

## ***Pakistan's Afghan Policy (1979–1992)***

**Rashid Ahmad Siddiqui\***

The direct Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 posed a serious threat to Pakistan's security. Feelings were generated in Pakistan at the masses level as well as among the decision-makers that the country's very existence as a sovereign territorial entity was at stake. A direct military threat from a superpower that had reached its borders was first of its kind confronted by Pakistan since its creation in 1947. The present paper aims at analyzing Pakistan's policies to meet the challenges of these new developments across its North-Western borders. It will focus on the period starting from the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 up to the ouster of the Soviet-sponsored regime of Dr. Najibullah in 1992 by the Mujahideen. Two important aspects of Pakistan's Afghan policy during the said period would be dealt with in this study. First we will analyze the dynamics of the decision-making structure of Pakistan's Afghan policy and the extent of various internal and external influences on it. Then we will concentrate on the nature and composition of the actual policies and strategies pursued by Pakistan to achieve its objectives vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

Since its creation Pakistan has always looked towards other Muslim countries as its natural allies in its struggle for survival against its more powerful adversary i.e. India. The concept of *Ummah* deep-rooted in its national ideology has been an important factor in shaping its foreign policies.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan had special

---

\* Assistant Professor, Islamabad College for Boys, G-6/3, Islamabad.

1 Agha Shahi, *Pakistan's Security and Foreign Policy* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1988), p. 296.

expectations of help from its Muslim neighbour Afghanistan in its struggle vis-à-vis India. It was due to the fact that Afghanistan had been the most important part of the history of the Muslims of South Asia and enjoyed strong cultural, linguistic and ethnic affinities with the people of Pakistan. But unfortunately, Pakistan, after its creation, had a very painful start of its relations with Afghanistan. Pakistan's problems with Afghanistan were rooted in the latter's ambitions in respect of those areas of Pakistan which were, and still are, ethnically inhabited by the Pukhtoos. Since its creation the Afghan state had been relying for its legitimacy on the Pukhtoon domination of other ethnic groups. The Pukhtoon nationalism has been the very foundation of the Afghan state. Afghanistan refused to accept Durand Line as its international border with Pakistan after the departure of the British colonial power from South Asia. The Afghan government embarked upon the policy of wooing the Pukhtoon population of NWFP and Baluchistan and started a propaganda campaign to influence them to reunite with their 'motherland' (Afghanistan). It was aimed at adding to the numerical strength of its Pukhtoon population to tilt the balance more in favour of the dominant Pukhtoon ethnic group in a greater Afghanistan. On the other hand, it served to increase the sympathies among its Pukhtoon tribes for the ruling elite which mainly belonged to the Durrani Pukhtoos thus enhancing its legitimacy. When the propaganda of reunion with the 'motherland' failed to create enough enthusiasm among the Pukhtoos of Pakistan, the Afghan government shifted its stance and raised the slogan of a totally independent state for the Pukhtoos of Pakistan under the name of 'Pukhtoonistan'. However, even this stunt could not be made popular and the Afghan government retreated again and started playing the role of the champion of the rights of the Pukhtoos and started campaigning for an autonomous 'Pukhtoonistan' within a loose Union of Pakistan.

Taking full advantage of the strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, India managed to develop close links with the Afghan government. On the other hand, USA's lukewarm response to the Afghan request for military and economic aid pushed Afghanistan towards the USSR's sphere of influence. Pakistan's pro-West foreign policy after its creation had already

resulted in the deterioration of its relations with USSR. Consequently, there developed in Pakistan a perception of a Delhi-Kabul-Moscow nexus being active in exacerbating troubles for it. In response to Afghanistan's open confrontation, Pakistan, however, always refrained from pursuing an aggressive policy towards her. Its passive and accommodating attitude towards Afghanistan, in spite of the latter's hostility, was due to the fact that the general Muslim Afghan public had a positive image of Pakistan and a tit for tat response from Pakistan could have led to a general alienation of the Afghans creating more problems for her. Tensions between the two countries remained quite high especially during the premiership of Sardar Daud, a cousin of Zahir Shah, from 1953 to 1963. With the removal of Daud in 1963 there began a steady process of improvement of relations between the two countries. The downfall of Daud was largely precipitated by the royal family's disenchantment with the Pukhtoonistan issue and its impact on Afghan society and economy<sup>2</sup> and with this developed a desire in the Kabul authorities to normalize and improve their relations with Pakistan and Iran. The Kabul government officially sided with Pakistan during the 1965 war and remained neutral during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan conflict. Hopes were high for a real breakthrough in relations between the two countries, but the July 1973 coup by Sardar Daud put the matters back to square one.

With the return of Daud on the Afghan scene there started a renewed tension between the two countries. There was a sudden increase in the propaganda campaign against Pakistan on the issues of 'Pukhtoonistan' and non-recognition of the Durand Line. The issue of 'Pukhtoonistan' was raised by the Afghan President in his address at the OIC summit at Lahore in 1974. Pakistan which was already struggling to cope with the problems arising out of its dismemberment in 1971 was put to a lot of discomfort with this obstinate attitude of the Afghan regime.

During the 70s, a new element entered into the Afghan politics. This was the increased political influence of the urban, educated middle class divided on various ideological and ethnic lines. It consisted of two major ideological groups namely the so-called

---

2 G. Marvin Weinbaum, *Pakistan and Afghanistan: Resistance and Reconstruction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p.3.

'Islamists' and the 'Communists'. Daud's coup was widely supported by the leftist/communist elements of the Afghan society. However, after the coup, his domestic agenda met with strong opposition from various sectors of the Afghan society, especially the 'Islamists'. Daud also developed differences with some of the leftist factions who had supported him earlier. With the increasing popularity, especially that of the Islamist opposition to the Daud regime, Pakistan saw in it a unique opportunity to use them as leverage to force the Kabul regime to change its policies towards Pakistan. Moreover, by aiding the Islamist elements which included Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Masood and Yunus Khalis etc., Pakistan hoped to whittle down the nationalist tendencies among the Pukhtoons. Military training and allied support for the armed struggle against Daud was provided by the then Bhutto government to these elements whose aim was to overthrow the Daud regime.<sup>3</sup> According to one estimate about 5000 Afghan dissidents were trained in Pakistani camps between 1973 and 1977.<sup>4</sup> A number of incursions and uprisings were planned, the most notable of which occurred in the Punjsher Valley in 1975.<sup>5</sup> The pinch of the Pakistan's response was clearly felt by Daud and there emerged clear signs of change in his approach towards Pak-Afghanistan relations. Facilitating this change was also the growing disillusionment of Daud with his communist backers and the USSR. Coupled with it was the wooing of Afghanistan by Iran with attractive economic incentives and the convergence of Pak-Iran interest in pulling back her from the Soviet sphere of influence. An agreement on 'Pukhtoonistan' became close to completion in early 1977 and the Afghan president was prepared to accord a *de facto* recognition to the Durand Line as the international boundary.<sup>6</sup> The military coup in Pakistan led by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 also did not affect the trend of rapprochement

---

3 Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan: The Fragmentation of a State and Chances for Reconstruction* (US Institute of Peace: 1989), p.8.

4 Giradet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p.116.

5 For Pakistan's involvement in these uprisings, see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.86-93.

6 Weinbaum, *op.cit.*, p.6.

between the two countries as was evidenced by Daud's farewell remarks to his host General Zia while shaking hands with him at the conclusion of his successful visit to Pakistan in March 1978, to the effect that

This is the hand of a Pukhtoon promising to establish friendly relations with Pakistan on a firm and durable basis. In the past thirty years we have taken a stance on the issue. Give me a little time to mould public opinion in the country to affect change. I intend to convene a 'Loya Jirga' to take a decision to normalize relations with Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

Daud now started purging the communists out of the power structure to reduce their influence. Seeing the tide turning against them, the Afghan communist forces with the active support of the USSR planned a successful military coup in April 1978 popularly known as the Saur Revolution. Daud was killed and Noor Muhammad Tarakai assumed power. These events again stalled the positive trend in Pak-Afghan relations as was done by the military coup of Daud in 1973. During the communist rule that lasted till the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained almost strained. The new Kabul regime had a factious nature, the personal attitudes and policies of various leaders, towards Pakistan, varied. For instance, Tarakai was a bit compromising but Hafizullah Amin, a Pukhtoon 'Khalq' leader presented a strong anti-Pakistan posture. But after the direct assumption of power in his own hands by ousting Tarakai in a later coup, he, too, seemed willing to negotiate a deal with Pakistan mainly due to the rising tide of the Islamist resistance and the Soviet distrust of him. According to Agha Shahi, Hafizullah had renewed the invitation to Zia-ul-Haq for visit to Kabul to clear the way for a dialogue with him. It was fixed for 22 December, but had to be postponed at the very last minute because Kabul airport was snowbound and December 29 was decided as the new date.<sup>8</sup> However, before Pakistan could do anything for Amin, the situation changed altogether when the Soviets ousted him by sending their military forces into Afghanistan, took the direct control of the country on December 25, 1979 and placed Babrak Karmal as the titular head of the new Kabul administration.

---

7 K. M. Arif, *Working With Zia* (Karachi: Oxford University Press 1995), p.303.

8 Agha Shahi, *op cit.*, p.5.

The motives behind the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have long been debated by the scholars of international relations and the sovietologists. Bypassing this debate, one thing is certain that the Soviet interests in Afghanistan and the region, whether short-term or long-term, were threatened, in its eyes, to the extent that direct military intervention was considered as the most appropriate response to the situation. Moreover, the Soviets interpreted the regional and international environment as facilitating the military option. In Pakistan the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was perceived as the biggest threat to its existence probably even bigger than the traditional Indian threat. Although the threat was from a superpower, Pakistan did not reconcile to the Soviet intervention and refused to enter into an 'understanding' as 'requested'.<sup>9</sup>

The Soviets wished Pakistan to play the same role as was done by the Afghan government to crush the 'Basmachi' movement of Central Asia. Instead, Pakistan decided to support the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation. Pakistan had to involve itself in the Afghan quagmire due to a number of reasons and its Afghan policy was influenced by a lot many factors. First, Pakistan's historical experiences with the USSR had been quite painful. Pakistan always saw her willing to aid and arm India, a permanent source of security threat to Pakistan since its creation. Pakistan saw the USSR as an ally of India during the war of 1971 leading to the dismemberment of Pakistan. With the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan feared it could face a coordinated military attack both from the Northwest and the Southeast. Second, a direct military support by the Soviets to the communist-cum-nationalist movements of NWFP and Baluchistan could create serious problems initiating yet another phase of its dismemberment. Third, a large influx of refugees was bound to create economic, political and social problems in the Pakistani society. An early return of the refugees was another rationale for Pakistan's deep involvement in the Afghan crisis. Fourth, Pakistan's support to the Afghans was based on humanitarian and religious consideration also. Afghans being Muslims, the feelings of Islamic brotherhood also played a role in shaping and legitimizing Pakistan's Afghan policy. Fifth,

---

9 *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

the personal imperatives of the then regime of Pakistan cannot be ignored also. A non-elected military regime saw in it a source of legitimizing and perpetuating its rule. An active support to the Afghans not only pacified a growing resentment to General Zia's rule but also created a support base for it among certain religious circles. Sixth, the ideological orientation of the regime was yet another factor influencing the Afghan policy. Zia, who always portrayed himself as a champion of Islam and Muslim causes around the world could not sideline itself from supporting the Afghan resistance. Seventh, the religious parties of Pakistan had always maintained trans-national relations with their counterparts in Afghanistan. Helping the Afghan resistance on the basis of Islamic ethos put these parties, specifically Jama'at-i-Islami, strongly in favour of Afghan resistance which was accepted a justified armed struggle (*Jihad*) according to the Islamic doctrines. The influence of these parties, especially in mobilizing the mass support for the Afghan cause had an important impact on the formulation of the Afghan policy. The tolerance of the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq by the Jama'at-i which was earlier a die-hard opponent of the Ayub martial law was justified by its leaders on these grounds. Eighth, by supporting the Afghan resistance and refugees, especially the Islamist parties, Pakistan hoped for a better relationship between Islamabad and any future Mujahideen-dominated government after the expulsion of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, a long sought-after dream of Pakistan. The idea of 'Pukhtoonistan' being considered against the Islamic principles of Muslim solidarity by the Afghan Islamist parties, Pakistan hoped the burial of the 'Pukhtoonistan' slogan in the future Pak-Afghan relations.

The Afghan situation being a national security issue posing an external military threat was naturally considered to be lying largely in the domain of the Pakistan's defence forces. As the situation arose at a time when the military itself was in power in the country under Gen. Zia ul Haq's martial law, there was no question of a division between the civilian political control of the Afghan policy and military's role as being one of the tools of its implementation. Thus, military itself being at the helm of affairs had the overwhelmingly say in the formulation of the Afghan policy with

the civil bureaucracy playing only the second fiddle. This, however, does not mean that the national Afghan policy was not enjoying the popular support. There was a general consensus among the masses, with the exception of certain leftist elements, that the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion was justified and it must be supported as much as possible. Similarly the Afghan refugees were also accepted in keeping with the principles of Islamic brotherhood. The acceptance of foreign assistance to cope up with this security threat and humanitarian disaster was also hailed by the masses. One public opinion survey showed that 60% were in favour while only 10% were against these military and economic agreements.<sup>10</sup> However, with the return to the democratic order after the death of General Zia, the influence and control of the civilian governments over the formulation of the country's Afghan policy gradually increased.

Pakistan from the day one adopted a two-track approach towards resolving the Afghan question, i.e. the diplomatic and the military track. Pakistan while expressing the 'greatest concern' about the Soviet attack on Afghanistan and calling for the immediate withdrawal of the Soviet forces did not close its diplomatic channels with the USSR. It refused to recognize the Soviet-installed new Kabul regime but at the same time, hoped that the problem could be resolved through negotiations with the Soviets. Pursuing the military track, international assistance in the form of weapons was accepted from varied sources including the USA, Arab countries notably Saudi Arabia, China, and the West European countries. However it was much before the start of the international assistance that Pakistan had started aiding and arming the Afghan resistance. The formal US economic and military assistance program started about one and half years after the Soviet invasion. However, Pakistan tried as much as possible to win over allies to its struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as it never wanted the war to be seen as solely its responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

---

10 Ijaz S. Gilani, *The Four R's of Afghanistan* (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion, 1984), p.23.

11 Robert G. Wirsing, "Pakistan and the War in Afghanistan", *Asian Affairs*, Vol.14, No.2, Summer, 1987, p.63.

While the diplomatic channels were kept open, the task of implementing the strategies of the military track was assigned to the military intelligence service, i.e. the ISI. It was largely a covert military operation and Pakistan never publicly accepted that it was aiding and arming the Afghan resistance and was acting as a base camp for it. Charged with the responsibility of buttressing the Afghan resistance, the ISI played an important role, alongside the Mujahideen groups, in planning and implementing of the guerrilla activities inside Afghanistan. With the passage of time, the ISI came to acquire an impressive understanding of the Afghan affairs. As the Mujahideen groups had developed an inflexible stance towards the negotiations, the ISI performed two additional tasks. The first one being to satisfy and remove the misgivings of the Mujahideen leadership regarding the progress on the diplomatic track, while the second one related to conveying to the leadership of Pakistan the views of the Mujahideen leadership regarding various policy matters. In this way it played the role of an intermediary between the Mujahideen and the Afghan policy decision-makers of Pakistan. The success of the ISI in controlling and manipulating the internal politics of the Mujahideen groups can be gauged from the fact that it was able to coalesce the diverse and numerous Mujahideen groups into a somewhat manageable seven parties alliance of the Afghan Mujahideen based at Peshawar. It helped create the much desired unity among the Mujahideen ranks to boost their international image. Being the largest pool of important information regarding Afghan affairs and of men experienced with the internal Mujahideen politics, the recommendations of the ISI had an important value for the decision-makers on Afghan policy. However, some writers, foreign as well as local, have exaggerated the role and influence of ISI in the formulation of the Afghan policy and have accused it of following its own agenda independent of the national policies.<sup>12</sup> All that does not seem to be justified due to peculiar nature of the operation and the role assigned to the organization in this regard.

---

12 For example, see Weinbaum, *op.cit.* p.35, also Ahmed Rashid, *The Herald* (Karachi), March 1990, and John Kaniyalil, "ISI—The Master Manipulator", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XVI, No. 8, Nov. 1993, p.987.

On the diplomatic front Pakistan adopted a four-point stance towards the solution of the Afghan problem on the basis of the four principles of the OIC resolution of May 1980. These included: One, preservation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and non-aligned character of Afghanistan; Second, right of the Afghan people to determine their own form of government and to choose freely their own economic, political and social system, Third, immediate withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan, and Fourth, creation of necessary conditions to enable the Afghan refugees to return voluntarily to their homes in honour and safety. Initially, though, Pakistan did not appear very hopeful. In an interview, Zia-ul-Haq said, "Pakistan must adjust itself to the Soviet presence in the area as a political fact of life. You cannot live in the sea and create enmities with the whales."<sup>13</sup> But as the resistance grew stronger, Pakistan's hopes that the Soviets could be bogged down in Afghanistan increased. In the meantime, there emerged in Pakistan an ambition for the formation of a pro-Pakistan government at Kabul as a natural reward for its highly risky and time-tested support to the Afghan people in their struggle against the foreign occupation of a 'godless creed'. This pro-Pakistan government was expected to discard the 'Pukhtoonistan' issue, formally accept the Durand Line and act as an ally vis-à-vis India.

One important aspect of the Pakistan's strategy was to keep the initiative in all aspects of the Afghan crisis in its own hands. For this purpose, it prevented the formation of any government in exile by the Afghan resistance till the time that the Soviet withdrawal became imminent. Such a government would have become a state within state posing serious political problems and destabilization in the country. It could have also acted independently in international politics taking the initiative in its own hands. Another important calculation for Pakistan regarding the guerrilla activities inside Afghanistan was maintaining control over the resistance and supply of weapons and thus keeping it within such a limit that it did not risk provoking a violent Soviet reaction. Although there were consistent airspace violations,

---

13 Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.93.

coupled with the border area bombardments, yet these were of the manageable magnitude

The organization of the Afghan resistance which was highly divided in countless groups was a crucial step forward. Pakistan formally accepted the seven parties of Mujahideen that were based at Peshawar. Four of these were commonly regarded as the Islamists and three as traditionalist, on the basis of their ideological orientations. The parties in each group were further divided on ideological, ethnic and personal lines.<sup>14</sup> A number of factors were involved in Pakistan's decision to formally accept these particular parties. The most important of these was that Pakistan preferred to recognize those parties with which it had enjoyed relations much before the Soviet invasion as it considered those parties and personalities more trustworthy to deal with. The other criterion included the military effectiveness and strength of a party. The ideological affinities have been overestimated although these did play a role, especially through the influence of Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup> Pakistan's preference for the Pukhtoon-dominated parties was not also without rationale. One reason was that there was a clear majority of the Pukhtoos among the resistance forces. The other reason, as explained earlier also, was the desire to contain the Pukhtoon nationalism. It was the Pukhtoon nationalism which had always created problems for Pakistan. Thus, the Pukhtoon-dominated parties based on Islamist ideology were the most attractive option for Pakistan in this regard. By strengthening such parties which were opposed to the ideas of Pukhtoon nationalism, Pakistan wished to reduce the significance of the 'Pukhtoonistan' issue. The fact that Afghanistan had always been governed by Pukhtoos and they formed the majority community of Afghanistan was another reason for Pakistan's preference for Pukhtoon-dominated parties. Keeping them out of power corridors in Afghanistan could have resulted in a backlash in the form of an aggressive Pukhtoon nationalism that could have affected the

---

14 For more information on Afghan Mujahideen parties see Tahir Amin, *Afghanistan Crisis* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies 1982), pp.23-27.

15 Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, "Islamic Opposition to the Islamic State: The Jama'at-i-Islami, 1977-1988", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.25 (1993), p.268.

Pukhtoos of Pakistan also and could have created serious internal instability for this country. There has been a criticism regarding the special support of Pakistan to Hezb-i-Islami of Hekmatyar. Fingers have also been pointed at certain ideological affinities between the Hezb and certain officials of the ISI. These accusations seem to be exaggerated and have been denied by the ISI repeatedly on the grounds that the amount of aid was distributed solely on pragmatic grounds, namely the military effectiveness and the following of the parties.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the middle of the 80s, the Soviet cost of occupation began to increase. The Soviet army started demoralizing due to the rising tide of the Mujahideen's operations. The psychological defeat of the Soviets, coupled with the political changes at Moscow, compelled the Soviets to seriously think of a face-saving withdrawal and an acceptable solution of the Afghan problem. Afghanistan had become a 'bleeding wound' for them and the Soviets were now becoming more serious for a negotiated solution. Soon after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan had developed an interest in a negotiated political settlement of the crisis as a means of containing Soviet hostility and any of its further military adventures. On the contrary, the Soviet and Kabul governments' interest in talks stemmed from the desire to gain legitimacy for the communist government of Afghanistan and cessation of outside intervention. This interest in negotiations, though for different objectives, resulted in the series of talks at Geneva under the UN auspices.

Pakistan's stance on non-recognition of Kabul regime resulted in indirect talks with the Soviet-installed Kabul administration. The Afghan Mujahideen were not included in the process. It was mainly due to the total refusal of Kabul to sit with the Mujahideen and on the other hand, the lack of interest by the Mujahideen in any negotiation process. Pakistan did not insist too much primarily to break the deadlock. Moreover, it also helped Pakistan to keep the initiative in its own hands. An alternative to involve Mujahideen in the process was proposed and consistently emphasized by Pakistan, although not to the extent of breakup of

---

16 Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (Lahore: Jang Publishers, 1992).

the talks. This was Pakistan's stress on the need for discussion with the refugees for knowing their views on the conditions for their voluntary return. But this proposal was later withdrawn by Pakistan in 1987 in favour of the UN initiative, led by Mr. Cordovez, aimed at seeking Afghanistan's internal political settlement. All that did not mean that Pakistan was not interested in the internal aspect of the problem. The concession implicit in its agreement to drop self-determination from the agenda of the negotiations was just formalistic. It believed that Moscow would not discuss withdrawal without simultaneously showing willingness to accept replacement of Karmal by a broad-based government of national reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> It assumed that progress in the negotiations would elicit moves from Moscow to address and resolve the internal aspect, a situation that altogether reversed towards the conclusion of the Geneva Accords. The Soviets who had earlier linked the question of withdrawal with internal political settlement suddenly began to delink the issue after the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in 1987. Instead, the Soviet leader offered to withdraw within twelve months provided there was an agreement on cessation of military and financial assistance to the Mujahideen. Pakistan which had hoped that withdrawal would be coupled with the internal political settlement, now felt itself outmanoeuvred by the Americans and Soviets. Zia even perceived some sort of conspiracy hatched against Pakistan to deprive it of its vital security interests in Afghanistan. He said that the Soviet leader had delinked the issue of coalition government from the withdrawal a day after his meeting with Reagan and this was the result of a deal between the superpowers which sullied the reputation of his country.<sup>18</sup>

Pakistan now faced a serious dilemma, whether to go ahead with the negotiations or not. Pakistan had been claiming publicly that the Soviets were using the question of internal settlement for delaying their stay in Afghanistan. Pakistan had hoped that the desire to withdraw its forces would compel the Soviets to accommodate Pakistan's interests in the internal Afghan settlement. To sign the Accords without a settlement of the internal aspect of

---

17 Riaz, *op.cit.*, p.94.

18 Agha Shahi, *op.cit.*, p.138.

the crisis ran contrary to Pakistan's interests. However, due to a number of internal and external pressures, Pakistan had to go along with the Accords which were signed on 14 April 1988. On the domestic front, there was a split between Zia and the Prime Minister Junejo who was keen to sign the Accords in a hurry, mainly to take the credit for the negotiated settlement. Internationally also there was pressure, mainly from the USA, the most important source of military aid and other supplies for the Mujahideen, which forced Pakistan to accept the terms and conditions of the Accords.

The only change brought about by the Accords was the departure of the uniformed personnel of the Red Army. Although the Accords provided for 'non-intervention and non interference' but practically there was an accord on intervention and interference. The Soviet military and economic aid to its puppet regime in Kabul continued along with the services of thousands of 'experts' and 'advisors' in all fields including the Afghan army and intelligence services. On the other hand, failing to convince the Americans and the Soviets to delay the signing of the Accords until the internal political settlement of Afghanistan, Pakistan favoured the concept of 'positive symmetry', i.e. permitting continuation of supplies to both sides.<sup>19</sup> One assumption behind the acceptance of positive symmetry was that the Kabul regime would not survive after the departure of the Soviets despite their continued support; so to bring about the fall of Kabul regime aid must continue for the Mujahideen after the Soviet departure. Pakistan succeeded in winning the support of the Americans especially of the US Senate on the issue of symmetry. There was a unanimously-adopted Senate resolution of March 01,1988 expressing strong belief that the US government should not cease, suspend, diminish or otherwise restrict assistance to Afghan resistance until it was absolutely clear that the Soviets had terminated their military occupation and that the Mujahideen were well enough equipped to maintain their integrity during the transition period. Thus, outside the framework of the Accords, an understanding was reached on positive symmetry in the mutual transfer of letters by the guarantors, i.e. both the superpowers.

---

19 Riaz, *op.cit.* p.305.

The Geneva Accords brought to an end one nightmare of Pakistan, i.e. the presence of Soviet military forces on its borders and the threat posed by them. But the other problems for Pakistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan were still there. The situation for Pakistan had just returned to the pre-1979 period. The resurgence of the spectre of 'Pukhtoonistan' was haunting Pakistan and there was still a continued presence of a large number of refugees. The period following the Geneva Accords saw the emergence of new regional and international rivalries. At the global level the bipolar world started melting down and the USA emerged as the only superpower. The Soviet decision to withdraw brought a major change in the international perception of the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan's perception of the war and its security interests in Afghanistan war were now at variance with those of its major allies, particularly the USA and the West European countries. These countries now lost much of their interest in Afghanistan. The wave of anti-fundamentalism put additional pressures on Pakistan. It was now being criticized for supporting the so-called fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan. At the regional level, India and Iran emerged as the major rivals of Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan. Iran's interests in Afghanistan lay primarily in the containment of the US influence and the promotion of such a government there that would be sensitive to the Iranian interests in the region. Iran wanted to use Afghanistan as a bridge to extend its influence across central Asia especially on to Tajikistan, also a Persian-speaking country. To increase its influence in Afghanistan, it wanted a dominant role for the Shi'a Hazaras and Persian-speaking Tajik communities of Afghanistan. India emerged as the other strong contender of Pakistan for its influence in Afghanistan. It was due to its fears that in case an Islamic regime friendly to Pakistan took over in Kabul, it would seriously undermine its regional and international ambitions. Also this could give a boost to the freedom movement in Kashmir. In an interview, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi warned that India would be really upset if an Islamic government took over in Kabul.<sup>20</sup> For Pakistan, a pro-India government in Kabul could raise the same old traditional issues undermining its national security. Zain Noorani,

---

20 *The Frontier Post* (Peshawar), June 12, 1988.

the then foreign minister of Pakistan, strongly condemned India for flirting with Kabul and accused it of meddling in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup>

Having resolved the issue of symmetry, Pakistan was now ready to move forward on its foreign policy agenda regarding Afghanistan. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan did not bring about any major change in the basic structure of its two-pronged approach to the problem. Pakistan continued to support the international efforts especially those of the UNO and the OIC to bring about a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan. On the other hand, there was continued assistance to the Mujahideen to put military pressure for exacting favourable terms and conditions in any negotiated settlement if and when it happened. Arrangements had been made at Geneva for the continued role of the UNO for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, what was commonly referred to as the 'second track', a task initially assigned to Mr. Cordovez. Pakistan fully supported his efforts although she was not initially much enthusiastic about it. Like almost all the observers on Afghanistan, she also thought that the Kabul regime would not be able to survive following the Soviet withdrawal. Louis Dupree expected a short life for the PDPA regime and commented that the best hope for the leading PDPA cadres, such as Najibullah, would be to end up in the USSR.<sup>22</sup> Pakistan's continued support to the Mujahideen was also due to the fact that they had totally rejected any talks with the PDPA regime and had asked for the unconditional removal of that regime. They had vowed to fight till a complete 'Islamic' government had taken over at Kabul. In such a scenario, the political cost of annoying the Mujahideen and adopting a policy contrary to their wishes was very high. As mentioned earlier, Pakistan was also quite optimistic about Mujahideen's victory. Zia-ul-Haq hoped for a Mujahideen government in Kabul and he expressed this while addressing the concluding session of the International Conference on National Stability and Regional Security in South Asia.<sup>23</sup> In his last interview published on 13 August 1988, he said about the

---

21 *Ibid.*

22 Riaz, *op.cit.*, p.270.

23 *The Pakistan Times* (Islamabad), June 26, 1988

Cordovez mission that if he did not succeed then some other efforts would have to be made to bring in an interim government.<sup>24</sup>

On the diplomatic front to bridge up the differences and enhance the political image of the Mujahideen, Pakistan decided to help them form an interim government in exile. In the beginning of the Afghan *Jihad*, a disunited resistance facilitated Pakistan to keep initiative in its own hands. Later on, the need for a united structure increased due to the international credibility needs of the resistance and to facilitate military and economic assistance. Repeated attempts by Pakistan resulted in May 1985 in the formation of an alliance of seven parties called the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen (IUAM). To improve the bargaining position of the Mujahideen, Pakistan pushed forward the IUAM to form an Afghan Interim Government (AIG) on June 18, 1988. The ISI played an important role in the formation of this government. Louis Dupree referred to it as the ISI's "shotgun marriage arrangement."<sup>25</sup> All this had been arranged in the wake of the Cordovez's second track diplomacy that could not produce any results. It failed mainly due to the hard-line positions taken by the Kabul regime and the Mujahideen, lack of Pakistan's interest due to its euphoria of military victory and the differences among various Mujahideen groups.

Two events seriously undermined the effectiveness of the military pressure on the Kabul regime to produce desired results in the diplomatic efforts. One was the blowing up of the Ojhri Depot where arms and ammunition were dumped for the Mujahideen and the second was the death of Zia-ul-Haq in a mysterious crash of C-130 airplane. The tragedy of Ojhri Camp affected Pakistan's resolve in two ways. First, it brought the differences among the military and its civilian partner in power, i.e. the prime minister Junejo to the forefront. The event seriously undermined the prestige of the army and Junejo successfully used the public anger against the military. The confrontation ended up in the dissolution of the Junejo government and the National Assembly by Zia-ul-Haq. On the other hand, the opposition of MRD being led by the

---

24 *Ibid.*, August 13, 1988.

25 Amin Saikal and William Maley (eds.), *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.133.

PPP of Ms Benazir Bhutto became more vocal in criticizing the Afghan policy and the military's hold over power. It even criticized the Zia government for violating the Geneva Accords.<sup>26</sup> Thus 'the Afghan policy became politically charged and the national consensus that was built earlier was shattered.' The second impact of the event was more far-reaching. The blowing up of the camp placed high constraints on the supply of the logistics and arms to the Mujahideen, especially when the USA had already stopped the supply of arms until the completion of the Soviet withdrawal as agreed upon by the superpowers at Geneva. All this contributed to the lowering down of the military pressure especially during the withdrawal phase.

The second event, i.e. 'Zia's death gave a serious blow to those who were quite supportive and hopeful of the Mujahideen's military victory.' His death removed the most effective and powerful friend of the Afghan Mujahideen from the national scene and gave way to those people into the corridors of power who were not so enthusiastic about the Mujahideen victory. The elections of 1988 brought the PPP into power that had a secular outlook and had criticized Zia's Afghan policy. However, after coming into power, it did not change the basic two-pronged approach of the Afghan policy. It seems that Benazir's earlier criticism was just a political gimmick and she was pragmatic enough to follow the old route due to the realities that existed at home, in Afghanistan and in the region. Moreover, criticism of the strong opposition, weak parliamentary base and the strong influence of the Army and the ISI were the other factors that compelled her to continue with the earlier policies. It was not until the failure of the Jalalabad operation that she started putting her own stamp on Afghan policy.

In 1989, Pakistan helped the Mujahideen to create a more representative government this time in expectation of a quick Mujahideen victory after the Soviet withdrawal. Efforts were made for the representation of the Iran-based Shi'a parties. However, the differences between the Peshawar-based Sunni parties and the Iran-based Shi'a parties could not be resolved on the issues of the composition of government. Consequently, an AIG came into

---

26 *The Muslim* (Islamabad), June 8, 1988.

being in February 1989, without the participation of the Shi'a parties and seats were kept vacant for them in the Shura. But it administered a serious blow to the representative character of the new government. The AIG was also handicapped by the lack of effectiveness due to the internal divisions and rivalries of its component parties. Besides, it failed to enlist the support of some influential segments of the Afghan society especially the tribal elders, some important Mujahideen commanders, the still important Durrani tribe and the Afghan émigrés. The open rivalry of its two major components, Hekmatyar's Hezb and Rabbani's Jami'at also lowered its status. It became just a faction when both these parties publicly fell out due to the July 1989 Takhar incident.

After the formation of the AIG in February, 1989, Pakistan went ahead in helping it capture a base inside Afghanistan to boost its image and lay the foundation of its international recognition. The city of Jalalabad was chosen for this purpose due to its proximity with the Pakistani borders where the supply line could be maintained more easily. It was expected that following the proposed capture of Jalalabad and the shifting of the AIG headquarters to the liberated city, it would be able to formally lay claim to the Afghan seat in the forthcoming OIC conference of Foreign Ministers to be held in March 1989. The famous Jalalabad offensive started but it came to a standstill in April 1989 and finally ended in a fiasco giving rise to controversies about the decision for the Jalalabad offensive and its execution. Some of the Mujahideen commanders blamed the ISI and the Pak-US concerns for this ill-advised move.<sup>27</sup> There were also allegations both by the ISI and the Foreign Office towards each other on the planning of the move.<sup>28</sup> Marvin G. Weinbaum has quoted a story published in the *New York Times* that 'the plan to attach the city of Jalalabad was decided on March 5, two days before the operation was launched, at a meeting of foreign policy officials and the US ambassador Robert P. Oakley.'<sup>29</sup> Lack of coordination among the Mujahideen, suspicions of each other, problems in the supply line, tactical ill-planning and miscalculation of the resolve of the

---

27 Riaz, *op.cit.*, p.305.

28 Weinbaum, *op.cit.*, p.41.

29 *Ibid.*

defenders of the city were among the factors that contributed to the failure of the operation. 'In military terms, Mujahideen's lack of experience in waging pitched battles, Kabul's decisive edge in air power and massive Soviet supplies available to the Kabul army tilted the balance in Kabul's favour.' Another attempt later in September 1989 to capture the strategic border town of Khost also failed. General Tanai's coup attempt of March 6-7, 1990 was another attempt on the part of the Mujahideen and Pakistan to bring about the desired changes in Afghanistan through military means. Pakistan hoped for taking advantage of the internal rivalries of the Kabul regime. The fight continued in Kabul for a day or so but Najibullah succeeded in controlling the situation and General Tanai and his companion ended up in Pakistan.

From the mid-onward 1990, there started a thinking in Pakistan of giving more serious role to diplomacy in resolving the Afghan imbroglio. A number of factors contributed towards this change. The decision-makers of Pakistan seemed to be frustrated over the inability of the Mujahideen to defeat Najibullah government which was demonstrated by the failed campaigns of Jalalabad and Khost. As the war in Afghanistan did not seem to be ending in the near future, the international opinion was changing. Instead of having the manifestation of the Afghan struggle for their self-determination, it started looking more like a civil war wherein different Afghan groups were fighting for power. The West, mainly the USA, was now in no mood to sponsor the Afghan Mujahideen as now there was no threat of the Soviets. Moreover, due to the emergence of a wave of anti-fundamentalism in the West, the governments there started distancing themselves from the Mujahideen who were characterized as such, and instead began to encourage those groups in Afghanistan whom they considered to be moderates. To undermine the influence of the Peshawar-based parties, the USA started pressurizing Pakistan to deliver the arms and supplies directly to the commanders inside Afghanistan, a policy that was reversed later. Pakistan was now being accused of giving special support to the Islamist parties, particularly that of Hikmatyar as against the moderate ones. The USA, a major supporter of the Mujahideen now started emphasizing on Pakistan

to stop the military aid to the Mujahideen.<sup>30</sup> The US authorities made it clear to Pakistan that the American aid to Pakistan would be stopped if there was no progress towards a political settlement.<sup>31</sup> With the departure of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, other US interests in Pakistan and the region came to the forefront of its foreign policy agenda. These included the containment of the fundamentalist forces in the Muslim World and blocking Pakistan's quest for the nuclear weapons. The Pak-US relations were now moving back to the pre-1979 period when economic and military sanctions were reimposed on Pakistan. In the mid-1990, nuclear related sanctions were reimposed on Pakistan and the formal US aid package to Pakistan was suspended. All this put increased pressure on Pakistan's free manoeuvring regarding Afghan situation.

The position taken by the Afghan Islamist parties during the Gulf war that had started from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait alienated Saudi Arabia also which was an important supporter of the Mujahideen. Saudis now became more selective in their aid to the Mujahideen, favoured Ittehad-i-Islami of Sayyaf, a pro-Saudi party mainly of the 'Ahl-e Hadith' proclivities and showed more interest in a negotiated settlement instead of pushing for a Mujahideen's military victory. Similarly, now in Pakistan there was an increased interest in the early conclusion of war. The changes in the USSR in 1990-91 and then its ultimate dissolution resulted in the independence of the Muslim-dominated Central Asian states. These geographical changes in the region held the promise of valuable economic benefits also. Pakistan could provide the shortest possible route to sea to these states for their trade. All this was possible only with a peaceful, stable Afghanistan.

However, it did not mean that the importance of the military track was being neglected. Pakistan's commitment to the military track was demonstrated by the fall of Khost in March 1991. The fall of Khost was interpreted as the enhancement of the bargaining position of the Mujahideen.

---

30 M. Islam, "The Pak-US Relations —The Afghan Factor", *Pak-American Relations*, ed. Raziullah Azami, (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1994), p.92.

31 *The Muslim* (Islamabad), August 11, 1991.

The strategy demonstrated the shift from the earlier policy of capturing big cities like Jalalabad to a method of 'a string of smaller military victories leading to the desired results.'<sup>32</sup> The situation was now considered to be favourable for a purposeful dialogue. A decision to go along the UN plans for negotiated settlement in Afghanistan was taken by the Nawaz Sharif government in the meeting of the Afghan Cell in July 1991. However, it was not a complete departure from the earlier two-track policy. Keeping in view the Mujahideen's inflexible approach to talks and the desirability of maintaining the minimum military pressure for better terms in the talks the military aid and help to the Mujahideen continued. There were renewed attacks on Jalalabad and Gardez at the end of 1991. Nawaz Sharif government faced a lot of resistance for its support to the latest UN plan. Certain changes in the Pakistan army i.e., the ascendance of General Asif Nawaz as COAS after General Mirza Aslam Beg and the removal of General Hamid Gul facilitated such a move. Keeping in view the psychological make-up of a military mind, the opposition from the ISI to the increased emphasis on political track was but natural. But it did not and could not put a veto on this change. Changes were also brought about in the ISI top brass, as well as at the lower levels to manage difficulties of such a shift.<sup>33</sup> There was opposition to the policy of giving support to the UN plan from other quarters also. For example, as a result of this change, Jama'at-i-Islami broke its alliance with the Nawaz government accusing Nawaz Sharif of betraying the Afghan *Jihad*. Hekmatyar, chief of the Hezb-i-Islami, outrightly rejected the UN plan and asked the Pakistan government to work out a new formula for the solution of the Afghan crisis which could be

---

32 Weinbaum, *op.cit.*, p.11.

33 Kaniyalil, *op.cit.* p.987.

acceptable to the Mujahideen.<sup>34</sup> Burhanuddin Rabbani and Sayyaf also echoed the same views and rejected the UN plan.

In September 1991, the US and the USSR agreed on a mutual cut-off aid to Afghan groups starting from January 1992 and stressed for a negotiated settlement. During January 1992, Islamabad also finally went along the 'negative symmetry', declaring its intention to end military aid for the Mujahideen. 'The Nawaz government pressed openly for the acceptance of the UN peace plan, warning that the peace would not be held hostage to the opposition of a few resistance groups and that they would be left behind if they posed obstacles.'<sup>35</sup> Ignoring objections from the Islamist parties, the government endorsed the idea of a pre-transition council which would rule for 45 days leading to a UN-sponsored assembly with 150 representatives drawn from various Afghan groups to be convened in Europe. A council was to be elected by the assembly that would assume authority in advance of national elections. On Jan 27, 1992, Pakistan's minister of state for foreign affairs, Siddique Khan Kanju told the newsmen in Islamabad clearly that "the ball is now in the UN court."<sup>36</sup>

But before there could be any progress on the UN plan Najibullah's hold over the administration started loosening. His announcement to resign when the interim government would be formed had a catalyst effect on the process of his downfall. Defections to the resistance started occurring from amongst the Kabul regime. Political and administrative confusion became the order of the day in the cities under the control of the Najibullah government, which eventually led to an acute shortage of supplies of food and fuel. The situation became so alarming that Pakistan, US and others started shipping wheat to Kabul to stave off hunger and to ensure

---

34 *Pakistan and Gulf Economist* (Karachi), March 14-20, 1992, p.9.

35 *Frontier Post* (Peshawar) Feb.7, 1992, quoted in Weinbaum, *op.cit.*, p.131.

36 *The News* (Rawalpindi), January 28, 1992.

enough stability for the regime's administration for the peaceful transfer of power in Kabul. But the process of changes once started became so dramatic and quick that it ended up in the fall of the Najibullah regime in Afghanistan and Kabul was captured by the Mujahideen forces in April 1992.