

Afghanistan-Soviet Relations during the Cold War: A Threat for South Asian Peace

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Abstract

Afghanistan's relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union began to take a specific direction in the wake of the British departure from the Subcontinent and with the creation of Pakistan in consequence of the partition of the subcontinent. The new orientation in Soviet-Afghan relations was due to the United States' reluctance to play the role which the British had been playing before its exit from the Subcontinent. Most of the ruling elites of Afghanistan were more inclined to the United States and very early sought to develop a nexus with America. However, US preferred Pakistan over Afghanistan and continued the policy during Cold War. Secondly, Pakistan played a significant role in pushing Afghanistan towards the Soviet Union as it exploited the Pashtunistan issue to its advantage. The Soviet Union utilized American reluctance, and alienation between Pakistan and Afghanistan and enhanced its political and military influence in Afghanistan so much so that the Soviet inspired communists managed successfully to overthrow the government of President Daoud in April 1978. The entry of Soviet military in Afghanistan paved the way for the involvement of US which made Afghanistan a battlefield for prolong wars.

Key Words: Cold War, Durand Line, Pashtunistan, Mujahideen, Rentier State, Porous Border, Saur Revolution, Frontline State, Soveitization, Geneva Accords, al-Qaeda, Taliban.

Introduction

International relations are predominantly a study of relations of powerful states. Smaller or weaker states, by virtue of their status, do not have much significant impact on the course of international politics. Therefore, their relations evoke marginal interest of scholars and experts. Such states become significant if they are strategically located. The big or powerful states prioritize their relations with weaker states in proportionate to latter relevance to their interests. That is why, it is perceived that the relations among states is not a zero-sum game, i.e. states relations are subject to permutation inasmuch as state's relations with a set of states at any given time do not preclude it from establishing relations with other set of states later on. But at any particular time in world politics, one region assumes more importance than others. In a geographical context, the region is called epicenter of international

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relations. "A state's proximity to an epicenter can be a vital determinant of its significance on the geostrategic map of the world." (Shah, 1997) Smaller state's relations with powerful states assume vital dimension and go a contributory way in shaping the course of international politics if they become part or situate in proximity to the 'epicentre'. Only then do their relations attract the scholars and experts' interest; their relations are explored with a view to evaluating their impact on international politics.

The World War II was a phenomenal episode in the sense that two ideologically antipode states, the United States and the Soviet Union, collaborated against the common threat of Axis alliance. Their cooperation is referred to as a period of 'entente' between the two great powers. The pressures of War resulted in teeth-gritting compromise between Communists and anti-Communists. However, the period of entente between the coalitions of the anti-Axis was destined to be of short duration. The post-WW II era rapidly degenerated into the 'Cold War', dividing the Anti-Axis Allies into two antagonistic camps. The period was characterized by "rising tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, tensions that were being termed a Cold War." (Lindermann, 2013) In terms of Structuralism, it is the period of Cold War that provides the context to analyze the relations of a weaker but strategically located Afghanistan and one of the great powers, the Soviet Union. But it is equally significant that ruling elites of a state observe international politics through the prism of their position in the domestic power structure. And they map out response to international politics in such a way that ensure their status in the domestic power structure. Any miscalculation on their part could cost not only big loss to their status but also to the state.

Hypothesis

The United States' preference to Pakistan over Afghanistan enabled the Soviet Union to gain a foothold in Afghanistan. Same time the successive governments in Afghanistan were merely instrumental in allowing Moscow to penetrate deeply in Afghanistan. Thus, it moved further and further into the Soviet sphere of influence, and this led to the Communist coup of 1978 and the Soviet military entry into Afghanistan in 1979 which eventually kept Afghanistan a battle ground for a longer period of time.

Significance of the Study

The study highlights how limitations of a weaker state in an international milieu dominated by two great powers affected its internal and external politics. The leadership of the weaker state has to conduct foreign policy in a way as to secure its national interests without over committing its state to one country or a bloc. The political leadership of Afghanistan in pursuance of its policy of playing one great power against the other with a view to maximizing its interests committed a misjudgment, i.e. over committing Afghanistan to the Soviet bloc. The implications of Afghan leadership's indiscretion were so intense that Afghanistan has not been able to escape their effects hitherto. Likewise, the United States policy of committing itself to Afghanistan only to the point of ensuring latter's political

independence proved detrimental not only for Afghanistan but also influenced the trajectory of international politics in the long run.

Post-British Departure Phase

The departure of the British from the Subcontinent after dividing it into two asymmetrical states, Pakistan and India, and Afghanistan's troubled relations with Pakistan on the issues of the Durand Line and Pashtunistan produced complex dynamics in the region. It's worth mentioning that Pashtunistan remained a contentious issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Pashtun population is divided on both sides of the Durand Line. At the time of the partition of the Subcontinent, Afghanistan began espousal for an independent Pashtun state craved out from Pashtun areas of Pakistan. The Durand Line agreement was signed in 1893 between Britain and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan. It is the 2640 kilometers long porous international border between Afghanistan and the semiautonomous tribal regions of Pakistan. The immediate impact of the British withdrawal was that it deprived Afghanistan of a balancer in its relations with the Soviet Union. Afghanistan had, in view of the changed circumstances, formulated three foreign policy objectives: "firstly, securing of alternative transit routes, the second was broadening of international support for Afghanistan's position in its conflict with Pakistan, and finally, strengthening and modernization of army." (Ghaus, 1988) The objectives required it to cultivate relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union.

Afghanistan and the United States

The Afghan ruling elite was more inclined to develop partnership with the United States. In the post-World War II era, the government of Afghanistan held a higher expectation from America, which it conceived as the logical successor to Britain. In August 1946, Prime Minister Shah Mohammad Khan said, "he was convinced that the United States could guarantee his country's security." (Collins, 1986) The underlying objective of Kabul's fervent desire for strengthening its relations with Washington was "not only to involve the United States in Afghanistan's economic development but also more importantly, to obtain U.S. support for the safeguarding of Afghanistan's political independence." (Ghaus, 1988) At that time, the United States had no direct interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, it adopted a measured policy of limiting itself to extending economic assistance to Kabul. And, as a matter of fact, it did provide modest economic help to Afghanistan under Truman's Four Point Program; however, American "response to Afghan overtures for political support in pursuit of the Pashtunistan was negligible, and for military assistance utterly negative." (Ghaus, 1988)

The United States' policy of short shrift to Afghanistan on the issues of military assistance and political support for Pashtunistan is attributed to three disincentives: the first was Washington's implicit admission that Kabul fell within the Soviet sphere. Robert G. Neumann who served as the United States Ambassador to Afghanistan from 1966 to

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1973 explained American policy regarding Afghanistan, "U.S. diplomacy recognized tacitly that the Soviet Union had a legitimate interest in stability along its southern border, while the U.S. interest was of a lesser degree, that is, to help Afghans protect their independence." (Ghaus, 1988) Washington regarded Afghanistan as "the Finland of Asia, a small state located next to the Soviet Union and therefore eager to avoid it." (Hammond, 1984) Therefore, the United States and allies had accepted "Afghanistan's tilt during monarchy as an unavoidable fact of life reflecting Afghanistan's vulnerable, landlocked position." (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995)

In view of the implied acknowledgment by U.S. of the Soviet Union's legitimate interests in Afghanistan, Washington apprehended that reciprocating Kabul's request for military equipments in any form may have jeopardized Afghanistan's political independence inasmuch as it could provoke Moscow to initiate some kind of move against Afghanistan. (Hammond, 1984) The United States primarily wanted Afghanistan as "neutral, independent, and not over committed to the Soviet bloc." (Collins, 1986) Neumann continued, "For the United States, Afghanistan has at that time limited direct interest: It is not an important trading partner: it is not an access route for US trade with trade with others; it is not presently...a source of oil or scarce strategic metals." (Hammond, 1984) However, he believed, "Afghanistan has important interests for us which have in large part derived from its strategic location between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent." (Hammond, 1984) Implicit in the observation was advice that the United States must have maintained relations with Afghanistan to a limit.

Pakistan's Special Relations with U.S

The third disincentive for the United States was its special relations with Pakistan, an important plank of Washington's policy during the Cold War. They are cited as one of the principle explanations of the United States' eschewing of developing a 'dominant influence' in Afghanistan. America's perception was that after India's nonalignment embrace, Pakistan's strategic value for maintaining a "desirable balance of power in South Asia had increased." (Hussain, 2005)

Washington perception was that its 'special relations' with Pakistan took precedence over all other considerations and "regardless of the legitimacy of the Afghan case, the United States could not afford to antagonize the Pakistanis by supporting calls for an independent Pashtunistan." (Arnold, 1981) Later on, America made it explicit during the Korean War in mid-1952 that it was going "to choose Pakistan as one of its trusted partners in its struggle to contain Communist expansion and was going to arm it accordingly." (Ghaus, 1988)

After Daoud's assumption of premiership office, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Mohamed Naim, visited Washington in October 1954 and appealed for military assistance. Hewas replied three months later: "After careful consideration, extending military aid to Afghanistan would create problems not offset by the strength it would generate. Instead of asking for arms, Afghanistan should settle the Pashtunistan dispute with Pakistan." (Rasanayagm, 2003) However, only once U.S did consent to supply military equipment to Kabul provided it joined "CENTO Daoud, despite the fact that he was anti-Communist, did

not accept the proposal forwarded to him and instead ask for military assistance from the USSR” (Anwar, 1988)

Pakistan: A Factor in Afghanistan-Soviet Relations

Angelo Rasanayagam observed, “It was the United States insensitivity to the peculiarities of the Afghan situation [*after the exit of the British from the subcontinent*] and Daoud’s aggressive espousal of Pashtunistan were the two factors account for rise of the Soviet influence in Afghanistan.” (Rasanayagm, 2003) The first influenced the United States policy of not responding to Afghanistan’s requests for a political support on the Pashtunistan issue and military assistance. The second issue provided Pakistanis with an opening to exploit the issue of Pashtunistan to its advantage by projecting “a menacing picture of Soviet Influence in Afghanistan to bolster their own position as the first line of defence against Soviet expansion into South Asia.” (Haqqani, 2005) The issue of Pashtunistan so poisoned Pakistan-Afghanistan relations that “when Pakistan’s application for admission to the United Nations came up in the General Assembly on 30 September the Afghan representative, Hosayn Aziz cast the only opposing vote” (Burke, 1973) The negative vote had, however, been withdrawn in October indicating Afghanistan’s “willingness to discuss the issue of Pashtunistan with Pakistan through diplomatic channels.” (Dupree, 1973)

During the 1950s, the trajectory of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations was touching the nadir point leading to closure of transit-trade outlet to Afghanistan by Pakistan and attack on Pakistan’s Embassy by Afghan demonstrators in 1955. The mob “also hoisted the Pashtunistanflag on the Embassy building. Similar attacks were carried out on Pakistani consulates in Kandhar and Jalalabad with the connivance of the Afghan Government.” (Hussain, 2005) Pakistan opted to deny Afghanistan transit-trade facility in retribution to poisonous propaganda and incursions into Pakistan territory by Afghan irregular tribal armed bands. The first closure of the transit-trade outlet took place when “three Afghan lashkar [Irregular Tribal armed bands] columns, one led by the Pashtun leader Wali Khan Afridi, crossed the Durand Line in 1950 and 1951 with the avowed intention of flying ‘Pashtunistan’ flag on the on the Indus River. Pakistan protested, and the first blockade of Afghan in-transit goods occurred.” (Dupree, 1973) The severance in their diplomatic relations took place when Pakistan’s regular troops clashed Afghan troops and tribesmen who crossed the Durand Line to “assist a small federatory prince, the Khan of Bajaur against his rival.” (Hussain, 2005) Consequently, diplomatic relations broke down, ambassadors were recalled and Pakistan once again closed its sea ports to Kabul.

Pakistan’s recourse to choking Afghanistan was intended to snub Afghanistan for its overarching misdemeanors across the Durand Line. But in the long run the economic stranglehold proved to counter-productive inasmuch as “transport through eastern Iran was extremely poor, so the only alternative outlet was Soviet Central Asia.” (Rubin, 1995) Pakistan’s approach may be described a subtle retaliatory leverage which Islamabad calculatedly exploited by projecting Afghan-Soviet closeness an ominous development, and thus raised the United States’ stakes in its ‘special relationship’ with Pakistan. But it, along with the United States lack of enthusiasm in engaging Afghanistan, paved the way for deepening of ties between Kabul and Moscow.

Afghanistan and the Soviet Union

Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union had more vital and direct interests in Afghanistan. The USSR wanted to secure substantial footprints in Afghanistan because Kremlin intended to “prevent Afghanistan from serving as a base for a hostile power and thus encourage its policy of nonalignment [and] to develop Afghanistan as a showpiece of Soviet developmental assistance.” (Rubenstein, 1982) Therefore, the Soviet Union was prepared to co-operate with Afghanistan on issues which the White House deemed inconsistent with its policy.

The British exit from the subcontinent provided the Soviets with an opportunity to penetrate their influence in Afghanistan. However, Joseph Stalin could not pay significant attention to the Third World inasmuch as he was preoccupied with “postwar reconstruction and the consolidation of his hold on Europe.” (Hammond, 1984) Besides, they were wary of “greater political and economic involvement in Asia, especially after the reverses it [Soviet Union] suffered in Turkey and Iran in 1945 and 1946 respectively.” (Ghaus, 1988)

The Afghan leadership too was not eager to speed up its relations with Moscow though it was aware of the benefits that might accrue. The fostering of relations could “stave off dangers from the north. They could also bring other benefits, like transit facilities, increased trade, and aid.” (Ghaus, 1988) Another reason of the ‘go-slow policy’ was the attitude of Shah Mahmud Khan, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, and his close associates were “reared in the traditional suspicion of Russia, shied away from taking steps that would bring Afghanistan too close to the Soviet Union.” (Ghaus, 1988)

After Stalin’s death, Nikita Khrushchev launched initiatives to woo “the Third World actively and to compete with the United States in substantial aid programs.” (Hammond, 1984) On the other hand, Afghanistan had reached a stage where vital issues related to economic development, modernization of its armed forces and political support for the issue of Pashtunistan could not be delayed. Despite the Afghan leadership’s “traditional suspicions of Russian motives, pragmatic considerations were motivating Afghanistan into closer accommodation with the USSR.” (Arnold, 1981) Afghanistan and the Soviet Union signed a four-year trade agreement in July 1950 which provided, inter alia, “duty-free transit for Afghan goods and a high currency exchange rate. Moscow also agreed to construct several gasoline storage facilities in the country.” (Hussain, 2005) The most significant development was the opening of a Soviet trade office in Kabul “something never permitted by previous Afghan policy makers.” (Dupree, 1973)

Afghan-Soviet Relations during Daoud’s Era as Prime Minister

Relations between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan got impetus during Premier Daoud’s reign. The acceleration might have not been possible had the United States requited Afghanistan’s request for military aid because “it was only when USA rejected Afghanistan’s request for arms aid, made repeatedly in 1948, 1951 and 1953” (Mitinuddin, 1991) then Afghanistan turned finally to the Soviet Union for the modernization of its armed forces.

Pakistan's joining of the American sponsored military pacts, Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) 1953 and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1954 and respectively further antagonized the two neighbors. The membership made Pakistan eligible for "military equipment and training to its armed forces along with the stationing of American military advisers in the Pakistan Army's Headquarters in Rawalpindi." (Hussain, 2005) Premier Daoud criticized American supply of military equipments to Pakistan and "declared U.S. military aid to Pakistan was serious threat." (Rubenstein, 1982)

On the other hand Afghanistan and the USSR agreed on a series of development projects related to construction of highways, bridges, the Bagram airport north of Kabul but the most amazing feat was the construction of "an all-weather road linking Kabul with the USSR border that involved the spectacular fact of engineering- the construction of the Salang Tunnel that pierced the Hindu Kush for the first time in history." (Rasanayagm, 2003) Ironically, the Soviets used the same bridges and roads to ferry their forces into Afghanistan in 1979. Likewise, the same Salang Tunnel had been used by the Soviet army. Relations between Moscow and Kabul further deepened with the start of collaboration on oil exploration in Afghanistan. Oil surveying teams increased after the 1957 visit of King Zahir Shah to Moscow "at which time the Soviets contributed another \$ 15 million for oil exploration in north Afghanistan. Between 1950 and 1955, Afghan transit trade through Pakistan actually increased annually; trade with the Soviet Union mushroomed." (Dupree, 1973)

The Soviet Union's economic cooperation with Afghanistan was a precursor to its seeking of influence in Afghan military. Thousands of Afghan army and air force officers were sent to the Soviet Union for training. This was the available stated point that Afghanistan sent 7000 junior military officers to USSR AND Czechoslovakia for training between 1961 and 1970. Apart from military training, the Afghan army and military officers were initiated in Marxist-Leninist indoctrination and procommunist views. The Soviet trained army officers played a central role in the ouster of the King in 1973 and, later on, in the Saur Revolution in 1979. (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995) Another aspect of the military cooperation was the provision of military weapons and help for re-building Afghan Air Force. USSR started providing small quantities of military weapons and equipment which included "T-34 tanks, guns, military vehicles, field radios and combat air craft. By 1960, the Soviet military mission had swelled in number to about 500 military advisors, technicians and instructors." (Ballance, 1993) The first Soviet aircraft to arrive in Afghanistan were a "batch of 40 MiG-17 fighter planes. By 1960, the AAF [Afghan Air Force] had over 100 Soviet combat aircraft and six helicopters." (Ballance, 1993) The Soviets had not restricted their cooperation to supply of equipments only. They undertook to improve existing airfields, construct storage facilities and lay down new airfields near main cities. The Soviet Union, besides providing economic and military assistance, extended political support also to Afghanistan on the issue of Pashtunistan. During Communist Party of Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev and Premier Nikolai Bulganin state visit to Afghanistan, Bulganin specifically said: "We think the demands of Afghanistan to give the population of bordering Pashtunistan an opportunity of freely expressing their will are justified. (Rubenstein, 1982)

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Daoud's unstinted pursuit of the Pashtunistan issue and over-committing Afghanistan to the Soviet bloc did not go down well in Afghanistan's influential circles. Fearing that Daoud's intransigent stand on Pashtunistan could have negative implications for Afghanistan and traditional neutrality, Daoud was asked to resign and made way for M. Yusuf. But Daoud's resignation in 1963 did not bring about any pronounced shift in the direction of Afghanistan's relations with the Soviet Union because "by 1973, total Soviet military and economic aid (\$425 million) by a factor three to one." (Collins, 1986)

Daoud as President (1973-78) and Soviet Union

Daoud's second coming to power was in consequence of a successful putsch which was supported by Soviet trained military officers belonged to the Parcham faction of the Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). On the instruction of "Moscow a major faction of the Afghan Communist Party, the Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), supported Daoud, and some PDPA members even served in cabinet position." (Hussain, 2005) But Daoud used the cushion of Soviet-trained military offices as "expedient, temporary allies who could easily be controlled and discarded when convenient." (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995)

The pro-Soviet army officers and PDPA sympathizers in bureaucracy used their positions to increase their penetration in the state apparatus. Realizing that their exponential influence was a threat to his government, President Daoud launched a ferret out and purge communist drive. President Daoud removed two hundred Soviet trained officers in 1974. His shedding exercise perturbed the Soviets so much that the Soviet President Nikolai Podogorny paid an immediate visit to Afghanistan "to register mounting Soviet concern." (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995) Daoud's measures to neutralize the communist actually facilitated the unification, mediated by the Communist Party of India, of two squabbling factions, Parcham and the Khalq, of the PDPA in 1977.

"Collateral to crackdown on the Communists, President Daoud, in order to curtail the Soviet influence in Afghanistan, sought to reappraise Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors and Arab countries and, especially, with the Peoples' Republic of China. The purported shift in Afghanistan's foreign policy was, from the Soviet perspective, an ominous development. It generated apprehensions in Kremlin that Afghanistan might slip out of its sphere of influence. However, by the beginning of 1978, President Daoud's popularity had already plummeted due to his dictatorial style and decline in Afghan economy which had alienated the Afghan populace. The United factions of the PDPA successfully exploited the discontentment and on 27 April 1978 dislodged Daoud in a bloody coup d'etat." (Hussain, 2005)

Post-Daoud Period 1978-1989

The falling of Afghanistan to a communism-inspired revolution was a phenomenal happening. Because the essential character of the Afghan society is religious and conservative, therefore, "foreign influence, let alone the Soviet brand of socialism, generally perceived as atheistic and anti-Islamic, was an affront to the cultural sensibilities

of a largely peasant society.” (Rais, 1994) It is difficult to ascertain to find the extent of the Soviet involvement in the revolution but Moscow’s prompt recognition of the new regime had strengthened the impression of the coup being Kremlin inspired. (Ali, 1983) Radio Kabul in its announcement on 3 May 1978 said that the “Revolution was a democratic and national revolution and rebutted the impression that it was foreign inspired. (Times, 1978) Conflicting views regarding the Soviet complicity apart, the Saur Revolution was a prologue to the impending climax in Kremlin’s influence in Afghanistan. The first step was the signing of a Friendship Agreement between Moscow and Kabul on 3 December 1978. Article IV of the Agreement stated, “the signatories shall consult each other and take by agreement appropriate measures to ensure the security, independence and territorial integrity of the two countries.” (Arnold, 1981)

The Khalqis wanted to transform Afghanistan into a modern socialist state. In pursuance of this, they introduced a number of reforms. The most important reforms were agrarian reforms which were intended to ameliorate Afghan peasantry. The agrarian reforms were contained in two decrees. Decree 6 was announced to abolish the mortgage system and usury. The second decree, Decree 8, was related to redistribution of land. Another significant decree was Decree 7 which outlawed the custom of dowry’

The reforms did not go down well amongst the agrarian influential, and they launched resistance against them. Their resistance and the internecine power struggle between Tarakai and Amin had so undermined the Saur Revolution that it was feared to be “on the verge of collapse within twenty months.” (Gupta, 1986) The war within the party resulted in the death of Tarakai and consequently Amin stepped into his shoes. Regarding Tarakai’s death, the Kabul Times in its 10 October 1979 issue reported that Tarakai died of “serious illness, which he had been suffering from sometime.” (Bradsher, 1999) However, it came to light later on that he had been suffocated to death by Amin’s men in the dark night of 8 October 1979.” (Gupta, 1986)

The Soviets though granted diplomatic recognition to Amin’s government but his relations with Moscow was far from smooth. Amin’s nationalist profile and his “refusal to let them (Soviets) exercise the supervision that normally went with massive Soviet aid in a satellite state” (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995) deepened trust crisis between Kabul and Kremlin. Moscow “perceived him increasingly during 1979 as an opportunist who might turn to Washington and Islamabad if the rebels were to pose a serious threat to his regime.” (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995)

The Soviets had played a crucial role in the development and modernization of Afghanistan since the late fifties, and no government in Kabul, monarchical or republican tried to pursue policies detrimental to Soviet interests. Ironically, Amin committed the same mistake: he, having realized that Moscow was not pleased with his approach, sought to cultivate relations with the United States and Islamabad. The Soviets were not incorrect in their estimation because Amin in his maiden speech as president invited his Pakistani counterpart, Zia ulHaq, and his adviser on foreign affairs, Agha Shahi, to visit Afghanistan as soon as possible for elimination of misunderstanding. (Bradsher, 1999) This was a clear indication of change in Afghanistan’s foreign policy.

The Soviets viewed Amin’s attempts to reorient Afghan foreign policy during his 100 days in power another Anwar Sadaat in the making who might break with Moscow as he

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was “looking for way to justify a break with us, leading to the expulsion of our advisers.” (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995) They were not prepared to lose Afghanistan under any circumstances; therefore, they, in order to pre-empt this eventuality, decided to remove Amin from power. On the eve of Christmas in December 1979, the Soviet moved into Afghanistan, and a specially trained group of KGB troops killed Amin and installed BabrakKarmal as the next president of Afghanistan. Amin’s likely break away from the Soviet Union was not the only factor responsible for the Soviet military entry into Afghanistan. International and regional developments too influenced the Soviet decision.

Entry of Military Forces in Afghanistan

The entry of Soviet military forces into Afghanistan in December 1979 “sent shock waves throughout the world.” (Mitinuddin, 1991) Washington deciphered the step as a “calculated move in Russian global strategy rather than as a response to the dangerous floundering of an incompetent puppet.” (Calvoceossi, 2006) James R. Schlesinger, Defence and Energy Secretary in President Carter’s administration, described the development as the “gravest peril since the darkest days of the World War II.” (Mitinuddin, 1991) The stationing of the Soviet forces on afghan soil represented the climax of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. After entry into Afghanistan, the process of Sovietization was initiated which had two main strands: first, a large number of Soviet advisers were called into Afghanistan to run many government offices and make important decisions. (Rasanayagm, 2003) Available records point that 1500 or more Soviet advisers were engaged in running the administration of civil ministries. And between 3500 and 4000 Soviet military officers and technicians ran the armed forces. (Bradsher, 1999) Second, the government, the party, the mass organizations, the educational system, and the economy were all being remodeled to imitate the Soviet pattern. (Rasanayagm, 2003)

Consequences of Soviet control over Afghanistan

The United States regarded the physical Soviet control over Afghanistan as an opening gambit in the great Soviet strategy which would, after incorporating Afghanistan, move to subjugate the Gulf oil-producing states. (Cordovez & Harrison, 1995, p. 32) Washington, in collaboration of its international and regional knitted an alliance to contain the Soviet move, and, on the other hand, raised the cost of occupation. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, KrasnayaZvezda, the Soviet Defence Ministry newspaper, revealed in mid-1990 the cost, men and material, which the Soviet Union had to bear to maintain Afghanistan’s occupation for a decade. Kremlin, according to the newspaper, lost 14454 men in action and as a result of wounds;309 missing; about 50 000 wounded and 600 maimed and invalided. As far as the cost of the Afghan war was concerned, the figure was 60 billion roubles, or \$96 billion at the official exchange rate in the 1980s. Other figures ranged from 5 billion to 10 billion roubles a year, for a total of \$76 billion to \$ 152 billion. (Bradsher, 1999)

Pakistan was coopted in the alliance as a ‘frontline state’. The United States rewarded Pakistan for its role as a ‘frontline state’ status. America provided Pakistan worth US \$3.2

billion worth of economic and military assistance spread over six years starting from 1981. Later on, the quantum of aid was reduced to US \$4 billion spread over six years. Washington arranged for the provision of sophisticated military hardware to Pakistan and provided for the training and the education of Pakistani army officer corps. (Hussain, 2005)

The 'frontline state' status conferred upon Pakistan the prerogative for financing, training, and equipping Afghan *Mujahideen* engaged in resisting the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. According to Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, Pakistan provided training to over 80000 *Mujahideen* (The word '*Mujahideen*' refers to a military force of Muslim guerilla warriors engaged in Holy jihad) between 1984 and 1987 and distributed hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons and ammunitions. Several billion dollars were spent on this immense logistic exercise and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) teams regularly entered Afghanistan along with *Mujahideen*. (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992)

Moscow's adventure of sending its troops into Afghanistan brought the two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, into conflict in Afghanistan. The clash between them converted Afghanistan into a battlefield where America, with the help of Pakistan, used Afghan *Mujahideen* as its proxies to give the Soviets the dose of their Vietnam. According to Charlie Wilson, "There were 58000 [US] dead in Vietnam and we owe the Russians one...I have a slight obsession with it because of Vietnam. I thought the Soviets ought to get a dose of it." (Yousaf & Adkin, 1992)

It is a fact that the ordinary Afghans, especially the rural population were the most sufferers. The Soviet occupation had a devastating effect on them because the rural Afghans fed and provided shelter to the *Mujahideen*, the Soviets tried to eliminate or removed the civilians from the country side where resistance was based. Soviet bombing destroyed entire villages, crops and irrigation, leaving millions of people dead, homeless and starving.

The Geneva Accords

Collateral to the armed resistance, Pakistan and Afghanistan initiated indirect courtesy the United Nations auspices for the political resolution of the Afghan conflict. The indirect talks started in Geneva on 25 June 1982. After ten torturous rounds of talks held between 1982 and 1988, the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union and the Secretary of State of the United States signed the Geneva Accords on 14 April 1988. (Sattar, 2012) The signing of the Geneva Accords facilitated and paved the way for the smooth and face-saving exit of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The Geneva Accords provided for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan within nine months, and half of them to be removed in the first three months; secondly, ban on cross border activities; thirdly, the Accords stipulated the superpowers to ensure one-year moratorium on arm deliveries. However, they had been granted the right to start resupply of arms to their allies in case of a violation of the moratorium. (Mitinuddin, 1991) Interestingly, a few days after the signing of the historic Geneva Accords, the President of Pakistan, General Zia ulHaq, commented that "the *Mujahideen* should and would continue to fight and topple the Kabul regime." (Hussain, 2005) His comments were an explicit challenge to Article 1 of the Accords which stipulated an obligation on both Pakistan and Afghanistan not to interfere and intervene in each other's internal affairs. (Mitinuddin, 1991)

Conclusion

Cold War was a complex phase of the 20th century in international politics. The period was characterized by a strategic competition between the two great powers to have influence in different parts of the globe. Two points are worth mentioning in this connection: first, their race for securing more sway was regulated by tacit acceptance of respecting each other's legitimated interests in a region. Secondly, they had prioritized their relations in proportion of countries' relevancy to their interests. The United States' policy towards Afghanistan during the Cold War was based upon its perception that since the Soviet Union had, being its neighbor, justify interests in Afghanistan; therefore, it fell within the sphere of Moscow's influence. Washington thought that obliging Kabul for military equipment might provoke Moscow to a some kind of action against Afghanistan. But, at the same time, America wanted an Afghanistan which was politically neutral, and was prepared to commit itself to the point. The dilemma of the United States policy was that it contained dichotomy between desire and perception: Washington perceived a politically neutral Afghanistan could play a significant role in achieving a stable balance of power in the region, and it was ready to engage Kabul on this issue; whereas, the perception regarded Afghanistan a part of the Soviet sphere of influence. The issue was how to reconcile inasmuch as for ensuring the political neutrality it was vital to balance the Soviet influence in Afghanistan. In other words, US needed wider engagement in Afghanistan. America was the only country which could have played the role of the balancer, however, its option not to act so points to a fact that even great powers in pursuance of their grand strategy commits apparently insignificant indiscretion which is fraught with deeper implications in the long-run. In Afghanistan's case, the reluctance on the part of Washington produced vacuum which provided the Soviet Union an opportunity to penetrate its influence in Afghanistan. The climax of American indiscretion was the Saur Revolution of 1978.

The US again mis-assessed the trajectory of events when the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in 1989. On that occasion, Washington lost interest in Afghanistan which proved disastrous not for only Afghanistan but also deeply impacted the direction of international politics. America was required to use its influence and diplomacy for the settlement of post-withdrawal issues in Afghanistan. But Washington's retreat from Afghanistan, along with Pakistan's failure to play a constructive role, plunged Afghanistan into civil war. Later on, the rise of the *Taliban* from the ruins of the Afghan civil war and their support to *Al-Qaeda*, under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden, was happenings which morphed the direction of international politics as was evident from the event of 9/11.

The problems of Afghanistan were, after the British exit from the subcontinent, more complex and grave. The Afghan leadership wanted to induce Washington to fill-in the vacuum and help Afghanistan to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Afghan leaders were unable to realize that the United States, unlike British, had no direct or immediate interests in Afghanistan, therefore, they could not play one great power against the other; secondly, Afghanistan was a reinter state, and as such it had limitations in the realm of foreign policy.

Premier Daoud, having failed to convince the United States, abandoned Afghanistan's traditional policy and sought the support of Soviet Union. The essence of trajectory of Afghanistan's relations with the Soviet Union must have been not to over commit itself

because a great power invariably tends to use its leverage to enhance its influence. Afghanistan, as a rentier state, neither possessed wide social base nor strong and stable political and economic institutions to defy the Soviet influence. The upshot of Premier Daoud's policy of committing Afghanistan whole hog to Moscow was that it resulted in exponential rise in the Kremlin's penetration in Afghanistan. Later on, when Daoud as a president attempted to reverse the Moscow's sway, he lost his government as well as his life.

Notwithstanding the fact that ruling elites of Afghanistan manipulated internal contradictions and orientated them into foreign policy issues so that their position in the domestic power-structure was not threatened. Given Afghanistan's complex ethnic balance, Daoud's insistence on the issue of Pashtunistan appeared consonance with the above observation. But, at the same time, foreign policy objectives must synchronize with the imperatives of the objective international political environment. Idealistically Premier Daoud must have so formulated Afghanistan's tenor on the Pashtunistan issue as to avoid poisoning of its relations with Pakistan. It was significant because Afghanistan has been dependent upon Pakistan to reach Arabian Sea for its external trade. But Premier Daoud opted for the otherwise course and, first, compromised Kabul's nonalignment status and secondly, antagonized Pakistan.

The United States tacitly overlooked Afghanistan fell in the Soviet sphere of influence but with a caveat that Moscow would not militarily interfere in Afghanistan. Kremlin's sending of its troops into Afghanistan was regarded by Washington as tantamount to breach of this implicit setting. The misstep of the Soviet Union converted Afghanistan into a battle ground where rival great powers fought a decade long proxy war to edge out the other.

Afghanistan still exists as an independent, sovereign country. But after Revolution in 1978 till the United States' military assault in retaliation of the twin attacks by Afghanistan-based *Al-Qaeda* on 9/11, the identification of Afghanistan as sovereign state is a debatable question. Even after the pull out of International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan towards the end of 2014, eight to ten thousand American will continue to stay in Afghanistan for training and special operations.

The two prolonged bouts of war: the first between Soviet forces and the Afghan *Mujahideen*, supported by U.S., and the second between Afghan forces led by ISAF and the *Taliban* have inflicted huge human and infrastructure losses to Afghanistan. The infrastructure which the Soviets had developed during heydays of their influence in Afghanistan tattered when they were confronting the resistance of *Mujahideen*. Though the ISAF have rebuilt and constructed the network of roads and other communications yet a substantial funding is required to sustain the quality, which Afghanistan, as a reinter state, lacks. Besides, the economy of Afghanistan was on the decline, however the presence of International Forces after the 9/11 incident did provide the support to the deteriorating economy. The fact of the matter is that the Government of Afghanistan has begun to feel the economic pinch of American and ISAF withdrawal. The survival of Afghanistan as an integrated and viable country appears difficult without the continuous support and help of international community and US particularly.

Afghanistan has been in a state of war since the Saur Revolution in 1978. Wars, civil wars and successive fragile and unpopular governments in the country have resulted in

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breeding grounds for extremism, especially the rise of *Taliban* phenomenon which had not only played havoc with peace of the region but also changed the traditional settings of international relations. The point to emphasize is that there is a pronounced difference between what the world was before and after the event of 9/11. As a result of prolonged wars millions of Afghans displaced and migrated to Pakistan and have been confronting hardships and grave conditions. They are known as the permanent and largest immigrants of recent times. Need not to say that they have been remained dependent on the help and support of International Community otherwise there would be a huge human tragedy.

It goes without saying that had Afghanistan not pursued the policy of making a nexus with a great power and unfriendly relations with Pakistan on the pretext of Pashtonistan, it would be in much better position today. Moreover peace and stability in Afghanistan and region would not be at stake. The bottom line is that the ordinary Afghans have been the ultimate sufferers since April 1978 because when 'elephants fight, it is the grass that has to bear the brunt of their fight.'

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