CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The United States policy towards Afghanistan during the period under investigation reveals several characteristics which emerged from the broad realm of its Third World policy. Factors ranging from geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives to ideological/political struggle with the Soviet Union and its allies came in the way of historically shaping the United States Third World policy. However, the basic parameters of this policy need to be placed in a wider context of American national interests and its evolving foreign policy objectives and strategies.

Evidently, the transformation of the American State - from an economic power to a military, political, and economic superpower - has been a decisive factor of its foreign policy in the post-war period. The dynamics of its relations and policies, therefore, reflect the basic imperatives of the American State and the expanding role of American capitalism. This essentially demands various strategies seeking to contain the Soviet power and its growing influence in the Third World. The United States thus sought to develop and strengthen political and economic linkages to ensure its security, besides maintaining freedom of access to critical raw materials and sea passages. The Third World regions, from Latin America to Southeast Asia, played a critical role in sustaining the United States' global interests and engagements, which have grown in size and complexity over the years. At the beginning, the United States projected an essentially economic vision of its future role in the Third World and, ever since, the economic factor has
continued to be the single most important element in its post-war engagements with the Third World.

However, the post-war scenario presented a complex political situation for the American foreign policy. The US began to perceive new threats, primarily from the Soviet Union and its allies. Washington attempted to deal with the situation by evolving various methods of containment – from the distribution of economic and military assistance, collective defence planning, regional economic arrangements to protection of sources of strategic materials. The containment thus became a formal policy package of the United States foreign policy. This was first articulated in the Truman Doctrine, which rationalised the American military and economic assistance to Greek and Turkey. Indeed, from that time onwards, the suppression of communist/radical movements became a principal goal and the prime target of the US foreign assistance programme. Economic aid or military assistance was extended to Third World countries not only to buy their support on foreign policy issues but also to facilitate the process of 'gradualism' and strengthen the forces of 'stability.'

In the 1950s and 1960s, the terrain of the rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union shifted from Europe to the Third World regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America. For instance, Latin America's economic importance to the United States made it the single most significant test of Washington’s basic goals and assumptions. The containment policy was sustained by successive American administrations. President Eisenhower through his doctrine underlined the inevitability of containing communism and sought to advance more effective bilateral and multilateral aid
programmes towards strengthening the states in the Middle East. He also asked for authority from Congress for the possible use of US military force to strengthen American power and position in the Middle East. The Eisenhower Doctrine was proclaimed primarily to check the growing influence of Soviet Union in the Middle East and to contain the effects of socio-economic changes under way in the region, such as in Egypt.

The most profound Third World challenges in the 1960s were poverty and underdevelopment. The Kennedy administration understood the nature of the Third World crisis and emphasised the role that foreign aid could play in alleviating Third World problems. Kennedy launched the 'Alliance for Progress' realising the link between the growth of the Third World and the enhancement of the US national security. During the decade, the threat of insurgency had also dominated the United States Third World policy. The issues of the domestic affairs of various Third World nations became more than ever the legitimate concern of the United States, including, if need be, a warrant for action. The US sought to ensure that Third World countries evolve in a way that affords a congenial world environment. In the larger sense, it meant that the United States had an economic interest that the resources and markets of the less developed world remained available to the United States and its Western allies.

President Johnson further advanced United States policy of counter-insurgency in the Third World. The emerging situation in Latin America and Southeast Asia prompted him to formulate his foreign policy doctrine. The Johnson Doctrine focused on Southeast Asia, and later Latin America, expressing a strong American commitment to these regions either indirectly
through foreign aid or directly through direct military intervention to resist the growing influence of communism. Washington's engagements in the Third World saw a significant change under Richard Nixon. He favoured a military withdrawal from Southeast Asia. It was considered as a landmark in American foreign policy – i.e., “away from intervention in the internal affairs of Third World countries.” In fact, the US experience in the Vietnam war prompted Nixon to take such a decisive step. Thus, the Doctrine that President Nixon advanced aimed at a reduction of the US responsibilities and objectives abroad. Perhaps another significant factor that motivated Nixon to formulate his Doctrine was the changing nature of power configuration in the international system. Among other factors, the oil crisis in the early 1970s was a turning point in the relations between the Third World and the major industrial capitalist nations, in particular the United States. It was during this time that the American interest in the Middle East grew.

President Jimmy Carter had initially shown some interest in the Third World problems when he talked about "global interdependence and North-South cooperation." However, the emerging situation in Iran, Afghanistan, Nicaragua etc. had compelled him to modify his ideological notions of foreign policy and transformed his 'world-order politics' into a more realist approach by the end of his term. Carter saw the change of regime in Iran and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as the most "serious challenge to the United States." The steady growth and increased projection of Soviet military power, the overwhelming dependence of the Western democracies on oil supplies from the Middle East and the process of socio-economic and political changes under way in many of the Third world countries,
exemplified by the revolution in Iran, had helped shape American policy during this time. The Carter administration had categorically stated that the Soviet action in Afghanistan would pose the “most serious threat to the peace since the Second World War” and that Moscow “must pay a concrete price for their aggression.” Evidently, the major objective of the Carter doctrine was to convince the Soviet Union that the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia region would be of great importance to Washington and, in a departure from the Nixon Doctrine, to tell the Soviet Union that the US would assume ultimate responsibility for regional defence.

A significant push in the US policy towards the Third World came during the two terms of the Reagan presidency. Unlike the cold war doctrine of containing ‘Soviet expansionism’, the new strategy envisaged by the Reagan administration sought to ensure American moral and material support to insurgent movements attempting to oust Soviet-backed regimes in various Third World countries. Early indications of this Doctrine came in the mid-80s when he affirmed that the US must stand by all its democratic allies who were risking their lives - on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua - to defy Soviet aggression.

Meanwhile, the sweeping changes that came across the world since the late 1980s and the early 1990s had tremendous implications for the US Third World policy. The developments in Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the new round of GATT negotiations under way in Uruguay, the fall of Berlin Wall, the changes across some of the East European countries, and the eventual disintegration of the USSR in 1991 all contributed to a perception of the 'post-cold war era'
in global politics with the United States emerging as the lone superpower. In the background of the Gulf crisis following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Bush administration sought to legitimate the US hegemony in world politics by enunciating a ‘New World Order’ thesis. This obviously had a great bearing on Washington’s policy towards the Third World in the 1990s.

This study keeps the contours of the US Third World policy in perspective while analysing its policy towards Afghanistan during 1979-91. Afghanistan, situated as it is in Southwest Asia, occupies a distinct strategic position. Its geographical situation and physical features have greatly influenced its history and the character of its people. Afghanistan is also one of the most backward countries in the Third World with a substantial number of the population still living under poverty line, and they remain under-nourished and ill-housed. For nearly three decades, Afghanistan has been the focal point of global politics. The conflict over Afghanistan and the power struggle within the country brought in intense superpower rivalry, which persisted at least until the late 1980s. Throughout the eighties, Afghanistan was an arena of intense battle, fought directly by the Soviet-Afghan Army, on the one side, and the mujahideen guerrillas, on the other. The Afghan war that dragged on since the late 1970s, in fact, worsened the systemic crisis and brought in new forces of conflict.

For the United States, Southwest Asia occupies a significant position in its geopolitical and geostrategic considerations. Of late, this region has been identified as an important source of critical western energy supply. However, the United States interest in Afghanistan remained dormant for long. The
emergence of Afghanistan in the security discourse of the American foreign policy could be traced back to the developments after the Second World War. Nevertheless, Afghanistan was not a popular country in the United States. Rather, the view from the West, in general, was of a remote and hostile land visited only by the adventurous. During the Second World War, the US-Afghan relations began in earnest when Cornelius Van H. Engert, the American Minister in Kabul, made efforts to help the ailing economy of Afghanistan. But soon, Pakistan emerged as a determining factor due to the strains in the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the issue of Pushtunistan which seemed to have dictated Washington’s policy responses in the 1950s. The US even refused to extend military aid to Kabul when a request was made by the new government of Muhammed Daoud in October 1954. Afghan observers in the US argued that American failure to respond to the genuine economic and security needs of a friendly and pro-western Afghan government set the stage for the stunning successes of Soviet diplomacy. The United States believed for a long time that notwithstanding the possibilities of an expanding influence of Soviet Union, it could do very little to counter it.

The United States policy towards Afghanistan did not undergo any significant change in the late 1950s or early 1960s. However, Washington had made a reassessment of the possibilities and prospects of improving its position in Afghanistan. It knew that Afghanistan, being a landlocked country, had little bearing on the US regional interests nor was Washington in a position to counter the Soviet thrusts it had gained over years. Till the middle of 1970s, Afghanistan had limited direct interest; it was not an important trading partner; it was not an access route for US trade with
others; it was not a source of oil or scarce strategic metals and there were no treaty ties or defence commitments. Afghanistan’s only importance had derived from its strategic location between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

The United States perceptions and policies began to change during the presidency of Jimmy Carter. At this time the State Department formulated the concept of regional influence and identified the Shah of Iran as the first of the heads of state with which Washington could engage itself. Afghanistan was to provide the link between the two even more than Pakistan. But the situation changed all of a sudden in the late 1970s when the Shah’s regime collapsed, followed by the developments in Afghanistan culminating in the Soviet intervention in December 1979. This triggered off a wave of protests and reactions worldwide, which soon became a major crisis of the cold war type. The Soviet action also generated speculations in the West whether Moscow, through its intervention, would have a ‘Grand Design.’ However, Soviet Union’s interest in Afghanistan should be seen in a wider historical perspective, taking into account the geopolitical and ideological imperatives of the Soviet state.

Howsoever contentious the interpretations of the Soviet action may be, the events that unfolded since December 1979 indicated a sharp deterioration in US-Soviet relations, having its impact on regional and global politics. Signs of a sharp deterioration in the relations between Afghanistan and the US were perceptible in the following months. The perception of the US government hardened, particularly in regard to the expanding political and military role of Moscow. Meanwhile, Washington rejected the Soviet
explanations of its intervention in Afghanistan and announced various punitive measures against the Soviet Union such as the shelving of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, blocking grain sales to the Soviet Union, stopping the sale of high technology and strategic items to the Soviet Union, curbing Soviet fishing privileges in US water and boycotting the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow.

In early January 1980, President Jimmy Carter announced a new US policy which was formulated against the backdrop of the developments in Iran and Afghanistan. Carter said that the crises in Iran and Afghanistan presented a serious challenge to the United States. In response to the emerging situation in Afghanistan, President Carter also offered military and economic aid to Pakistan, the neighbouring country of Afghanistan against “the threat” it faced from the north. A major objective of the Carter doctrine was to put Moscow on notice that the region, encompassing the Gulf and Southwest Asia, would be of vital importance to the United States, and in a departure from the Nixon Doctrine, to make clear to the Soviet Union that Washington would assume ultimate responsibility for regional defence.

Evidences indicate that the Carter administration had already started out a covert programme of support to the Afghan resistance forces. Carl Bernstein noted a major US-organised effort to supply arms to the Afghan resistance via China and Pakistan. According to him, this effort had been organised within a month after the December 1979 Soviet action. Statements of former officials of the Carter administration, particularly of Brzezinski, however, indicate that Washington had decided to assist the rebel forces in Afghanistan much before the Soviet intervention in December 1979. If such
versions are correct, the arguments tendered by Moscow and Kabul for the Soviet military intervention may sustain their apprehensions about the "external involvements" in the affairs of Afghanistan. However, the Soviet intervention triggered off a new set of contradictions in Southwest Asia with the United States, Pakistan, and other regional powers involving deeply in the internal dynamics of Afghanistan. The Carter administration's moral standing on democracy and nuclear proliferation also suffered setbacks due to its open support to the military-authoritarian regime in Islamabad, in the background of the Afghan crisis, and its waving of US laws prohibiting assistance to countries having nuclear weapons' programme.

The Reagan administrations' policy responses to the Afghan crisis during 1981-87 reveal the greater involvement of Washington in terms of assisting the mujahideen forces against the Kabul regime and the Soviet troops. From the very beginning, the Reagan administration kept up a high-keyed rhetoric in its commitment to the Afghan issue. The United States considered the Afghan issue as a major barrier to the development of a more constructive East-West relationship. However, Reagan was sceptical about the effectiveness of the sanctions imposed by the Carter administration against Moscow. Hence, he lifted the 15-month grain embargo on 24 April 1981 and most of other sanctions also lapsed subsequently.

During this time, differences developed between American Congress and the administration on the question of aid to Pakistan. The Democratic-controlled House committee said it wanted to wait to see what the administration intended to do about nuclear proliferation and how much aid it wanted to give Pakistan. The Republican-controlled Senate committee took a more
trusting approach and approved request for economic and military assistance for Pakistan. The US obviously wanted to make Pakistan a key element – a frontline state - in its efforts to build a strategic consensus of states threatened by Soviet Union. Even as UN negotiations were under way, the United States stepped up covert military support for insurgents with the purpose of forcing Moscow to pay higher price for its efforts to assert control over Afghanistan. Reagan called the mujahideens as ‘freedom fighters’ and the Afghan war an ‘indigenous’ movement.

During the middle of 1980s, after four years of internal conflicts on foreign policy issues, Congress and President Reagan reached an accommodation: Congress adopted Reagan’s aggressive posture, as enunciated in the Reagan Doctrine, towards communist regimes in the Third World, and the President allowed Congress to set the agenda on a handful of issues that were tangential to his preoccupation with the East-West struggle. Ending a decade of reluctance to intervene in foreign conflicts, Congress in 1985 supported or removed obstacles to US aid for guerrilla movements in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua. Congress also passed a foreign aid authorisation bill providing for a substantial amount of foreign aid. The most important feature of the bill was its general acceptance of the administration’s proposition that the US should support a broad range of guerrilla forces that were battling established communist regimes.

The US, though being aware of the internal bickering of the heterogenous mujahideen groups, did not show any interest in a political settlement based on a democratic-secular framework for the political destiny of Afghanistan. Fundamentalism gained ascendancy during this period and tended to dictate
the future course of political developments in Afghanistan. The civil war and political uncertainty that persisted even after the Geneva Accords and the Soviet troop withdrawal seemed to have emanated from the manner in which the whole question had been handled in Washington, Islamabad and Moscow.

However, the Afghan crisis entered a crucial phase with the signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1988 and the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The UN had been actively involved in the crisis from the very beginning to bring about a settlement. But negotiations suffered occasional setbacks due to the conflicting positions of the countries involved in the crisis. A major factor which facilitated the process of negotiations leading to the Accords in 1988 was the reorientation of Soviet foreign policy under Mikhail Gorbachev. The new leadership in Moscow sought "interdependence and collaboration" with the West and a sort of "disengagement from the Third World." In accordance with this, the revolutionary forces and regimes in the Third World were asked to rely primarily on their resources and even to negotiate or collaborate with their adversaries. Soviets said regional conflicts should not be used to engender confrontation between Moscow and Washington and that no further large-scale military and economic aid to the Third World was in store. This had implications for Moscow's Afghan policy.

The United States policy options during this time centred around questions of Soviet withdrawal of troops, the return of three million refugees to their homeland and the restoration of Afghanistan's independent status. The year 1988 was crucial for the Reagan administration, for it was the final phase of
its term. Though Washington responded positively to the Geneva negotiations, it retained the option of continuing to aid the fighting mujahideen. Moscow also agreed to complete its withdrawal in nine months instead of the four years it had demanded earlier. This was a real breakthrough in the long drawn-out negotiations. The Geneva Accords were, thus, signed after a very lengthy process, which paved the way for withdrawal of Soviet forces.

The Accords consisted of four official agreements, plus unilateral statements by the United States and the United Nations. Each agreement was to enter into force on 15 May 1988. Afghanistan and Pakistan adhered to the principle of non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of each other. Both countries also agreed to respect each others' sovereignty and political independence. Under the Accords, the United States and the Soviet Union signed a one-page document pledging support for the Afghan-Pakistan agreement. The two superpowers said that they would refrain from any form of interference and intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan and to respect the commitments contained in the bilateral Agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan. All negotiations involved the fourth agreement, signed by Afghanistan and Pakistan and witnessed by the US and the USSR. By this, there would be a phased withdrawal of the foreign troops which would start on 15 May 1988. The Soviet Union and the US also agreed to act as guarantors of the political settlement. It may also be noted that neither of the organized Afghan resistance nor any other representative of the non-communist people of Afghanistan, including representative of the refugees, was included in the
negotiations or kept officially informed. Pakistan, in effect, served as negotiator on their behalf.

During the critical stage of the negotiations, conservative Congress members insisted that there had to be 'symmetry' between US and Soviet actions in Afghanistan; the United States would continue supplying arms to the mujahideen as long as the Soviets gave military supplies to Kabul. The concept of “symmetry” was subsequently enunciated by the State Department in early March 1988 in response to the Congress pressure. This was reiterated by Secretary of State Shultz in Geneva on 14 April. The critics, however, denounced the Accords calling it “a sell-out.”

As the Reagan era was coming to an end, American foreign policy observers felt that there was “a full agenda of unfinished business in conflicts where the United States sided with ‘freedom fighters’ against leftist governments.” Initially, the Bush administration had not yet made decisions with regard to Afghanistan’s future, including whether to continue supplying rebels with military equipments after the Soviet withdrawal. By February 1989, the Bush administration, under Congressional pressure to maintain military backing of the mujahideen, moved to review the US policy towards Afghanistan. Washington faced several questions in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal such as: how long to continue shipping weapons and other supplies to the guerrillas through Pakistan, how to attempt to influence the formation of a new government for Kabul, and when to extend official diplomatic recognition to a new regime. US aid to mujahideen had long been supported by a broad bipartisan majority in Congress. Key activists
supporting that aid had insisted that “the administration continue the aid until the guerrilla leaders say they no longer need it.”

In the immediate aftermath of the completion of the withdrawal of troops in February 1989, there were concerns everywhere what would happen to the Najibullah regime in Kabul. The mujahideen and their supporters were not interested in any formula suggested by Najibullah or Moscow, which would allow the PDPA to retain any power and saw its collapse as imminent. This expectation of swift victory apparently resulted in the decisions by the US regarding the mujahideen when it decided to cut back considerably its military aid in late 1988 and early 1989. However, the United States greeted the formation of the government-in exile formed by the rebels as a positive step, and proceeded to work with it while withholding formal recognition.

During the year President George Bush announced the emerging foreign policy perspectives of the US, which would have far-reaching implications for its global involvements, particularly in the background of the developments in East Europe. He said that the United States decided “to move beyond containment.” In the same year, the US policy towards Pakistan came under re-evaluation, especially in the background of the developments in East-West relations, including the Soviet pullout of troops from Afghanistan. During this time, the situation in Afghanistan was becoming much worse when fighting between various factions of the resistance resulted in heavy casualties.

In 1990 Washington had grown increasingly suspicious about Pakistan’s nuclear programme. Reflecting the changed global priorities, the US brought
its security ties with Pakistan to a sudden halt in October 1990, when President Bush withheld certification to Congress that Pakistan did not possess nuclear weapons, whereupon the disbursement of $573 million in assistance earmarked for Pakistan in fiscal year 1990-91 was suspended. Congress had already moved to cut and place restrictions on Bush administration's request for continued covert military aid to Afghan rebels.

As the civil war in Afghanistan continued, the Bush administration provided no funds for Afghan rebels in its proposed 1992 budget for the reason that the efforts to overthrow the Kabul regime seemed to be outmoded and hard to defend. The move was apparently a strategy of the Bush administration to induce Soviet Union which was reportedly providing arms to Kabul. However, by September 1990, the US and Soviet Union agreed to stop all arms sales to combatants in Afghanistan to help pave for free election and end to civil war.

In April 1992, the rebels captured power in Kabul. The US welcomed the formal transfer of power in Kabul. However, the change of regime in Kabul marked the beginning of a new spell of power struggles and proxy wars among the different factions of the mujahideen. The volatile situation in Afghanistan further enhanced the interest of regional powers in the affairs of Kabul. Thus, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and some of the Arab Gulf countries, besides Russia - the successor state of the Soviet Union - were involved in the power struggle and proxy wars. This culminated in the capture of power by Taliban, the Pashtun-led movement supported by Pakistan and some Arab Gulf states, in 1996.
The disintegration of the USSR in 1991 and the collapse of the entire East Europe accelerated the pace of transformation of the global politics that was under way since 1989. The immediate post-cold war world was characterised as “unipolar” with the United States occupying the centre of world attended by its Western allies. Washington's pre-eminence was based on the perception that “it is the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any conflict in whatever part of the world it chooses to involve itself.” In fact, the Gulf war of 1991 marked the beginning of a Pax Americana in which the world would acquiesce in an American hegemony.

A Pentagon report on the US military priorities in the 1990s, which came to limelight during this time, epitomises the blueprint for a “Washington-centric, unipolar world” which advocated that if the United States was “to maintain global supremacy, it must act vigorously all over the world to protect American interests and those of its allies.” However, the global security environment underwent a major change a decade later with the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. This seemed to have affected the American security perceptions so profoundly that what followed in the name of “War on Terrorism” was a high-profile war on Afghanistan and the Taliban regime. Afghanistan, thus, once gain slid itself into the vortex of global power game - this time not because of an external intervention in that country but due to the vast potential of oil in the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus region to which Afghanistan is an important access route. That explains the changing dimension and increasing focus of the new US Afghan policy.