts that "reactionary" domestic and foreign policy led the POPA to intensify its work among "the patriotic minded officers in the armed forces". It was under these circumstances the two factions of PDPA reunited in July 1977. It is reported that the Soviet Union played a major role in the reunification process. It

45 Marin G. Weinbaum, N.21, p.250.
was at this conference in July 1977 that "the issue of the liquidation of Muhammad Daoud was first raised. According to Anthony Arnold, at least some areas of the Khalq recruitment campaign in the Afghan army after 1973 "smack of Soviet intelligence involvement." 47

There are different versions of the story on PDPA reunification. It is reported that the Communist Party of India (CPI) played a significant part on it. 48 An article published in 'Party Life' (CPI journal) on 22 July 1976 by N.K. Krishnan reads that "unity of the democratic, progressive and patriotic forces of Afghanistan (is important) in order to get the new policies of the republic implemented and to defeat the forces of foreign and internal reaction which are chafing under the new regime and are planning to weaken and sabotage its policies." 49 He called the PDPA "a focal point of the progressive democratic movement in Afghanistan". He continued: "there seems to be less reasons for the continuation of the split in the circumstances of today." 50 This article tends to

47 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
believe that there was appeal and encouragement from the Indian communist party in the reunification of PDPA.

Moreover, PDPA members like Taraki, Amin, Karmal, Ratebzad, Khyber, etc. were all in friendly relationship with Romesh Chandra, the President of the Soviet sponsored World Peace Council and also a member of the CPI's central executive. This also given the doubt of a Soviet pressure for the unification of PDPA factions.\textsuperscript{51}

It is reported that the CPI invited the Khalq and Parcham representatives to India in 1977 "for a detailed discussion of their internal dissensions."\textsuperscript{52} According to this information the unification agreement in March 1977 might have been the result of Indian efforts. But the fact that factionalism continued further proves that this effort was not fruitful.

And again another source points out that the Indian attempt to reunify PDPA was not successful and therefore, there was a second attempt by Tudeh Party of Iran. It is reported that this effort for the reunification of PDPA by Party leader Ehsan Tabari became successful and both the factions agreed to the formation of a single organization on 3 July 1977. In Taraki's official biography, this

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p.70

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
reconciliation gets mention as follows: "The unity consisted of two parts. First unity in connection with civilians, secondly, unity among the armed forces. In the case of former, unity was achieved in all organizations belonging to Khalqis and Parchamis with equal rights for each group."\(^5^3\)

On many grounds soviet pressure can be seen in the reconciliation of PDPA factions. It is reported that a senior CPI official said that the invitation to the 1977 discussions was issued "with the knowledge and consent of (the) communist party of (the) Soviet Union; otherwise (the) CPI would not have undertaken it. Possibly, the suggestion for such an initiative on the part of the CPI also came from Moscow."\(^5^4\) This depicts that Moscow had pressurised CPI on this issue.

Even though Soviet goal was ultimately a Communist Afghanistan, the Soviets did not want a hasty action to bring the communists to power. Their effort was to make the PDPA ready to succeed Daoud through the help of Soviet specialists working in Afghanistan. Even when Khalqis claimed that they were able for an armed coup in 1976, the Soviets did not take their claim serious then. It seems

\(^5^3\) Raja Anwar, N.27, p.86.

\(^5^4\) Henry Bradsher, N.49, p.70.
that they had less confidence on the capability of communists at that time and were sceptical about the activities of PDPA. But now, the changed situation forced them to take decision on who must succeed the country: if Taraki succeeds Daoud, and then Karmal would succeed Taraki.

The hostile exchanges in the 1977 meeting between Brezhnev and Daoud gave the impression that Soviets would conspire to topple Daoud and install communists. Added to this were the political assassinations of his left and right wing opponents master minded by Daoud during his last years of rule. This also gave the Soviets an apt opportunity to put the communist strategy into action. It was the murder of Mr Akbar Khyber, a Parchami leader, in April 1978, that prompted the communist take over through the "Saur Revolution".

Overall, the Soviets influenced the educated Afghans, made a number of them pro-Soviet cadres of the PDPA, provided educational facilities in the Soviet Union and in Afghanistan, and offered economic and military assistance to the country. All these make it clear that there was widespread influence of Soviet Union in Afghanistan, particularly among the educated intelligentsia on the eve of the "Saur (April) Revolution". This prompt us to think
of the Soviet hand in the developments in Afghanistan during this crucial period.

From the above account, it is clear that Soviet policies differ according to the demand of time. In the initial years of split, the soviet policy was to support both the factions of the PDPA and at the same time the thrust was to prepare the PDPA capable and ready for an eventual take over in case of favourable developments. When Afghanistan left its pro-Moscow lenience, their policy was to reunite the two hostile factions of the Communist Party (PDPA) into a single organization free from factional fights and to replace someway or other the Daoud regime by a communist one. For the purpose of reunification, their policy was to reconcile the factions of the PDPA through the efforts of foreign communist parties. For that they have pressurised Communist Party of India or Tudeh Party of Iran.

Now we shall proceed to the details of the "Saur (April) Revolution" of 27 April 1978 in the next chapter.