

American Role in Afghanistan for Broad-Based Government after Soviet Withdrawal

Mussarat Jabeen*

Abstract

A decade-long Afghan war left the country in imbroglio. The Geneva Accord made the Soviet troops to leave Afghanistan but offered no post-war arrangement or power-sharing formula. There was need to establish a stable and democratic regime to address the post-war situation as the infrastructure was completely destroyed. The reconstruction and rebuilding of Afghanistan required economic assistance and cooperation of all parties involved in the Afghan war particularly that of the US. During the war, the US funnelled billions of dollars to the resistance forces and after the war, more funds and supervision was required for the war-ravaged country. Different attempts were made by the Mujahidin to establish a government but failed owing to little attention of the Washington. The US wanted military solution and was not ready to accept the political solution or power-sharing to communist regime as suggested by the Soviet Union. The communist regime was to collapse but no alternative administrative structure was finalized to replace it. The US changed different positions while discussing the broad-based government with different parties. In fact, the US lost interest in the country as its

* Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations & Political Science, University of Sargodha, Sargodha.

agenda was to bleed the Soviets, not the reconstruction of the country. Ignoring the war-torn country with heaps of weapon, it left the country. It took no effective measures but only cosmetic efforts were made to form a political set up. Consequently, the country faced humanitarian catastrophe of tremendous proportions due to civil war. This paper purports to review the American role of changing positions in Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal, thus analyzing the policies of establishing a broad-based government and reasons of its failure.

The Position of Post-War Afghanistan

The end of the Cold War provided new incentives and opportunities to international community to work for collective security, peace, stability and development of the world in general and the war-torn Afghanistan in particular. But internal situation of Afghanistan did not allow it to exploit the opportunity as the Afghan people were certainly in a dilemma whether they would be able to create a political and economic environment suitable to peace and prosperity or prevailing atmosphere of hatred, mistrust and violence would continue.

The successful struggle of the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet military intervention was a dramatic episode of the Cold War. The withdrawal of the Red Army was the top priority of the American national security policy. To achieve this goal, massive economic and military aid was provided to the Mujahideen who fought and forced Soviet troops to quit Afghan territory. Apart from this, the US had to extend concessions to neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and relaxed its nuclear policy toward South Asia. The departure of Soviet troops was officially taken place on May 15, 1988. The US and Pakistan achieved a major geo-political victory when the last Russian soldier crossed the Oxus Rive in February 1989. Both CIA and the US State Department celebrated this historic event as it brought humiliated defeat of the Soviet Union. The withdrawal was a signal to an immediate end of the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, the region ceased to be a

strategic interest for the US. The global situation was also changed in the Eastern Europe and communist world as Brezhnev doctrine¹ was expired and no ideology was to secure.

The American goal was to defeat the Soviet Union and it supported the Afghan resistance through Pakistani intelligence agencies. Pakistan funneled the aid from the US and other countries to the Mujahideen as it perceived the possibility of achieving some 'strategic depth' in case of establishment of a friendly Islamic regime. Both Washington and Islamabad declared that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had withdrawn his troops due to fear of military defeat. In fact, the change in Soviet domestic politics forced Gorbachev to carry out his new thinking and he abrogated the long-standing ideological commitment to aid those forces struggling to overthrow the capitalism. For the first time in the Soviet history, he talked about mutual security declaring that a decline in the security of one rival reduced other's security. One of his aides went as far as to tell the US that "we are going to do a terrible thing to you, we are going to deprive you of an enemy."² After the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the involvement of the US began to evaporate. The US embassy in Kabul was closed showing the security concerns. The CIA assumed that the Afghan regime would fall quickly after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. However, American chargé d'affaires. did not agree with this assumption of the CIA. The conventional wisdom of the CIA failed regarding its claim about the fall of Kabul regime and

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- 1 Breznev Doctrine was designed to highlight and secure the ideological and security interest of the Soviet Union. It suggested that the Soviet Union would intervene in socialist countries when their governments become unreliable or failed to ensure affective control of the state apparatus. It was authorized to use military might against external and internal forces hostile to socialism. According to this doctrine, a threat to socialist country would be a threat to the socialist common wealth. See details in Rasul Bakhsh Raees, *War without Winners*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 73-77.
 - 2 Eugene, R. Wittkoff, Charles W. Kegley and James M. Scott, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*, 6th ed., (London: Thomson Learning, 2003), pp. 53-54.

advance of the Mujahideen to Kabul victoriously. Many other embassies were also closed and the staff left Kabul due to food shortage and mounting violence.³

The country, which became a reference for the fall of Communism, suffered a lot after the departure of the Red Army. Afghanistan was caught up in the post-war fighting among various warring factions. These groups launched a combined struggle against the expansion of Communist rule, under covert and overt support of the US and other countries. But in the changing situation, they lost unity and raised weapons against each other. These factions became dagger drawn enemies and turned against their own allies in the absence of a common threat. These groups were not prepared to follow a durable power sharing arrangement. Their lust for power brought further devastation and havoc to the Afghans and caused great instability to the war-hot country. The whole population suffered adversely in this struggle of recovering freedom. A large portion of population was deprived of their lives and limbs by landmines, booby traps and other deadly contraptions. These explosive devices were laid in the country to reduce the mobility of foot soldiers of both sides. But the main victims were the hapless civilians and innocent children. Nearly one million persons were perished and some six million Afghan inhabitants had to take refuge in neighbouring countries. The entire infrastructure suffered a dreadful damage.

Afghan Mujahideen who had been fighting for ten years against the Communist regime could not ensure a peaceful transition to a stable order in Afghanistan. The victorious parties engaged themselves in power politics. The Jamiat-i-Islami of Masaud, Hizb-i-Islami of Hikmatyar, Ijtihad of Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, Jumbish of Dostam and more than a hundred other political groups having divergent ideologies locked themselves in self-annihilating actions. The practices of using guns and guise, shifting alliances, changing loyalties and forming groups overshadowed the Afghan scene. Intra-

3 Henry. S. Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 310.

party and inter-party differences went to such an extent that all the seventy-seven parties that had fought the Soviets as a single force, began to demand their share of power in the government.⁴

Reduced Tension between the Superpowers

The end of the Cold War and inability of the Mujahideen to form their government in Afghanistan changed the situation for American policy-makers, who began to pursue a cooperative relationship with the Soviets. Both super powers tried to seek resolution of regional conflicts. The policies of Gorbachev reduced the east-west rivalry, which relaxed tension between the hardliner Soviets and Americans. Gorbachev abandoned the policy of military involvement to compete with the US in order to restructure the Soviet economy, which led to the signing of Geneva Accord in April 1988 for final decision of the withdrawal. He was ready to leave Afghanistan even without an agreement.⁵ Unfortunately, the Geneva Accord did not end fighting in Afghanistan and the US could not prevent the Mujahideen from launching rocket attacks on the Soviet-backed Kabul regime headed by Najibullah who succeeded Babrak Karmal. Soviet troops brought Karmal to power when they invaded Afghanistan on December 27, 1979 after killing Hafizullah Amin. The leaders of the Mujahideen already rejected Najibullah's offer to make a coalition government. Najibullah was informed by Gorbachev that Soviets would not interfere in Afghanistan. The regime itself was unable to counter these attacks as it had been accustomed to obey Soviet instructions since coup d'état of 1978, which brought the communist to power by holding reins behind the curtain. So, the regime was unable to reach at any agreement with the Mujahideen. In such situation, Najibullah's own party, i.e., the Peoples

4 A. Z. Amin Khan, "Asian Approach to the Settlement of Regional Disputes: the Case of Afghanistan," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 21, summer and winter 1997, p. 143.

5 Raja Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, (New York: Verso Publishers, 1988), p. 250.

Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)⁶ accused him of selling out the revolutionary cause by agreeing to the Soviet withdrawal without achieving the original Geneva goal of halting American aid to the resistance.⁷ Many coup attempts were made to remove Najibullah but to in vain.

Efforts to form a Government

The expectations of the CIA and the ISI regarding peace and stability after the Soviet withdrawal ended in fiasco, which led to sharpen the differences among Peshawar-based groups.⁸ They accused one another of stealing supplies and attacking UN truck convoys to rob the goods. They were no longer prepared to reach at any arrangement in the new situation as the reduction in American aid and supervision ended their unity. The seven parties planned to establish a united government on February 23, 1988 but this attempt failed owing to the little attention of Washington. Other reason was the nature and time of the government, which

6 The PDPA was the principal Soviet-orientated Communist organisation in Afghanistan. The military coup of 1978 was engineered by the Soviet Union through this party as it had significant leverage over the PDPA and its activities. In fact, many of the leaders of the PDPA had got military training in Moscow or studied in Soviet institutions. This party was split into two factions in 1967, which reunited in 1977. Due to leadership of PDPA, Afghanistan became exclusively dependent on Soviet military and economic aid, while previous governments attempted to play off the US and USSR against one another avoiding from exclusive alignment with any of the superpower. Afghanistan's coup of 1978 brought PDPA to power under the leadership of Nur Muhammad Taraki in an uprising by the lower ranks of the military officers that overthrew the and government of Daud. President Daud was killed along with his family in this coup.

7 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, pp. 379-80.

8 During the Afghan war, there were seven recognized parties backed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which had their bases in Peshawar. These seven groups were further divided ideologically into two parts as three parties were moderate and four were fundamentalist parties. Among the fundamentalist groups, two were more active and prominent, namely Jamat-i-Islami of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Hizb-Islami of Hikmatyar. The US and Pakistan refused to provide aid to any independent group fighting inside Afghanistan due to its non-alliance to Peshawar-based parties. These independent groups resented the policy of partiality of the CIA and the ISI. The bulk of military hardware and money were going to Peshawar factions particularly Hikmatyar, who received almost fifty percent of aid provided by the US and other countries.

was yet to be decided. The US strongly opposed Zia-ul-Haq's last-minute effort to delay the Geneva Accord till the formation of a transitional government. The US had concerns only to get the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan while formation of a stable and non-aligned government was not on its agenda.⁹

The UN made efforts to promote a political solution and Diego Cordovez, was appointed as the personal representative of the secretary general of the UN in 1981. Cordovez being a senior UN official from Ecuador was suitable for this purpose. He offered a plan in 1987 to resolve the conflict. He offered a plan for the establishment of a coalition government, comprising of Afghan Mujahideen, refugees, selected Afghan personalities, PDPA and exiled Afghan leaders. But, this plan was rejected by Washington and Islamabad as well as Mujahideen who ruled out any dialogue with PDPA or any role for the former King Zahir Shah.¹⁰ The US wanted to build up the Peshawar-based alliance as a shadow government that could take over after the withdrawal. This policy was designed in 1987, as the US expected that Communist regime would fall soon after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. This assumption of the CIA never came true.

Cordovez's plan for a broad-based transitional arrangement providing representation to all Afghan groups was failed.¹¹ He again suggested a proposal of transitional arrangement whose members would not be included in permanent arrangement of future government. This proposal also met a failure because the US and Pakistan were not willing to accommodate the PDPA. Before the ink of the Accord had dried, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan began to accuse the US and Pakistan for providing arms to resistance in violation of the Accord. The Moscow and Kabul regimes

9 Anwar, *The Tragedy of Afghanistan*, p. 258.

10 Mohammad Yousaf & Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (Jang Publishers 1992), p. 218.

11 Diego Cordovez & Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of Soviet Withdrawal*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 53.

wanted Washington to end its support to the Mujahideen without cutting Soviet aid to Najibullah.¹²

Negative Symmetry

Since the eruption of the war in 1980, the US had been providing aid to the Mujahideen with the collaboration of other countries. It was the biggest military aid since the World War II, which cost the US more than \$ 2 billion.¹³ Even after the withdrawal, the US apprehended the possibility of retaining power by the Soviets, as the Communist regime in Kabul was not collapsed. The US laid great emphasis on the Soviets to avoid supporting Najibullah. This demand was made because Moscow had promised to accept a successor government in case Najib was overthrown. But, the Soviets backed out of their commitment and transferred large amount of equipments and troops to Kabul forces. Moscow did not consider this step as a support to the regime but Washington's opinion was different. The Soviets demanded that the Mujahideen should remain in their places to observe the ceasefire but the Mujahideen did not heed to the Soviets and overran several provisional capitals and government's bases to occupy the weapons.¹⁴ Richard Murphy, an official of the State Department had already warned the Regan administration that the US would not be able to prevent the Mujahideen from accelerating their attacks against Kabul after withdrawal.¹⁵ He was right in his opinion, as the Soviets did not fulfil their promise in which Gorbachev suggested to the US, "let nature take its course" and provided all possible aid to the regime.¹⁶ On the other hand, the Soviets expected from the US to implement the "negative symmetry", which meant the halt of aid to the

12 Barnett R. Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1995), pp. 167-68.

13 B. K. Shrivastava, "The US and the Political Settlement in Afghanistan" in Jasjit Singh et al., *Super Power Detent and Future of Afghanistan*, (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers 1990), p. 20.

14 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, p. 311.

15 *The New York Time*, January 30, 1989.

16 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, p. 98.

Mujahideen. It also requested the UN to ban the American aid to the Mujahideen because it was averse to the spirit of Geneva Accord. Despite the Soviet allegation, the UN never announced any evidence of a single violation of Accord by the US. President Reagan was pleased when Gorbachev showed his sincerity and signed the Geneva Accord after Washington Summit of 1987. The State Department relaxed ban on trade with Soviet Union, which was imposed after Soviet invasion of 1979, despite reservation of the Defence Department.¹⁷

Shift in Policy under the Bush Administration

President Bush took office in January 1989 at the time when the Soviets were completing their withdrawal. He wanted a cautious review of warm relations between Reagan and Gorbachev. He ordered the State Department to reassess the US policy toward the Soviet Union. At a press conference, he stated that he would try to bring stability to Afghanistan and directed for a high level review of the US-Afghan policy.¹⁸ Reagan's policy was to get the Soviets out of Afghanistan and he continued aid to resistance forces. But the issue confronting the Bush administration was whether the old policy should be continued or abandoned in the light of changed situation resulting from the Soviet withdrawal. He decided to continue Reagan's policy of supplying aid, as long as the Soviet-backed government remained in power. Thus after a short period, the US policy took a new twist and asserted that a stable, non-aligned and representative government should be made in Kabul. The US wanted to replace the Communist regime with the moderate one.¹⁹

Gorbachev urged President Bush to work together to arrange ceasefire as well as to create political environment for a broad-based coalition government by cutting arm supplies. Bush turned down the proposal, as he was not prepared to accept anything less than the surrender of Kabul

17 Shrivastava, "The US and the Political Settlement in Afghanistan", p. 20.

18 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, p. 99.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

regime.²⁰ But at the same time, the US was also not ready to accept an unstable government in Afghanistan. Owing to this reason, Bush refused to recognize the interim government of the Mujahideen, which was established in Islamabad. The US argued that interim government must fulfil certain criteria for the purpose of recognition including the control of substantial part of Afghan territory, a civil administration and popular support of public.²¹ (But this did not imply that US had no support for interim government at all. It extended all possible support to the Mujahideen.)

Occupation of Territory for US Recognition

The US policy took another turn when the Mujahideen failed to capture Jalalabad in April 1989. This attack was planned by the CIA and the ISI for an Afghan capital in order to install Mujahideen's government. It was reported that the director of the ISI and American Ambassador Robert B. Oakley were present in the meeting of March 5, 1989 held in Islamabad, where this decision was made and approved.²² After the failure, the CIA and the ISI, the agencies responsible for arms supply to the Mujahideen, did not admit their involvement in this failed attempt. But it was not true, as assault could not be made without American concurrence.

The Mujahideen failed due to lack of fighting skill as they had no experience of open war with trained and experienced army. Furthermore, they were neither organized nor equipped with conventional warfare. Other reason was wrong calculation of the CIA and the ISI as both assumed that after the assault a large number of Afghan soldiers would cross over the side of the Mujahideen at the first opportunity. They had forgotten the previous experience, when Mujahideen's firing of missiles on Jalalabad in 1988 had harassed the inhabitants to the extent that they had to flee to other areas and resultantly majority of the inhabitants

20 Shrivastava, "The US and the Political Settlement in Afghanistan", p. 21.

21 Ahsanur Rehman Khan, *Latent Angles of the Afghanistan War 1978-89*, (Rawalpindi: Izhar Sons Printers 1992), p.127.

22 Raees, *War without Winners*, p. 218.

fought along with soldiers of the Communist regime.²³ The Mujahideen had to pay heavily for their failure. It raised doubts in the US about their ability to win a large victory or any success against the Kabul regime. American's doubts were further confirmed by Mujahideen's failed effort to capture Gardoz. A later attack on Jalalabad in 1991 brought no progress for the Mujahideen despite support of the ISI.

This failure also brought to the surface bitter and deadly rivalries among the Mujahideen and it was too difficult to maintain unity among them as the Afghans were fighting against the Afghans. This situation disappointed Washington. The sources of the White House denied their involvement in Jalalabad attack and insisted that the US did not call for a reassessment of the Afghan policy after this failure.²⁴ On the other hand, the US was not in position to move away immediately from the policy of seeking military solution to the Afghan problem. Its National Security Council recommended to the Secretary of State James Baker, who was going to Moscow, to avoid negotiations on political settlement of the Afghan issue.²⁵

The next military action of political significance was the capture of Khost in March 1991 by the Mujahideen, with the logistic and advisory support of the ISI. Although Hizb-Khales played a vital role in this success yet Hikmatyar claimed it as his own victory. During this period, Masoud consolidated his control over the North Eastern Afghanistan. But this success could not fulfill the American demand for the recognition of the interim government. Consequently, the Bush administration began to edge away from seeking military solution but its aid remained continued along with the assistance from Saudi Arabia and other countries. It

23 Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush: (Afghanistan 1978-91)*, (Lahore: Wajidalis Publishers, 1991), p. 288.

24 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, pp. 363-64.

25 Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1993), p. 297.

provided \$ 600 million in 1989 and the total aid for the year was nearly \$ 1.3 billion.²⁶

Seeking a Political Solution

After the death of Zia-ul-Haq in August 1988, military and diplomacy began to run on separate tracks with little coordination. The CIA reduced interest in Afghanistan as its agenda was to seek a political solution of Afghan issue in changing scenario. But Pakistan military insisted on maintaining control over Afghanistan while Benazir Bhutto, the then prime minister of Pakistan was not in the favour of giving free hand to the ISI without US support. During her visit to Washington, she tried to persuade the president and the Congress that the political solution was the only feasible solution. She said, "Pakistan remained committed to a political solution which would ensure the right of Afghan people to choose their own Government." Perhaps she had drawn this conclusion from the failure of the Mujahideen at Jalalabad. Bush also discussed with Benazir Bhutto "ways to encourage political solution in Afghanistan."²⁷

For the US, a political solution was different from the one suggested by the Soviet Union. It wanted a transfer of power away from the PDPA to any of the entity more representative to the aspiration of a wide segment of the Afghan people. An official of the State Department, Howard B. Schaffer said in June 1989 that in the new government there would be no place for the PDPA.²⁸ However, he did not rule out the possibility of inclusion of some personalities of present regime without their party label. Schaffer indicated that neither the Soviet Union nor Kabul regime were willing to accept the American version of political settlement. Both of them offered a power-sharing formula but the US rejected the offer and continued its support to the Mujahideen. Schaffer affirmed that the resistance was determined to approach a political process from a position of strength and

26 G. D Bakshi, *Afghanistan: The First Fault Line War*, (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999), p. 138.

27 *The New York Time*, April 24, 1989.

28 Shrivastava, "The US and the Political Settlement in Afghanistan", p. 23.

Washington was committed to assist it to this end. At this stage, he also ruled out the role of the United Nations in the political settlement.²⁹ On this point, US position was not realistic as it was not possible for the Mujahideen to get a victory through negotiation, which they had lost in the battlefield. This American assumption was due to its intention of exerting pressure on Soviet Union for ending support of Communist regime to improve the ongoing process of détente.³⁰

The US took another initiative in 1990 when it sent an emissary to King Zahir Shah in exile to find out his future role for ending the conflict. Moscow and Kabul favored this idea and Zahir Shah too was willing to lend a helping hand, but the Mujahideen rejected this plan.³¹

The Interim Government

The United Nations made another plan to establish a broad-based government in Afghanistan after failure of its plans of 1987-88 initiated by Cordovez. It emphasized for the first time that preservation of Islamic character of Afghanistan was essential for a political solution. But the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) established in Peshawar, refused to accept this resolution of General Assembly. The education minister of AIG was leading a delegation in Washington to win US support for his government; he also resented the idea and angrily said, "if the meaning of broad-based is to include PDPA than it is totally rejected because we consider the present regime in Kabul as part of the Soviet army."³² The AIG had no authority to include other groups in future political set up and its notion of a political settlement was different from that of the Pakistan and the US. Both Kabul regime and AIG did not represent the majority of Afghan people.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, p. 353.

31 Cordovez and Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan*, p. 380.

32 Barnett R. Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1996), p. 250.

The president of interim government, who was appointed by a Shura of Mujahideen, refused to include the PDPA in new set up. While the Soviet Union wanted PDPA as part of interim government and linked its offer to abandon the support of Kabul regime with this demand. The US and Pakistan did not comply with the proposal too. This Shura was mainly composed of Pushtuns from Eastern Afghanistan. The US did not directly support the Shura, but Saudi Arabia was in favour of the Mujahideen's government and spent \$ 26 million per week during the Shura session of forming a government.³³ This government did not succeed in establishing its strong footing in Afghanistan or arranging elections. The US provided aid to health and education ministries to make the government as a political alternative to the Kabul regime. But different attempts to establish the AIG were failed, because it was a government in exile rather than an interim government.

Hikmatyar and American Policymakers

The US military aid continued to interim government as well as to other political parties. But later Washington adopted both military and political tracks. A few Afghan groups that were pursuing military track opposed the political solution. But the American goal to seek a political solution was in pursuance to marginalize Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, a one-time favourite of Pakistan and the US, on whose military-power the CIA and the ISI had to depend. Hekmatyar's forces destroyed Kabul and killed more people than any other group. However, factions under political leaders like Ahmed Shah Masoud, Burhanuddiin Rabbani, Abdul Rashid Dostum, Abdul Ali Mazari and Abdul Karim Khalili were equally responsible for the violence that raged between 1992 and 1996 in the city of Kabul.

The State Department addressed the issue by challenging the huge share of aid that went to Hikmatyar or Sayyaf and other Peshawar-based parties. Congressional supporters of the Mujahideen also charged the CIA of

33 *Ibid.*

favouring the ISI. They alleged the ISI had been supplying aid to the most extreme authoritarian elements of the Afghan resistance serving interests of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The portrayal of Hikmatyar in American media was that of a fundamentalist, who wanted to set up a theocratic Islamic state similar to that of Iran with the basic difference as it would be a Sunni state rather than Shia's one. The US alleged that Hikmatyar was of using rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran in denouncing the United States as the 'Great Satan' and castigated Western values including theories of democracy and capitalism as social poisons.³⁴ Due to allegations of aid to Hikmatyar, the head of the Afghan Task Force of CIA was dismissed in September 1989. The Bush administration declared that no weapon would be given to Hikmatyar or Sayyaf and instead of them military aid would be supplied to regional or local commanders of Mujahideen who were fighting inside Afghanistan. By directing its aid programme, the US wanted the ISI to leave the support of Hikmatyar who was reportedly responsible for the assassination of a leading secular figure from the Afghan exile community. Professor Syed Burhanuddin Majrooh published a survey showing that 72 percent of Afghan refugees preferred Zahir Shah to any of the Peshawar-based leaders as the future head of the state.³⁵ Though this sad incident occurred even before Soviet withdrawal yet this action was condemnable being official status of Hikmatyar in interim government. He was also responsible for heavy artillery and rocket attacks on Kabul that caused 2000 casualties and had driven out half a million civilians from the capital city by August 1992. Kabul, which was not destroyed during Soviet fighting with the Mujahideen, faced great

34 Ted Galen Carpenter, "The Unintended Consequences of Afghanistan," in *American Foreign Policy* (Dushken Publishing Group, Sluice Bock, 1997-98), p. 216.

35 Prof. Syed Bahuddin Majrooh was a revered poet and philosopher. He published the result of a survey in which 72 percent of Afghan refugees preferred King Zahir Shah at any other Peshawar-based leader as the head of state. The assassination of Majrooh was widely interpreted as Gulbadin Hikmatyar's reaction to this survey. See Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 249.

destruction at the hands of Hikmatyar. At the end of 1992, the Human Rights Watch reports stated, "international interest in the conflict had all but vanished and Afghanistan appeared to be on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe," and this destruction was carried out with American and Saudi funding. Another report by the *Economist* stated that up to summer 1993, about 30,000 people had been killed and 100,000 wounded in the capital while a large number became refugees.³⁶

The decision of the Reagan administration for halting aid to Hikmatyar was under the pressure of Congress and American public. The reports about assassination plots of some Afghan leaders and other human rights abuses committed by Hikmatyar were received in Washington with great concern and pressurized the president to halt the aid. But this policy made little difference to Hikmatyar as he continued to receive aid from Saudi Arabia. He also got funds from Libya and Iraq.³⁷

Losing Leverage on Allies

During all this period, the US policymakers repeatedly attempted to make a cooperative relationship with the Soviets on Afghan issue. Both parties started a dialogue and suggested to form a regime without foreign military presence and aid. A cease-fire and creation of a new government through free and fair election was also suggested. The Bush administration agreed on these suggestions as it gave up the idea of military victory. The discussion led both countries to a transitional settlement and they endorsed the UN five-point plan. But implementation of such a proposal was very difficult and cooperation was a far cry among different factions. The situation was different from that of the Geneva Accord.

During the Cold War, hostility and mistrust were based on genuine conflict of interest between the superpowers

36 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hunger threatens millions of poor Afghans," 9 June 2000.

37 Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, p. 297.

while in changed position, both powers were pursuing a policy of common interest for ending war in Afghanistan and formulation of a new and more legitimate as well as representative government. But in existing situation, they were not in the position to implement this plan like 1988. The passing years widened the gap and both powers had less leverage on the actors involved in this dilemma. A successful transitional set up required cooperation among the superpowers, i.e., Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Some of them had no relation or rivalry with each other as the USSR and Saudi Arabia, the US and Iran. In addition to these parties, numerous political actors of Afghanistan were showing their power. It was a multilateral trans-national cooperation problem. One method for solving this issue was the role of hegemonic actors (the US and the USSR) for taking responsibility of setting the small actors. But in the changed position, this method was not applicable. It was the Cold War, which maintained hegemony of both superpowers but now their allies and clients were not under their control and the problem remained unsolved. The efforts for sidelining the extremists including Najibullah, Hikmatyar and Sayyaf failed due to rigidity of the behaviour of involved groups.³⁸

The US-Soviet talks on Afghanistan were stalemated. American Congress began to consider the reduction of aid in 1990. It allotted only \$ 280 million and other 60 percent funds were provided by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Saddam Hussain of Iraq also provided money before his attack on Kuwait.³⁹ The Soviet Union objected the American aid and asked for implementation of "negative symmetry" but the US was not in the position to halt the aid unilaterally as other powers were paying major portion of the aid. The US had the logistic facility of organizing and carrying out this massive aid programme to the concerned parties. As for as assurance about the aid of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan was concerned, the US argued to the Soviets that domestic politics of both

38 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, p. 96.

39 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, p. 38.

countries prevented them from halting aid to the Mujahideen. The CIA opposed this policy and American Congress reduced the budget and ultimately cut it off in 1991 as the Bush administration wanted to get Afghanistan off the US-Soviet agenda. On the other hand, the Soviets were least interested in the Afghan issue and were preoccupied with their domestic problems. The hardliners in Moscow were increasing their pressure against Gorbachev's policies.

Disintegration of the Soviet Union

Gorbachev's policies brought reforms throughout the 'Communist World' but he was little honoured at home despite winning the award of Nobel Peace Prize. He was disposed of in a *coup* led by the conservatives. The situation became worst after his fall and Baltic States immediately declared and achieved their independence and Moscow could not resist. In September 1991, Moscow made an agreement with the US Secretary of State on negative symmetry. It was decided that both governments would stop arms deliveries to Afghanistan by January 1992. It also called for a cease-fire and a cut off of weapons deliveries from all other sources and suggested to remove major weapons; particularly scud and stinger missiles. Soviet military deliveries ended in December 15 and the Soviet Union was dissolved fifteen days later on December 31, 1991. The Soviet Union officially ceased to exist and succeeded by a loosely organized Commonwealth of Independent States (CISs). Now the Cold War was surely over and the United States became the sole superpower on the globe. It triumphed economically, ideologically and politically on the world scene. But the end of the Cold War could not end the rivalries among the nations of the world, which were renewed by the Gulf War of 1990-91.

The Gulf War and Afghanistan

The cooperative trends that had began between the US and Russia began to evaporate after passing some time. The US revived its hegemonic control over its Cold War allies, especially Saudi-Arabia, the country most relevant to Afghanistan. The US had undertaken extensive obligation to

defend Saudi Arabia from external aggression. The protection of Saudi Kingdom from possible Iraqi attack brought deployment of American troops in August 1990. A group of Afghan Mujahideen was also sent to Saudi Arabia to join hands with the US despite opposition from radical elements like Hikmatyar and others.

Pakistan was deeply resentful on American decision about termination of aid. The Bush administration refused to certify Pakistan's non-nuclear status, while India and Israel were still enjoying under the umbrella of American favour. This decision was due to decline in Pakistan's strategic importance. The American favor and aid continued for the Afghan cause. The reduction in chill of the Cold War and cooperative policies of the superpowers towards each other reduced the role of front-line state, which lost its significance. The CIA started direct supply of aid to major commanders of Mujahideen and provided them radio communication equipments to pass their messages in code words inside Afghanistan without going through Pakistan. The US appointed Peter Thomson as a special envoy to Afghan resistance who reported directly without involving American embassy in Islamabad.⁴⁰ The major part of American funding for ministries of AIG was halted in 1991, which had no strategic significance for US interests in this changed scenario. (After Gulf War, with the approval of President Bush, the CIA transferred captured Iraqi weapons of \$30 million worth to the Mujahideen).

Changed Policy of Communist Regime

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US terminated all types of aid to the Mujahideen by applying the 'negative symmetry' along with the Russians who were no more in the position to assist Kabul regime. The US adopted this policy because of its assumption that negotiation would lead to a political settlement. The Mujahideen became involved in smuggling and drug-trade for fueling their fighting as they were not receiving American aid under

40 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, p. 96.

'negative symmetry.' The halt of aid from the Soviet Union shifted the ideology of Kabul regime away from the Soviet-inspired socialist model of modernization to more traditional way of politics. Najeebullah changed the name of country back to Republic of Afghanistan and PDPA was renamed as "Watan Party." He also tried to adopt Islamic ways in his policies and politics.⁴¹

In 1991, the concerned parties adopted policy of political solution after losing thousand more lives and shedding billion of dollars in Afghanistan. The dissolution of the Soviet Union transformed the regional significance of Afghanistan. Both superpowers devised a plan exercising their hegemonic corporation under the aegis of the UN. The United States asked the UN Secretary General to use his good office to promote and sponsor interim government. It also stressed to use his pressure for implementation of the plan for the said government. Disappearing of the USSR from the globe enabled the US to disengage from the area, which had no longer strategic value for it. The cooperation between super powers on Afghanistan became a far cry.

The UN Secretary General tried to secure cooperation from the concerned parties through dialogue and shuttle diplomacy. All parties assured him of their cooperation for a political settlement. The UN succeeded in removing the last hurdle by getting a promise from Russia that Najibullah would not be a part of transitional arrangement.⁴² American intention was to marginalize both Najibullah and Hikmatyar and to exclude their role from the future government. Hikmatyar was not invited to Moscow meeting that comprised other Peshawar-based groups. In this meeting, Russia promised to withdraw its remaining military advisers from Kabul regime and end the supply of fuel to military operations. The weapon supply was already halted under 'negative symmetry.'

41 Bradsher, *Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention*, p. 340.

42 Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, p. 120.

Fall of Kabul Regime

The Mujahideen promised to expedite the release of Soviet prisoners of war. In January 1992, the new Secretary General of the UN, Boutros Ghali suggested Afghan public to submit a list of candidates in his office for an Afghan gathering (Ijlas). The purpose of this gathering was to decide an interim government and the holding of election. The Mujahideen rejected this proposal as usual. Najeebullah offered to hand over power to Zahir Shah instead of fragmented resistance that had not been able to defeat him and offered no alternative or united regime. Not a single group submitted its list to the UN.⁴³

By March 1992, the US put intense pressure on Benon Seiven; special envoy of the UN Secretary General, to work for the removal of Najibullah. The US assumed that his absence would be helpful in establishing an interim government. Under the UN pressure, Najibullah announced his resignation in March 1992 through TV and Radio in favour of the interim government. But the Kabul regime collapsed on April 16, 1992 with the forced resignation of Najibullah who found asylum in the UN office. His own commander Abdul Rashid Dostam defected from the PDPA and allied himself with Mujahideen's commander Ahmad Shah Masoud who had already been controlling much of the Eastern Afghanistan.

The fall of Najibullah created a vacuum of power in Kabul into which regional and ethnic coalition rushed. These groups failed to agree on a common political settlement. The pursuit of these objectives even in the normal political condition of domestic state would be a difficult process because it requires institutions, traditions, compromises and experience of government. But Mujahideen groups had not prepared themselves to

43 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, p. 127.

take over power in Kabul with the help of power sharing agreement or other arrangements. In this connection, the US did not bother to provide any guidance or arrangement for peaceful formulation of government and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

UN Efforts to Settle the Afghan Quagmire

After the fall of the regime, Mujahideen groups could not agree on a common political platform due to their different ethnic origins and different sources of foreign supporters. Their income from drug-trade and local taxes had reduced their dependency on foreign aid. This halt of aid deprived Washington of leverage over Peshawar-based parties and the ISI.

Before the fall of Kabul regime, the UN put together a new plan for the government consisting of all the major factions. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi was appointed its president while Masoud and Hikmatyar were appointed as defense minister and prime minister respectively. These arrangements were made in Peshawar Accord. An Islamic council was installed for two months with Mojaddedi as its president. After this period, Rabbani was to become president for four months to form a transitional arrangement through a *Shoora* for a period of eighteen months. Mujaddedi abided by the Accord but Rabbani refused to yield power on expiry of his term. He managed to convene a *Shoora* of 1335 members of his own choice but other parties boycotted it and the people were divided over this setup. After this, another agreement was signed in Islamabad in March 7, 1993 to formulate a government but this plan was not implemented too.⁴⁴

These leaders of interim government received instructions from the UN to fly in a UN plane to Kabul, and Najib would transfer power to them at airport and

44 Raees, *War without Winners*, p. 222.

leave for exile in India on the same plane. Ignoring the proposed plan, Mujahideen leaders reached Kabul and failed the UN attempt regarding transfer of power. Hikmatyar never entered the capital to form a cabinet in consultation with the president and remained encamped on the hills from where he shelled the city and the troops of his 'president' Rabbani. Kabul that had largely escaped destruction during the Soviet invasion because of its many lines of defence was badly devastated over the next three years at the hands of its own so called liberator.

After the failure of UN plan, American special envoy to the Mujahideen, Peter Thomas dismissed this plan by calling it a collection of principles instead of a plan.⁴⁵ The US reduced its interest in the changed situation as Afghanistan was no more important strategically. It suggested adding Afghanistan to the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) that was denied import-export licenses for weapons and defence-related articles and services to prevent the arms flow to Afghanistan. It also encouraged the other states to take various measures to stop the arms supply to Afghanistan.⁴⁶ The US left the task of restoring peace in Afghanistan to the United Nations. Benon Sevan peace plan of 1991 was sabotaged. It was analyzed by UN officials that he focused too much on unrepresentative party leaders rather than adopting strategy of Cordovez to mobilize broad political forces including the old regime representatives and former king. Despite his failure to win the US favour, this plan had positive proposals to bring out the creation of an interim government through an intra Afghan dialogue to work

45 Najam Rafique, "Afghanistan: US Politics in Context", *Strategic Perspective*, Vol.4, Nos. 1&2, spring-summer 1996, p. 80.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

on a five-point agenda for a political settlement including cease-fire, broad-based government, a transnational mechanism through free and fair election and an agreement to end the aid to all Afghan groups.

Mahmood Mestiri succeeded Benon Sevan due to American criticism for his failure in solving Afghan issue. Mahmood Mestiri met with a wide range of Afghan personalities with the same proposals. He completed his visit on September 1994 but failed to convene a joint meeting of the warring factions. The reason for the failure of plan was attitude of the rival leaders. Rivalries among the leaders were exacerbated by the fact that most leaders had been either cultivated or adopted in one form or another by rival international patrons of the resistance. The extremist Hizbi-i-Islami of Hikmatyar was supported by the ISI. He cut a deal with Uzbek leader Dostam on January 1994. Dostam once again betrayed his former allies to join with what he hoped would be the winning side in future. This odd couple of the Mujahid and Communist general failed to bring down Rabbani's government and fighting inside and around Kabul intensified. Rabbani labelled Hikmatyar a dangerous terrorist who should be expelled from Afghanistan.⁴⁷ The negotiation related to UN plan continued but Mahmood Mestiri did not enjoy sufficient support of those groups who could solve the conflict. The UN envoy failed to contact the various factions of the Afghans due to lack of their availability. Despite this hurdle, he contacted exiled personalities including Zahir Shah and representatives of the refugees. Mestiri allied the mission with a group of moderate Afghans including relatives of Zahir Shah. He made an Advisory Council which pressurized Rabbani to hand over power to a

47 Amera Saeed, "Afghanistan: Past, Present and Future. Peshawar Accord and After", *Journal of Regional Studies*, autumn 1997.

Council that would form a Loya Girga for establishment of a future government. President Rabbani, Hikmatyar and other leaders accepted this UN proposal in principle.⁴⁸ Mestiri and his team continued to work on this plan but a new force, the Taliban literally religious students appeared on the horizon of Afghanistan. The appearance of the Taliban in the second half of the 1994 and their successes against experienced warlords added a new chapter to the Afghan dilemma.

Conclusion

After the Soviet withdrawal, all the involved parties were responsible for the failure of political setup in Afghanistan with less or more role. All interested powerful players wanted win-win position except the poor Afghan people. With the fall of one superpower, the other was in the position to make an interim arrangement leading to elections for a permanent government. But it engaged in proxy war with the Soviet Union for power and ideological conquest and objective was only to humiliate the Soviets and take revenge of Vietnam. It ignored the devastation of Afghanistan, which got embroiled in internal struggle lacking political consensus and legitimacy for a government. From April 1988 to 1992, more than twenty thousand lives lost due to fratricidal struggle of the Afghans. The peace and unity of the country was disappeared and even different zones emerged with a tussle between the Mujahideen and Soviet-backed regime for occupation of power, which worsened the situation. The US emerged as the major beneficiary and the Soviets got nothing from Afghanistan except disgrace in the country and the world. The post-war arrangement was not priority of the US and the plans for formation of a government failed because of little attention of Washington to the nature of

48 Rubin, *The Search of Peace in Afghanistan*, pp. 137-38.

government before or after the withdrawal. After fulfilling its agenda, the official role was given to the UN for formation of an interim government and return of refugees. The Afghan refugees were not only suffering themselves but also burdening the economy of neighbouring countries, i.e., Pakistan and Iran. It also affected internal social and economic position and brought drug and *Kalashnikov* culture. The interim government was not discussed in final round of the Geneva Accord of 1988 and vague statement of Cordovez was not sufficient to form a broad-based Afghan government. Furthermore, UN's role was nothing without American support but it refused to play even the role of a mediator. The Mujahideen showed rigidity towards Cordovez's proposal of a coalition government and even ruled out any dialogue with PDPA or role for former King Zahir Shah. The Mujahideen were not equipped, trained or prepared for the war with conventional forces. It was wrong assessment on the American part that fighting in Afghanistan would continue until there was external involvement ignoring its own role as the biggest supplier of arms and funds in fuelling the proxy war in the unfortunate land. It began to criticize the interference and involvement of external world in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Its propaganda was just to keep it away from the Afghan quagmire in the absence of its own interests. Pakistan wanted to end civil war and restoration of Afghan unity and a government of Mujahideen. To achieve this goal, President Zia-ul-Haq attempted to delay the Geneva Accord till the formation of a transitional government but the US strongly opposed his last minutes' effort and Accord did not include any form of interim set-up. The divergence of interests reduced the leverage of Islamabad on Washington. No doubt Pakistan required a pro-Pakistani government to get 'strategic depth'

against India but at the same time it wanted a stable Afghanistan. The US policy towards the Third World has always been serving its own interests with a touch of domination.