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NUMBER 158

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FROM SWEDENISATION TO FINLANDISATION

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"Internally the political situation in Afghanistan is stable. President Daud remains very much in control and faces no significant opposition. The process of political institution building is going apace." This was stated on March 16, 1978, in testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, by Ambassador Dubs, speaking as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs. The following month, on April 28, 1978, President Daud along with members of his family and four senior members of his government had been killed and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, led by the communist-inclined coalition of Khalq and Parcham parties with Taraki as President established. Later in the same year Mr. Dubs went on to become the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan and in February 1979 was himself killed as a hostage in a Kabul hotel by the new Republic's security guards, in an inept endeavour to overwhelm his captors, who were suspected of being Islamic militants.

In January 1980, after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, President Carter declared that the Soviet action posed the gravest threat to world peace since World War II and propounded the Carter doctrine, which committed the United States to defend the Persian Gulf. The U.S. Administration also made it known that every step possible would be taken to compel the withdrawal of the Soviet forces.

Only nine months later, in October 1980, during the U.S. presidential campaign, when major issues of external as well as internal policy were being debated in a national television hook-up lasting 90 minutes, neither President Carter nor President-to-be Reagan even mentioned the problem of Afghanistan!

The three episodes, separated in time by no more than two and a half years, reflected extraordinary changes in American perceptions of the Afghanistan situation and its international significance. They cannot be explained by sequential change and development but only by failure of contemporaneous judgment.

Before the Saur revolution of April 1978, Afghanistan had caused no serious anxieties for East/West relations. However, when the Soviet intervention occurred, in December, 1979, Afghanistan was at once linked in the American view to Yemen, Angola, Ethiopia, and Vietnam's action in Cambodia. The Soviets' action was judged to be based on confidence derived from the improved military balance of the Warsaw Pact vis-a-vis NATO. The Soviet Union, it was argued, was attempting to realize the old Russian ambition to reach warm waters: it aimed to dominate South and South-West Asia, and sought thereby to control or even throttle the oil artery on which the industrialized West was critically dependent. It was believed the timing of the Soviet intervention was related to the hostage crisis in Iran which was then baffling the United States. It was also seen as a signal to Ayatullah Khomeini and the Tudeh Party that the Soviet Union would react in the event of a U.S. intervention in Iran. At the time, the United States and indeed most Western governments and analysts

saw the Afghan developments as moves in the Kremlin's global strategy against the West.

The Soviet official position on Afghanistan has been equally changeable and contradictory. After President Daud's last visit to Moscow in February 1977, the joint communique reaffirmed friendship, trust, understanding and satisfaction and the determination to consolidate economic cooperation on "an equal and mutually advantageous" long-term basis. A 12-year Treaty for Economic Cooperation was signed, detailing specific fields for joint development, which in its preamble recalled the old treaties of 1921 and 1931 of "Neutrality and Non-Aggression". When Hafizullah Amin visited Moscow in May 1978 after the overthrow of Daud, the communique with Gromyko referred to the same treaty--"signed during the time of V.I. Lenin" and reiterated confidence in the "unbreakable friendship, all round cooperation and good neighborlines between the two countries." After the Soviet invasion in December 1979, the April 1978 revolution was still applauded, but its mastermind, Hafizullah Amin, was now found to be an agent of the C.I.A. and was roundly criticized as a dictator oppressor, traitor and accused of terror, violation of legality, etc. The turn-about became more anomalous when the Soviet military intrusion was claimed to be a response to the request from the Afghan government of which Amin himself was at the time the head. More ironically the legal bases cited were Article 51 of the UN charter (which gives the right of individual and collective self-defence) and Article 4 of the 1978 Soviet-Afghan Treaty which was negotiated by Amin himself. The many

shifts in the Soviet positions, even after April 1978, when they had a privileged position with the Afghan government, reveal a striking failure to understand the Afghan people and their political attitudes.

The substantive thrust of Soviet-defence for the violation of Afghan neutrality was that imperialism had planned an aggression to mend the holes in the strategic arc created by loss of the Shah's Iran. A commentator in Pravda even suggested that the Imperialists were planning a return to Kabul in triumph. The Czech government, in supporting the Soviet intervention, wrote more honestly that the USSR acted in "the spirit of internationalist solidarity of revolutionary and anti-Imperialist forces"--an oblique reference to the so-called Brezhnev doctrine, which had been advanced in Czechoslavakia.

The successive votes in the UN condemning Soviet action and demanding Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, showed that even after two years, the Soviet explanations have carried little international credibility. Indeed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has probably caused the biggest set-back in the history of Soviet relation with the Third World. It was the first direct use of Soviet combat troops outside the Yalta demarcations and the only time such troops had been employed in a non-aligned country. As long as the Soviet presence continues, Soviet diplomacy will be left to depend on the mistakes of the West, or seize opportunities which may arise out of national or regional conficts and circumstances. It has seriously undermined decades of efforts of the Soviet Union to portray itself in the decolonized world

as a principled supporter of independence, nationalism and non-alignment.

In any case neither the U.S. nor the Soviet variants of the dreaded Armegedon has come to pass. Notwithstanding continuing mention in public statements, Afghanistan has slowly slid away from the focus of international attention and anxiety. But within Afghanistan, defiant insurgency has not died down or been smothered.

Meanwhile, the Soviet intervention had triggered a chain of reactions. On the Sub-continent, it has been leading to the massive rearmament of Pakistan, and in turn of India, a process sure to strain their economies and intensify regional tensions. The U.S. response, based on the Carter perception, was a central factor in the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force, a greatly increased American--and Soviet--naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and the effort to reach an anti-Soviet strategic consensus. The premises proved unfounded, but the reactions generated developed a momentum of their own.

II

A final understanding of what led to the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan will remain buried in the secret archives of the Kremlin. Predictably, the <u>ex post facto</u> Soviet explanation referred to the threat of subversion of the established Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, chiefly from the United States and China through Pakistan. In denying the charge of aggression Soviet leaders, including President Brezhnev, sought to deflect criticism

by referring to East/West problems. Cited were the Camp David process, the upgrading of the U.S. nuclear and conventional arsenal, the changed U.S. attitude to the ratification of SALT II, the U.S. build up in the Indian Ocean, the development of the U.S.-China military relationship, etc. These explanations lacked plausible causal or chronological connections with the developments inside Afghanistan.

One could safely surmise, in fact, that the Soviet Union had grossly underestimated the adverse consequences which flowed from its intervention. The operation itself did not prove to be a quick surgical exercise. The mix of military coercion, economic aid, and propagandistic fraternization (with the help of ethnic and religious comrades of neighboring Central Asian republics) failed to produce quiet acquiescence by the Afghan people and reasonable, if not enthusiastic, support for the installed Karmal regime. Nor did Soviet diplomacy expect to be so put on the defensive, not just in the non-aligned world and the community of Islamic nations, but in the Communist fraternity itself. Incidentally, it also set back Cuba's hopes of leading the non-aligned Movement to look upon the Socialist bloc as its natural ally.

Very little has been heard in the last two years of the Asian security system which, in effect, was the Soviet design for the containment of China's influence and expansion in that part of the world. On the contrary--and this too may not have been forseen--the Soviet action in Afghanistan, along with the fall-out from Vietnam's action in Cambodia, gave an unexpected boost

to Chinese diplomacy in much of South Asia and the ASEAN region. In fact, the geopolitical Soviet gain from the occupation of Afghanistan was no more than slightly improved logistics and somewhat better tactical capability in the event of a major regional conflict involving the superpowers. But this was a marginal advantage in a hypothetical contingency. In any case, as compared to the United States, the Soviet Union always had an operational advantage in the Gulf region, barely 700 miles from its own southern frontier.

On the American side, as stated earlier, the immediate reaction, like a conditioned reflex, was to posit a worst case strategic scenario. One can, however, safely speculate that domestic political factors were, at least in part, responsible for the exaggerated significance attached to the Soviet action. Had the Soviet intervention taken place in 1978 instead of the year before the U.S. presidential elections and, had it not coincided with the baffling humiliation of the American hostages being held in Iran, the reaction of the Carter Administration might have been less agitated and better balanced.

It can be argued that the embargo on exports of grain and on the flow of western credits and technology, the boycott of the Olympics, and the general international alarm may have averted further military moves planned in the Kremlin. Without internal evidence such a contention cannot be proved or disproved, but it does not appear very convincing. Except for the Olympic boycott, the American response caused embarrassment and damage to the U.S.

American policy in no way advanced the goal of a Soviet retreat from Afghanistan and the grain embargo was eventually withdrawn unilaterally.

One cannot escape the conclusion that both the easy-win confidence of the Soviet Union, with its anticipation of minimal fall-out, and the excessive alarm on the American side were gross misperceptions. What was common to the fallacious judgments of both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was that every action or development was appraised from their respective global strategic perspectives instead of by an objective assessment of the complex dynamics of local events and regional circumstances.

The ups and downs in Soviet-American relations might have been no different even if there had been no Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Possibly the crisis in Afghanistan encouraged Solidarity and Polish nationalism, and the unexpected political and military difficulties in Afghanistan may have restrained the Soviet Union from another direct intervention. What is relevant in this context is that the Soviet movement into Afghanistan and the immediate militaristic reactions in the West have made the restoration of stability in the whole region vastly more complex and difficult.

To find explanations for the unexpected developments, the chronology of events needs to be objectively reviewed as it developed and was perceived both internally and externally. But before doing so, it would be useful to recall some historical background. While it has been ignored or discounted by the principal powers, it can yet illuminate the present and perhaps suggest a way out in the future.

III

No country outside the parameters of the European Concert had an historical experience of the ebb and flow of empires comparable to Afghanistan's. Straddling the crossroads between Europe and Asia, Afghanistan was important millennia before anyone had reflected on the strategic importance of distant lands. Since Alexander's march to the Indus, the Hindu Kush and its subsidiary ranges, which are the Afghan homeland, have been witness to some 25 invasions. However, diverse in origin and ethnic hue, every emperor who fancied himself as a world conqueror attempted to cross Afghanistan on the way to the Orient. The Bactrians, the Persians, the Turks, the Mongols, came and crossed, or stayed for a while, and then were obliged to withdraw. Napoleon and Hitler sought the agreement of their counterparts in Russia to smooth their passage to India. The only advance from the South was that of the Mauryan Empire, three centuries before the Christian era, when the message of Buddha was propagated in these lands. Eventually, in the seventh century after Christ, Islam came from the West, took root, and the Sunni faith became the dominant religion of the Afghan tribes.

When the European powers finally reached India by sea, Afghanistan became the diplomatic and military battleground between two competing empires, both European. The Great Game was played for half of the nineteenth century, between the Czarist Empire expanding southward and the British advancing from the East and wanting to establish a safe strategic frontier for their dominion over the Subcontinent. The Game was played with

military adventures, diplomacy, intrigue and deceit. But, even then, the Afghans were not docile spectators to the contest between foreign giants for their homeland. The Afghan rulers and tribal chiefs played the British off against the Russians and vice versa -- and inflicted military and political humiliation on both powers. Afghan tactics were even then full of courage and cunning. They included assassinations, ambushes, denial of supplies, use of captured arms, double dealings and deception. In the end it was the defiant hostility of the Afghan tribesman which compelled the "forward" imperialists of both Russia and Britain to yield to pragmatic counsels to leave the Afghans to their own tribal polity. Afghanistan was the only Asian country which, having faced full-scale repeated invasions from different powers, did not end up as part of an European Empire. The experience of coping with the Great Game of two Empires had, however, catalyzed Afghanistan, starting with Emir Abdur Rahman, into taking the first step towards the creation of a modern state.

In its foreign relations, the Afghan Emirate maintained a sagacious policy of not getting involved in the European political game or serving as strategic instrument of any power. Afghanistan defied both Russia and Britain and remained neutral during the First World War. When after the war Britain was militarily exhausted, the Afghans launched an invasion into British India in an attempt to get back the tribal areas east of the Durand line. It failed in this purpose, but by the treaty of 1919, Afghanistan obtained recognition of its full independence.

After the end of British control over Afghan external relations, the first major decision of the Afghan government was to recognize and conclude a treaty with the revolutionary government established after the October Revolution in Russia. Afghanistan was the first country to buy aircraft and arms from Soviet Union, and in 1925 Amanullah was the first monarch to visit the capital of the revolutionary communist state. Afghanistan, however, did not bind itself exclusively to its northern neighbor. Apart from maintaining the old links with Britain and Russia, it enlarged its diplomatic contacts and established economic and cultural links with Germany, France, and the Islamic World.

The external environment around Afghanistan altered more radically after the Second World War. The British withdrew from the Subcontinent, and Pakistan came into existence. Iran under the Reza Pahlavi gathered strength and later wealth. The United States emerged as the other great power in the new great game. In 1954 when a bilateral security treaty was concluded between Pakistan and the U.S., Afghanistan was not even informed by the U.S. Afghan suspicions were aroused that the U.S. supported Pakistan on the Pakthoonisthan question. Although Afghanistan had earlier considered getting arms from the U.S., after the U.S.-Pakistan alliance, it refused to join the Baghdad Pact or even the RCD agreement, though it was claimed the latter had a regional and economic focus. The postwar international landscape confirmed Afghanistan's perception that its security was best assured through its traditional policy -- non-alignment with any

great power, economic cooperation wherever beneficial, and friction-free relations with the powerful neighbour to the north. Not even the United States seriously questioned the rationale of this policy.

But while remaining sensitive to Soviet interests and keeping the U.S.S.R. as preeminent amongst its partners, Afghanistan systematically enlarged its pattern of bilateral economic relations with communist and non-communist countries -- notably with the U.S.A., Federal Germany, China, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, France, the United Kingdom, Japan and India. The U.S.S.R. concentrated on the development of power, gas, minerals and communications; U.S. aid was primarily for Helmand Valley development and support for education and the national communication infrastructure. The U.S.S.R. built the road from Herat to Kandahar and the U.S.A. continued it to Kabul. Western studies made in the sixties and early seventies -- long before detente -- had commented that, at least in Afghanistan, there was a kind of unspoken cooperative coexistence in the developmental field between the otherwise competing powers.

The most serious external problem which Afghanistan had to face in the last three decades was with Pakistan on the Pakthoonistan question. The issue came to a head on several occasions and led to a slowdown and sometimes to an actual blockade in transit of Afghanistan's seaborne commerce, which traditionally only went through Karachi. In the worst crisis of 1960-61, the Soviet

Union purchased and airlifted Afghan products and by doing so permanently strengthened Soviet-Afghan trade relations. But it should be noted that, except for a statement made when Bulganin and Khrushchev were in Kabul in 1955, the Soviet Union did not categorically endorse the concept of Pakthoonistan.

Those who argue the hidden hand of the U.S.S.R in the Saur Revolution (as part of a grand design) have suggested that the Soviets had become apprehensive about and hostile to President Daud and therefore masterminded his overthrow in 1978. But there is little proof of serious Soviet dissatisfaction with Daud before April 1978. If anything, for two decades Daud was looked upon as the architect of a closer Soviet-Afghan relationship. It was during Daud's tenure as Prime Minister in the fifties that Afghanistan invited Bulganin and Khrushchev to Kabul. The visit launched the substantial Soviet-assisted economic program in the country, and led to the agreement by which the Soviet Union reequipped the Afghan armed forces. The Soviet Union was the first to recognize the Afghan Republic when Daud dethroned his brother-in-law, King Zahir Shah, in 1973 and exuded satisfaction and confidence at AfghanSoviet relations. Post hoc analyses have grasped at isolated and minor indications of suspected Soviet dissatisfaction with Daud, such as his allowing Western technicians and UN experts to work on development projects north of the Hindu Kush near the Soviet border. But it cannot be show that these ever added up to real concern or led to a tangible deterioration in Soviet-Afghan relations. As

compared to the relations with her Islamic neighbors, Iran and Pakistan, Afghan relations with Communist Russia had been free from serious tensions up to 1978.

It is a fact that both before and during Daud's presidency many Afghan civilians, and officers of the armed forces had been educated and trained in the Soviet Union. In the process, outside their professional courses, they must have been exposed to propaganda and ideological persuasion. One can safely assume both the Khalq and Parcham parties had long-standing contacts with the Soviet Union and must have received support from Soviet agencies. The Soviet Union is acknowledged to have been instrumental in uniting these factions in 1977. However, such non-governmental investment and efforts are the features of the diplomacy of all great powers but they have generally yielded abysmally dismal dividends. In Afghanistan the strength of pro-Soviet sympathizers prior to 1978 were never considered by any observer to be of revolutionary timber or capability. Training abroad, be it in the USSR or China, has often produced more ideological sceptics than brain-washed anti-national converts. Or to put it another way, just as many students have been attracted to distant socio-economic models without any direct or indirect foreign contacts. In the case of Afghanistan none of the principal radical faction leaders were trained in the USSR. Tarakhi was self-educated and had served in the Afghan embassy in Washington and even worked for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. Babrak Karmal, now the President, was educated only in Kabul. Amin

became a Marxist in his years with the Teachers College in Columbia University. The fact is that all too frequently sincere Communists with firm and loyal commitment to Moscow or Peking have found themselves out of line with the twist and turns of the policies of the respective Communist mentor states. The intellectual antecedents of the leaders or even the party link with Moscow do not really provide a plausible clue to the course of Afghan developments starting with the overthrew of Daud.

IV

How then did this country, which preserved its independence and its native identity against great odds and with dexterous diplomacy and was accepted as a neutral non-aligned buffer by all powers, become a victim of a coup and an invasion jeopardizing its successful traditional policies? If the events are followed objectively, it would appear that a series of sudden and unplanned turns provide the most plausible explanation for the Afghan developments.

From every reliable account, including those of Western observers in Kabul at the time, the coup of 1978 happened and succeeded unexpectedly. Some analysts now argue that this coup was planned for August, but no one denies that when it occurred, it was as great a surprise to Moscow as to the rest of the world. According to Louis Dupree* of the American University Field Staff, (with a life time of scholarly expertise on Afghanistan who was in Kabul at the time) a series of accidents, combined

with inefficiency and ineptitude, led to the violent overthrow of the Daud government. The success of the coup he suggested surprised even its makers.

All commentators agreed that the killing of Mir Akbar Khan, a popular Parchamite figure, triggered the initial protests at a time when social and economic discontent was on the increase. The Khalq group succeeded in exploiting the killing to arouse public indignation. With the support of some units of the Army and the Air Force, the protest demonstration was turned into a kind of march on the Bastille -- the Presidential Palace -- where the assembled senior members of the government and their families were summarily killed. The numbers of Khalq-Parcham members and active sympathisers in the defence forces -- some no doubt well placed -- were probably no more than a few hundred. Hafizullah Amin subsequently claimed that he executed a master plan, but this must be discounted as emanating from the triumph of victory and power.

Ten days passed between the murder of Mir Akbar Khan and the overthrow of the Daud government. With a modicum of administrative foresight and a security alert, by bringing in units from the provinces as a precaution, it might have been a different story. In any case, the important fact was that the developments were local and unforeseen. The Soviet Union had no doubt helped bring about the reunification of the Khalq-Parcham factions in 1977, but the killing of Mir Akbar and its improvised exploitation do not reveal any Kremlin design or manipulation aimed at overthrowing the Daud regime.

The Soviet Union was understandably quick to recognize the unexpected and welcome the change in Afghanistan. Almost all countries including those of the West followed suit within weeks because the seizure, however brutal, was local and internal. The U.S.S.R. had an obvious interest in seeing the Socialist regime consolidate itself. Economic help and technical advisors were readily provided to the new government, and had an important role in the civil administration and the security forces. But the pattern and policies of the new Afghan leadership were based on their understanding of the Soviet model, rather than on prior guidance or direction from the Soviet Embassy or from Moscow. The Parcham faction initially accepted the Khalq leader,Taraki as President and "father of the nation," and Soviet comments echoed this local variant of the cult of personality. When within weeks the coalition disintegrated, it did so not on policy issues, but because of the personal rivalry and competitive ambitions of Amin and Babrak. The U.S.S.R. went along with the results of the power struggle. It did not demur at the expulsions of the Parchamites, when Babrak and others were banished to Ambassadorial exiles and, a few months later, were dismissed.

Amin, who emerged as the driving force of the new republic, was a convinced votary of the economic and social theories of Marx and the socialist system as installed by Lenin. Based on such text-book knowledge and Amin's understanding of the Soviet example, the new government launched forth on a programme for a quick transformation of Afghanistan into a socialist country. A

barrage of decrees were issued: 'tyranny' and usury were abolished; the equality of ethnolinguistic groups was proclaimed; large and middle-sized land holdings were redistributed; education and health services were made free; women were liberated and ordered to attend adult literacy classes; natural resources were nationalized and the judiciary was revamped. A new secular national flag in Communist red instead of Islamic green was adopted. This amateur radicalism -- Socialism by decree and fiat -- ignored the culture and sociology of the old tribal society. The new rulers also overlooked the incapacity of the governmental machinery -- further enfeebled by purges and disoriented by newly appointed, young, inexperienced political cadres -- to implement such reforms. The economic and administrative dislocations which naturally followed soon forfeited the support of the urban populace. The onslaught on religion and the entrenched social ethos provoked the anger of the Mullahs and the tribal chiefs in the countryside. The initial expectancy soon turned into disillusionment and hostility toward the regime.

All such opposition was predictably dismissed as the reaction of vested bourgeois interests, and the regime's response was only to intensify the repression. First the suspected Daud supporters, then, in turn, the Parchamites, the Islamic leaders, and later even nationalist sympathisers and army officers who had helped the coup were imprisoned. The arrest of each group increased the estrangement of the regime from the people. Within months the new rulers came to be looked upon as godless and foreign. The culmination was the revolt in Herat in March

'79 when units of the Afghan army mutinied, joined the insurgents, and even killed a number of their Soviet advisers. Again, the response to this growing insurgency was not retreat from the proclaimed socialist program or accommodation with the Islamic elements, but more ruthless suppression. The assumption of all effective powers by Hafizullah Amin as Prime Minister in March 1979, leaving Taraki only as a figure-head, symbolized the persistence of this ruthless, doctrinaire course.

Throughout this period (from April '78 to about June '79) there was no evidence that the Soviet Union had any hesitation in backing Amin as the emergent power in Kabul. He claimed to be and was accepted as the most loyal friend of the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Friendship between the U.S.S.R. and Afghanistan (Dec. '78) was actively promoted by Amin as Foreign Minister. When Brezhnev referred to Afghanistan as a new member of the Socialist Commonwealth, he was expressing not just satisfaction at the year's developments in Afghanistan but also confidence in the leadership of the country, where Amin was really at the controls. Some *post hoc* analysis hint that the Soviet Union had long harboured doubts about Amin and was all the time nursing Babrak Karmal. But until the spring of 1979 the Soviet Union was publicly unreserved in its support for Amin, who was seen as a zealous guardian of Soviet interests.

V

It was only in the summer of 1979 that the Soviet Union became alarmed that the radicalism and ideological militancy of Amin were proving dangerously counter-productive. The incidents

in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Pakthia, etc. and the general spread of insurgency in the country were patent evidence of the alienation of the people from the regime and their hostility towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is known to have said to its friends that Afghanistan was proceeding too fast on the road to Socialism. At this stage some gentle attempts to moderate policies must have been made. But it could not be easy for the first socialist state to curb an ideological militant so unabashedly pro-Soviet. Having rejoiced in the Saur Revolution and backed the Khalq government, the Soviet Union now became apprehensive that the advent of Socialism instead of strengthening was likely to jeopardize Russian security and turn a traditionally friendly country into a hostile neighbour.

It was in this defensive anxiety that Soviet Union contemplated the political if not physical elimination of Amin. Earlier the U.S.S.R. had acquiesced in the attenuation of Taraki's power (because he was not effective enough). In the dilemma of anti-Soviet disaffection being created by a pro-Soviet regime, the Soviets concluded that power should be restored to Taraki precisely because he had a greater nationalistic appeal and was less ideologically militant!

According to all analysts the dethroning of Amin was planned when Taraki stopped in Moscow on his way to and from the Havana Non-Aligned Summit. It seems to have been agreed that Amin was to be defrocked, in whatever way possible, immediately after Taraki's return to Kabul.

But modern Russians may again have overlooked their own nineteenth-century experience that an Afghan reacts against becoming the instrument of a foreign power. It appears that Tarun, the head of Afghan security who had accompanied Taraki, tipped off Amin of the plans to dethrone him. When on the 15th of September Amin finally went to the palace in response to Taraki's invitation (after, it is reported, personal assurances of safety had been given by the Soviet Ambassador), he brought his own armed escort with him. In the shoot-out, Taraki was injured by Amin's guards, Tarun was killed, but Amin managed to escape.

The Soviet Ambassador, it was reported, was present in the palace at the time of the shoot-out. Amin must have become dramatically alive to the reality that, far from being the Soviet Union's preferred leader, he had lost their confidence and they sought his removal. What was perhaps even more important, the Soviet Embassy knew that Amin had discovered the Soviet intention to unseat him; indeed, Amin was reported to have said as much to some East European diplomats a few weeks later. His fears were confirmed when three senior pro-Taraki ministers took refuge in the Soviet Embassy after the Palace shoot-out.

At all events, Amin immediately assumed all Taraki's titles and sought to consolidate his position. He declared Tarun a national hero, and he purged the remnants of the security forces of anyone he suspected of being pro-Parchem, pro-Taraki or pro-Soviet. But unlike the consolidation attempts when he became Prime Minister, this time he did not turn to the Soviet Union for

advice or support. Indeed, he demanded the recall of Soviet Ambassador Puzanov -- a most unusual occurrence within the Socialist commonwealth. Belatedly Amin sought to retreat from his earlier unpopular positions, to appeal to nationalist sentiments, and to broaden his political base. He even tried to mollify the Mullahs and the alienated Islamic opinion. The death sentence on the nationalist Qadir, whom he himself had arrested the previous year, was commuted. It was during this period that, when referring to the persisting insurgency, he made a point of declaring that "We would not ask our foreign friends to shed blood for us."

The failed September palace coup was the critical episode which made the subsequent direct Soviet intervention inevitable. There could be no compromise with an alienated Amin still in power. The Soviet Union faced the possibility of a total reversal in what had promised to be a gratuitous gain. During the summer months independent contingency plans on how to prevent the country from turning hostile may have been prepared by Soviet Security agencies. After September 1979 mere Soviet responsiveness to decision-making in Kabul was over. The Kremlin must have feared that, given time to marshall internal nationalist consolidation and secure external support, Amin, the loyal ideologue, would turn into a defiant Tito or even a nationalist Dubcek. There may even have been the worse fears that Amin might become a Sadat, abrogating the agreements through which he himself had cemented Afghan-Soviet relations, ask for

the withdrawal of Soviet military and civil advisers, and reach out to establish an American link.

The intervention had to be on a scale sufficient to simultaneously remove Amin and his supporters, disarm the Afghan army, take control of the towns and communications, and tackle the widespread insurgency. This required an operational capability and logistic support which could not be assembled in a hurry. At the same time, while plans and preparation were under way, the intentions had to be carefully concealed.

These three critical months between September and December 1979 must have been a battle of wits and deception between the Soviet Embassy and Amin. Superficially the mutual bonhomie continued. Friendly, but not effusive, protocol messages were exchanged on the anniversary of the October Revolution and the Afghan-Soviet Treaty. Even diplomatic observers failed to notice the crisis of confidence and the aroused suspicious between the two governments, but the die was cast. The visits of Yepishev, with experience of Czechoslovakia in 1968, General Pavlovsky, and General Papukin of the Soviet Ministry of Interior must have been intended not to curb the insurgency -- as might have been alleged -- but to plan for the military intervention in the country. During this period, Amin seems to have been fed information to keep him nervous and dependent on Soviet support. An offer to take Amin's nephew to Moscow, after he was wounded in December, might have been intended to make him believe in the Soviet Union's benign interest in his personal and political welfare. On the eve of the intervention, deliberately warned of

impending big insurgent attacks in Kabul, Amin may have even reluctantly agreed to let a small armed Soviet contingent be brought in by air. These mobile units took quick control of the Kabul airfield and later facilitated the induction of airborne troops before the main force rolled in across the frontier. This permission may be what was referred to by the U.S.S.R. as the invitation for a Soviet intervention.

However, after his narrow escape on September 15, 1979, Amin must have had premonitions of the danger of direct intervention by the Soviet Union. His own counter strategy, planned as discreetly as was possible under the circumstances, seems to have been to regain popularity at home, diversify his external contacts and eventually to wriggle free of the Soviet embrace. At this stage Amin, who had been so hostile in the past, made friendly overtures to Pakistan. Having earlier been so aggressive on the Pakhtoonistan question, Amin may have even decided it would be expedient to go back to the lines of agreement which were being explored in 1978, between Bhutto and Daud and so Mr. Agha Shahi, the foreign minister of Pakistan, was invited to Kabul. Amin's quick change of attitude may also have had a more far reaching purpose. He may have thought to use Pakistan as a conduit to send a signal to the United States that he was anxious to revert to the traditional pattern of Afghan non-alignment.

In these months, for the first time after Ambassador Dubs was killed, there were, in fact, indications of some slight improvement in Afghan-U.S. relations. The U.S. embassy was strengthened and the anti-West rhetoric was muted. The

announcement of a date for the Pakistan Foreign Minister's visit (it was postponed at the last minute) may have clinched for the nervous Kremlin, the timing of the landing of the Soviet airborne contingent. (It could also be assumed that the Western world would be caught preoccupied with Christmas festivities.)

Even at the time the Kremlin's motives may be most plausibly described as a defensive anxiety at the prospects of a hostile alienation of Afghanistan, rather than the desire to advance the Soviet Union's strategic or ideological frontiers. However, the world was shocked and came to fear that the U.S.S.R. was now prepared to intervene militarily even in the Third World on the basis of the "Brezhnev doctrine."

VI

The contention of this article is that the Afghan crisis culminating in the occupation of the country by Soviet forces was the product of misadventures and mishaps, compounded by internal mishandling and international misperceptions. Prior to April '78 the pace of modernization of Afghanistan was admittedly slow. Political expectations had been awakened, and dissatisfaction with the Daud regime had grown as attempts at economic progress, social justice, and political democracy proved sluggish or outright failures. Pockets of radicalism existed amongst students and intellectuals in Kabul, but for all the investment in propaganda and indoctrination of officials the 'Communist' factions and Soviet sympathizers in Afghanistan were still insignificant in numbers or influence. The tribal hold on

the country was so strong and the influence of Islam so entrenched that no observer prior to 1978 predicted that Afghanistan was ripe for revolution.

It was true Daud was trying to increase and diversify technical and economic cooperation with non-communist countries. This included Egypt, Pakistan, the Islamic nations, and also India. He was seeking additional economic assistance from the western countries. But there was no intention to or likelihood of diluting Soviet preeminence, particularly in the defence sector.

More significant could have been the prospects of massive aid, totalling 2 billion dollars, which the Shah at one time held out to Daud. The Shah had talked of a resolution to the old Helmand river dispute and of providing help to build a rail link that would reduce Afghanistan's exclusive dependence on Karachi for its seaborne commerce. The Shah, no doubt, envisaged that Afghanistan, like the Gulf, would come under Iran's protective umbrella. He may have tried to sell his concerns about the dangers and designs of "Islamic Marxists." But, almost a year before the direct Soviet intervention, the Shah and his grandiose dreams had collapsed. It is only in the light of hindsight that Soviet fears of a change in Afghan foreign policy, have been advanced as an explanation for the Soviet invasion in December 1979.

Afghanistan has been a tragedy because it need not have become such an intractable international problem. Daud could have moved faster to fulfill his promises of social and economic

progress and more broad-based politics; he need not have excluded the Parchamites from the coalition or, in his republican incarnation, been so repressive of a handful of radicals; following the funeral of Mir Akbar Kahn in April 1978, Daud could have acted with more administrative acumen. Amin could have been less impetuous with his radical reforms. Similarly the Soviet Union could have restrained Amin much earlier, instead of initially giving him unquestioning support for his head-long transition to socialism and his brutal repression. But all these errors and misjudgments and improvised reactions were local in nature. Not until September 1979, it would seem, was direct Soviet intervention decided -- or, by the Kremlin's logic, considered unavoidable.

President Brezhnev was not deceiving President Carter when he had assured him in Vienna in the spring of 1979 that the Soviet Union had no intention of direct intervention in Afghanistan. Earlier in 1979 Dupree himself had thought an intervention by the U.S.S.R. was unlikely. The circumstances which compelled the Soviet invasion occurred subsequently. In fact, ironically, had the September coup succeeded and Amin been eliminated, and the more pliable and moderate Taraki reinstated, there might not have been a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan!

Setting aside these hypothetical conjectures, two features of over-riding importance can be distilled from the chronology of the crisis.

1. First, in a situation where a conflict emerged between advancing or consolidating the professed ideology and security

anxieties, and both could no longer be ridden in tandem, it was the security consideration which prevailed in Soviet decision-making. If this were not so, the U.S.S.R. would have backed Amin more massively and not displaced him; nor would Babrak Karmal, after being installed, have been allowed to backtrack on the Socialist programme initiated by Amin.

2. Secondly, whether it was the opposition to the socialist decrees put out after April, 1978, or the persistent challenge to the Soviet army after it moved in, the Afghan will to independence -- call it nationalism -- was stronger than was anticipated. The religious, cultural, and social ethos of the land rejected alien ideas even when they were put forward by sons of the soil. They defied the Taraki-Amin regime and have continued to rebel against the Babrak Karmal government because the traditional independence and personality of the country was being outraged.

The critical importance of these two factors -- Soviet perceptions of its security and the sturdy individuality and nationalism of the Afghan people -- could have been gleaned from the history of Russia's relations with Afghanistan. In the past Afghans had come to respect Russian security sensitivity, and the Soviet Union had learned not to offend the social and political personality of Afghanistan. As a result of misperceptions and misadventures these resilient imperatives were brought into cross-purposes. The heart of the problem now was how to assuage both Afghanistan's nationalism and Soviet apprehensions of its security.

VII

The spur to the resolution of the Afghanistan problem now rests squarely on the recognition that the present situation could lead to an unpredictable deterioration for both global and regional powers. The blood-letting inside the country has inflicted terrible suffering on one of the poorest countries in the world. The mounting burden of refugees -- exceeding two million and still growing -- could be a disaster for the political unity and economic health of Pakistan. Afghanistan is not an island and the Durand line cannot become a Maginot line. The present situation inherently bears the risks of border incidents, hot pursuit, and counter infiltration across a notoriously permeable frontier. The ripples of tension and, with it the lava of instability, could spread eastward to the Subcontinent, southward to Baluchistan and the Gulf, westward to Iran, and even northward to the Central Asian republics. The germs of disaffection are a mix of national, sub-national, tribal, religious, and socio-economic factors. They are all but immune to the vigilance of conventional frontier customs and security forces, especially in this part of the world. There could be other Afghanistans -- in the sense of sudden dissident ignited internal turmoil, followed by violent suppression and alienation, global linkages and alarm. No power, be it global or local should be confident or complacent enough to think that persisting instability can be so controlled as to harm only the adversary, without damage to its own immediate or long-term interests. Hence not just in the interests of Afghanistans but any or all nations

with stakes in the area, the need to prevent such spillover lends urgency to the political solution to the Afghan problem.

However, as of now, neither the beginning of a solution or the sense of urgent-quest is anywhere evident. The paradox is that there has been a surprising measure of common ground on the broad ingredients of an ultimate solution. There has been an implicit recognition that stability could not be restored unless Afghanistan is neutralized against great power presence or competition. Even the recent study by Anthony Arnold of the Hoover Institution (who sees the crisis as proof of aggressive Soviet strategy against the West) agrees that Afghanistan must revert to "its traditional role as a nationally free, truly non-aligned and independent country." The proposal put forward on behalf of the European Economic Community by Lord Carrington also aimed at the evacuation of Soviet forces in return for the guaranteed neutrality of the country. The resolutions of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference, the UN resolutions had differing nuances, but all demanded the restoration of Afghanistan's non-alignment. In his speech of February 22, 1980, even President Brezhnev offered to withdraw Soviet forces but only after "all forms of outside interference" had ended. Predictably the Soviet position continues to confuse causes and consequences, but what comes through various Soviet comments is that (unlike the situation in Poland), the primary Soviet concern is to prevent Afghanistan becoming a hostile base rather than to retain Afghanistan as a strategic ally or hold it up as a model Socialist state. The proposals advanced in the

West also acknowledge that any solution would have to ensure that Afghanistan would not become a base to stir up trouble in Soviet Central Asia. Mr. Arnold, for example, acknowledges that the Afghans cannot afford to have permanently bad relations with the U.S.S.R. any more than they could afford permanent hostility towards Britain prior to 1947.

All these proposals in effect, amount to wanting Afghanistan to be reverted to the position which prevailed before 1978 -- namely, non-aligned, sensitive to Soviet interests, but free to develop economic relations with non-socialist as well as socialist countries, and able to evolve and modernize according to its own national religious and social ethos. The problem is thus not really to discover the outline of the end-solution, but to determine how to move forward toward it when it seems to demand going back and undoing the complex legacy of bitterness and suspicions interjected by the misadventures and mistakes of the last three years.

The parallels of Finland and Austria have been recalled both for the similarity of the end objective and the modalities of reaching it. The Soviet-Finnish Treaty led to the evacuation of Soviet base at Porkkala in return for a pledge that Finland would not join a military arrangement hostile to the U.S.S.R. and that the latter would retain the right to intervene if Soviet security were threatened. The Austrian Treaty of 1955 which ended the post-war four-power occupation and restored Austrian sovereignty was on the condition that the country would remain neutral.

The situation and circumstances of Finland and Austria, however, were very different from those of present-day Afghanistan. Both Austria and Finland had well-established democratic national traditions. The elected governments of the countries were in a position to speak for the national consensus, that to secure the withdrawal of the foreign presence, imposed neutrality would be an acceptable sacrifice. No one can at present speak authoritatively for the Afghan nation. No one, certainly not the Soviet Union, can be confident that if the Soviet troops were to be withdrawn, the bitter feelings of the Afghan people would evaporate and the country would not become revanchist and hostile to Soviet interests and security.

To identify, or to assuage Afghan nationalism is beyond the capabilities of the concert of great powers. Moreover when the Austrian State Treaty was negotiated -- soon after Stalin's death -- there was a brief easing of cold war tensions at least in Europe. In the present glacial international environment, every proposal emanating from one of the major powers is suspect as a move to advance or consolidate the strategic advantage over the other super-power. It was not surprising that the Soviet Union summarily rejected the EEC proposal of a two-stage international conference under UN auspices. Similarly, the proposal of May 14, 1981 from Kabul, endorsed by the U.S.S.R., for direct talks with the neighbors could not but be seen in the west as merely an attempt to secure legitimacy for the present regime, ignoring the evident alienation of the Afghan people.

There was, however, an aspect of the resolution of the problems of Finland and Austria which is pertinent to the search for a solution in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of Soviet presence from Austria was possible because Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania provided a security buffer for the U.S.S.R. The restoration of full Finnish independence hinged on the presumption that Sweden would remain neutral and not join NATO. *Selig Harrison in urging "Exit through Finland" has underlined that the Soviet withdrawal would have to be coupled with the guarantee of the non-alignment of Iran, Pakistan and India.

Could a similar cushion -- a penumbra of neutrality around Afghanistan restored to non-alignment -- come into being? This is the critical question -- a precondition to possible further steps for the eventual resolution of the Afghanistan crisis. The Kremlin's reaction to the idea of withdrawing as from Austria or Finland is likely to depend on whether Pakistan (and for purposes of the argument, Iran) is to be a Federal Germany, armed as a front-line state, or a Switzerland -- neutral and non-hostile between the great powers. The question is not so hypothetical as it may seem. The anti-Soviet strategic consensus was conceived on the presumption that Afghanistan was a springboard for a further southward thrust into Pakistan and the Gulf. If the U.S. was still pressing for the military containment of U.S.S.R. and envisaged a strongly armed anti-Soviet Pakistan (Iran, for the moment is out of the question), then there can be no hope of

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*Selig Harrison, "Dateline Afghanistan: Exit through Finland?" Foreign Policy, Number 41, Winter, 1980-81.

Soviet evacuation of Afghanistan. Indeed, it would amount to volunteering a post-hoc justification for the Soviet intervention and providing the sanction to perpetuate the Soviet presence in the country.

The U.S.S.R., on the other hand, was engaged in damage-limiting diplomacy to assuage the apprehension that had been aroused in the region specially amongst the neighbors of Afghanistan. Even in the face of strong denunciations, the U.S.S.R. had maintained a posture of cool non-hostile detachment toward the Islamic regime in Iran, be it only as a political investment in an uncertain future. With Pakistan, Soviet relations since the Saur revolution have gone through phases of sharp accusations and even threats but have remained short of actual manifestations of hostility. Judging from public statements made during the visits of Vice-Minister Firyubin in the autumn of 1981, both countries have reaffirmed friendliness and commitments to enlarged economic cooperation. It is pertinent to recall that even though Pakistan remained tied to the West, in the last two decades specially after the Soviet mediation in Indo-Pakistan problems at Tashkent, the Soviet Union has sought to maintain good relations with Pakistan. It has tried to balance the developing Sino-Pak relations. It had noted that Pakistan was critical of U.S. policies on Vietnam and the Middle East. As mentioned earlier, the Soviet Union has refrained from supporting Afghan demands for Paktoonistan. Contrary to some expectations it has not yet given encouragement or material support to the Baluchistan dissidents. Whatever the future may hold U.S.S.R.

has not yet played its anti-Pakistan cards or acted to enfeeble Pakistan's internal unity.

From its side, Pakistan has however tried to follow simultaneously two divergent lines of policy. On the one hand, it has pursued the diplomacy of non-alignment and of non-provocation of the U.S.S.R.; on the other, it has sought to improve its defence capability on grounds of the threat from the U.S.S.R. through Afghanistan. A digression on Indo-Pakistan relations would reach beyond the scope of this article, but assuming that Pakistan's main security anxieties are vis-a-vis India, this ambivalence could still be dangerous for Pakistan. Pakistan risks actual deterioration of its relations with the U.S.S.R., increased pressures on its Afghan border, and heightened tensions with India, all of which could aggravate her internal problems. Therefore, while unresolved ferment in Afghanistan and the Soviet presence on its border may gain Pakistan enhanced security capabilities, its leaders must recognize that the same ferment and presence in Afghanistan was fraught with heightened military dangers and of economic and political strain for the country.

If it is accepted, as this interpretation has sought to suggest, that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan grew out of local and unexpected defensive anxieties, then the West should be able to refrain safely from countermeasures initiated on the erroneous suspicion of a grand aggressive design. The oil flows have not been threatened, and the Gulf is as secure (or as fragile) as it was before 1980. The urgent need to militarize the region to block the Soviet threat has lost its proclaimed

rationale. To persist with the military containment of Afghanistan prevents the creation of the belt of neutrality, and could further strain the stability of the whole region.

VIII

If a serious attempt at a political solution is to be made, the foregoing analysis would suggest the following sorts of step-by-step modalities.

(1) A regional conference of countries closely affected by the present situation in Afghanistan should be convened in the capital of one of them. Natural participants would be Pakistan, Iran, India, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, or as many of them as would be willing to attend it. All these countries subscribe to the principles of non-alignment. In some cases even in the face of strong "persuasion" to the contrary, they have refused to provide military bases and operational concessions for the great powers. They can thus credibly affirm their opposition to the permanent presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and endorse the objective of reverting Afghanistan to non-aligned status. As an assembly of the region for the region -- outside the UN -- the conference could assert immunity for itself from the competitive manoeuvers of the great powers. At the first stage, the problems inside Afghanistan itself would not be the focus of their attention -- so Afghanistan need not be invited. The initial purpose would be to create a climate of mutual interest in regional stability, insulated from the strategic militarization of the Southwest and South Asia by

outside powers. Its aim, in effect, would be the Swedenisation of the region (in the sense of voluntarily reaffirming neutrality and detachment from military blocs) as a step towards the eventual Finlandization of Afghanistan (statutorily imposed neutrality). To sustain this purpose and safeguard against the threats of new Afghanistan's and fresh interventions from outside the region, the ministers could agree to meet periodically, say every quarter, and in the process promote regional economic cooperation and harmonisation on the pattern of ASEAN.

(2) Once this non-aligned or neutral regional buffer has been established and gained credibility -- which might even take a year or two -- the conference might seek the addition of selected non-aligned nations from other regions to enhance its international standing. Such an enlarged grouping might include, for example: Algeria, Jordan, Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Senegal, Tanzania, Mali, and Guinea, all of them having sizeable Muslim populations. A function of this larger non-aligned assembly would be to choose an Observer Group of five nations for a peace-keeping role in Afghanistan. The Observer Group could be of countries both from within and outside the region. The countries so selected would be expected to provide the personnel and support facilities for a protracted peace-keeping commitment in Afghanistan.

(3) Given the likelihood of widespread international endorsement for its mission, especially after the surrounding region has demonstrated its detachment from the global strategic competition, there would be an even chance of the Non-Aligned

Observer group being accepted for installation in Kabul by the Afghan government and the Soviet Union. Once established in Kabul, the first tasks would be to seek to defuse the insurgency, help restore internal confidence, facilitate the return of the refugees, and create conditions for a Loya Jirgah of representative Afghans to assemble in Kabul. As settling on a new basis would be difficult under the circumstances, the membership of the Loya Jirgah could be broadly along the lines of the last such assembly (January 1977). The Jirga would be expected to draw up a new constitution for the country as was done in 1963-64. The Observer Group's task would be only to facilitate and, if required, advise the constitution-making process of the Afghans.

(4) On the basis of the new constitution, the non-aligned Observer Group would assist in organizing and supervising general elections in the country. The group would have to determine its own procedures, but in some respects the role of the Commonwealth observers in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe might provide some useful guidelines. During the election process the primary responsibility for law and order would have to continue to rest with the Afghan government's civil security forces; but Electoral Officers from the Observer Group countries would help to supervise the elections. Through negotiations, a thinning and grouping of the Soviet forces could be arranged prior to the elections.

The assistance of the world community, including the great powers, would be necessary to facilitate the rehabilitation of the refugees on their return to the country. Further, in cooperation with the Afghan government, the Observer Group could

act as funnel and supervisor for urgent measures to restore the shattered economy of Afghanistan.

Needless to say the task of the non-aligned Observer Group would be delicate and difficult. It would be helped or hindered to the extent credibility was established for its non-ulterior and non-aligned purposes.

(5) On the basis of the supervised elections, power could be transferred to the chosen representatives of the Afghan people, and a government could be formed according to the new constitution of the country.

(6) The new government, once established, could negotiate to formalize the neutrality of Afghanistan and the withdrawal of the residuary Soviet forces and conclude an Afghan-Soviet treaty on the lines of the Soviet-Finnish treaty. The treaty could be formally endorsed by the UN so that in the final instance all great powers would be committed to respect Afghan neutrality and non-alignment.

These are tentative ideas with some deliberate and some doubtless inadvertent omissions set forth primarily with a view to provide a basis for discussion. They can be modified with better counsel and through a process of confidential diplomatic consultations. It is easy to anticipate flaws and pitfalls in this framework. Indeed, the proposal may be as much a non-starter as the other suggestions but the step-by-step sequence seeks to incorporate the following conclusions which emerged from this analysis.

(a) The present drift is dangerous for all countries interested in this strategically located country and region.

(b) A solution that will reduce tensions, restore peace and obtain eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces must emanate and be controlled from within the region and not sought to be imposed by mutually suspicious, adversary great powers.

(c) The creation of an outer belt of neutrality around Afghanistan has to be a pre-condition ot the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

(d) Only a non-aligned group of nations can command sufficient confidence and respect both to assuage the suspicions of the Afghan people and the anxieties of the Soviet Union about its future security.

(e) The Afghan people are entitled to determine their own form of government.

(f) During this protracted process, the security interests of regional or great powers would not be adversely compromised.

The approach offered here deliberately limits the involvement of the great powers. It is however obvious that no such effort could get off the ground without the assurance of their benign acquiescence in an endeavour to see Afghanistan restored to its traditional non-aligned role and the region freed from the dangers of further tensions and instability.

IX

The foregoing pages have repeatedly reaffirmed that Afghanistan remains a serious problem and the present drift is

dangerous. A radically different paradigm -- which maintains that there is now no longer the same urgency to a political solution of the Afghanistan situation -- cannot be overlooked. The unresolved Afghanistan has ceased to stand in the way of the superpower dialogue. The U.S.-U.S.S.R. arms control talks had started before the declaration of Martial law in Poland. There is a belated recognition that Soviet intervention was local and not a step in an aggressive grand design directed against vital Western interests. Since the U.S.S.R. is now there -- and there by force -- in a kind of reverse linkage, the Afghan problem can be used further to contain Soviet expansionism and generally to buttress Western diplomacy and strategy against the Soviet Union.

The significant unspoken thought in this point of view, is that the Soviet Union is militarily bogged down, economically under strain, politically stumped, and internationally on the defensive because of Afghanistan. Babrak Karmal's government, despite attempts to reverse its own harsher decrees and win back Islamic opinion, remains cribbed, confined, and alienated from the Afghan people. The Afghan rebel leaders -- religious, tribal, and secular -- though unable to unite on a common command or platform, remain irrevocably hostile to the U.S.S.R. In these circumstances, the Soviet Union should not be given an easy out, much less the political kudos which would result from a voluntary withdrawal. Instead, with little risk and limited costs, Afghanistan should be turned into a Russian Vietnam. To this end, the insurgents should be provided with automatic rifles,

anti-tank guns, and portable rockets against helicopter gun-ships, all preferably of Russian design. Even though intensified insurgency may never dislodge the Russians, the drain of men and resources, together with the loss of empathy in the Muslim world and in the Central Asian Republics, would be a deterrence against similar adventures elsewhere.

Intellectually, this extrapolated real politik argument is carried even further. The Soviet Union by its intervention has given a new legitimacy to the droit de limitrophe -- that disregarding international law and morality, other great powers can exercise the right to take military action in a neighboring country for reasons of perceived threats to their natioanal security. One has even heard, admittedly in a seemingly jocular vein, that the South African policy in Namibia and its preemptive armed forays into countries supporting the liberation movements can be defended as not essentially different from the Soviet action in Afghanistan.

In the United States, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan has been cited in marshalling public support for increased defence expenditures. It was used to justify the programme of massive rearmament and put on the defensive those who urged arms control talks and detente. Some plausible dovish arguments have also been adduced to reinforce the realpolitik approach. For example, one hears argued that even Germany reunification was shelved in order to preserve international peace, and Afghanistan is far less important than Germany. An incidental benefit, it is claimed, has been that Soviet frustrations in Afghanistan had saved Poland from Afghanistan's fate.

This compendium of reasons -- some Machiavellian, some realistic, and some merely wishful -- crystallises into a policy judgment that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan offers the West political advantages without serious corresponding dangers and risks. Carried to its analytical conclusion, this would amount to an unspoken and no doubt unintended parallelism of interest between the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. in the non-solution of the Afghanistan problem. Whether such considerations have been seriously entertained in responsible official circles is difficult to confirm based on published information only. But if in fact a tacit reconcilation to a permanent Soviet presence in Afghanistan is accepted in the USA the change would amount to a *volte-face*. Not that parallel interests between the superpowers should in principle cause surprise or regrets. The prevention of a major nuclear conflagration, the quest for arms control, detente and international stability hinge on their sense of global responsibility. Indeed, it is worth recalling that there developed an unspoken parallelism of interest between the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. in a political solution in Vietnam so that U.S. could withdraw with some honour. (China at that time was urging a continuing military struggle). But the present situation would be of the reverse kind, as it would amount to reconciliation in an on-going conflict and ignoring of the strength and validity of Third World nationalism.

There should be no illusion that this kind of superpower indifference to local or regional instability would not further damage their diplomatic credibility and standing. Like Kampuchea,

Afghanistan should not become a sideshow. But the serious misjudgement in this approach is the presumption that the U.S.S.R or the U.S.A. had the capacity separately or, even in condominium, to quarantine the problem inside Afghanistan and prevent or manage any spillover outside. It would, in fact, not be possible to insulate a low-level conflict -- whether it should prove seriously damaging or merely irritating to the U.S.S.R. -- so that it had no fall out in space or time. The sources of instability will not fade away. On the other hand, a benign support for a South and Southwest Asian peace process could translate the negative acquiescence in no solution, with all its hazards, into a positive quest for regional stability which would better safeguard the legitimate security and economic interests of both superpowers. A peace process might even catalytically revive the climate of detente. The hope and expectation of most countries including members of the NATO and Warsaw Pacts.

It needs underlining that the search for a political solution in Afghanistan has relevance and wider importance for the stability of the whole connected area, from the Subcontinent to the Middle East. Following the assassination of President Sadat and given Israel's persisting intransigence on the Palestine question, the entire Middle East is likely in the future to be more divisive and tense. The appeal of Pan-Islamic fundamentalism, cutting across political and ideological frontiers, and defying, both the conservative and secular governments is likely to grow. The social evolution and modernization of these traditional societies is likely to be erratic and could, for a while,

even be regressive. A strong feature of the prevailing sentiments in the entire Arab-Islamic world is a growing wariness towards both superpowers. The governments in the region may try, through arms purchases or economic cooperation, to use one or the other to their advantage. But no government is likely openly to embrace either of them in total trust or dependence. None of these countries, not even post-Sadaat Egypt, wants to be seen as in alliance with the East or West. The Gulf Cooperation Council may plan on regional military cooperation but they remain opposed to Western bases in their countries. Only Israel had taken a positive attitude towards the proposed strategic consensus. As happened in Iran and Iraq, the superpowers may find themselves exasperated spectators to sudden new turbulence and dramatic rejections. (Significantly neither Iran nor Iraq switched to embrace the other superpower.) Afghanistan for the Soviet Union and Iran for the United States were demonstrations of the hazards of excessive involvement or intrusion without heed to the sociology and nationalism of countries which did not share the military perspective of the big powers. To face similar contingencies, (which like the abortive coup in Bahrein may ignite locally) the wisest policy for both superpowers may be to shift deliberately from over-anxious and overzealous involvement to a posture of benign detachment and responsive friendliness. While the Arab-Israeli problem is becoming more complex if not impossible of peaceful resolution, the Afghanistan problem provides, for the moment, an opportunity to demonstrate a change of stance and

image before new shocks of xenophobic hostility and local turmoil burst upon the Middle East landscape.

A demand for detachment and restraint from superpowers can, of course, be dismissed as unrealistic non-aligned utopianism. In the West it is likely to be castigated as lacking in understanding of the dynamic and expansive nature of Soviet strategic ambitions and of the stakes for the industrialized West. Soviet suspicions of the proposed solution would be equally deep but more restrained in expression, at least until it becomes evident whether it will gather regional and international support. But from the point of view of both super powers, cohesive nonalignment, starting at the regional level, offers a better chance to ensure stability and dampen the future dangers of similar protracted Afghanistans or sudden Irans. Further, one may speculate that the Soviet Union wishes to regain some positive credibility in its diplomacy in the Islamic world. It is therefore more likely to respect and respond -- and less likely to ignore and defy -- a collective regional initiative if it follows successful efforts to create a buffer belt of neutrality and so assuage its security anxieties on its southern flank.

The anatomy of the Afghan crisis reinforces lessons from other cases of armed intervention, where nationalism and local circumstances were ignored or misunderstood. Apart from the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and the Russian involvement in Afghanistan, military action as a form of coercive diplomacy when tried by China against Vietnam met with the same nationalistic resistance and ended in political, if not military, failure. In

Kampuche, the Heng Samrin government has sought to capitalize on being more humane than the brutal Pol Pot regime, but it remains to be seen whether it can gain "acceptance" so long as its sanction is only a massive alien military force. In this context India's withdrawal from Bangladesh within 100 days was uniquely wise and therefore avoided an immediate nationalistic backlash. One might even speculate that, if in the Bay of Pigs, there had been initially a military success instead of failure, that accomplishment might have led to a worse quagmire, involving military occupation and guerrilla warfare.

Where international tensions have been defused, withdrawals effected, and comparative stability restored -- as in Cuba after the missile crisis, or between India and Pakistan after Tashkent, or in Finland and Austria -- it was through the kind of superpower restraint advocated here. Such restraint did no harm to the strategic interests of either superpower. Strategic vigilance between the two superpowers to the extent warranted by their respective threat perceptions could continue, but deterrence should rely on the multiple options contained in their strategic armories, without intruding into and complicating the politics of nations and regions. Their strategic launchers can be safely kept "off the horizons" of the turbulent developing world. Is it too broad a generalization to observe, that in a democratized, differentiated, but universalized system of nation states, political globalism has mainly courted frustrations and disasters. On the other hand, under the arch of the superpowers' balance of terror, persisting and resurgent nationalism and

regionalism -- economic and political -- has been relentlessly creeping ahead in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and even in Europe and looks like the wave of the future. Statesmanship demands adjusting to this all-too-obvious trend rather than ignoring resisting or seeking to discipline it to globalist strategic paradigms.

In conclusion it bears repetition that in Afghanistan the problem started locally and developed with its own dynamics. It was mishandled at home and misperceived abroad. The sturdy nationalism of its people and the country's long experience of guarding its identity and independence without drastically offending its northern neighbor was overlooked in an impetuous involvement. A nation in this situation, from any point of view, must be a buffer; a people with this courage and faith must be left alone to evolve in their own way.

Sir Winston Churchill, as a young subaltern campaigning against these same Pathans on the Indian frontier, came to this perspicacious judgment back in 1897. His observation merits quotation, even at perhaps excessive length, for its prose as well as its prophecy.

> Neither the landscape nor the people find their counterparts in any other portion of the globe. Valley walls rise steeply five or six thousand feet on every side. The columns crawl through a maze of giant corridors down which snow-fed torrents foam under skies of brass. Amid this scene of savage brilliancy, there dwells a race whose qualities seem to harmonise with their environment. . . . Every man is a warrior, a politician and a theologian. Every large house is a real feudal fortress made, it is true, only of sun-baked clay, but with battlements, turrets, loop-holes, flanking towers, drawbridges, etc. complete. Every village has its defence. . . . Every family cultivates its vendetta,

> every clan its feud. The numerous tribes and combinations of tribes have their accounts to settle. Nothing is ever forgotten and very few debts are left unpaid.
>
> Into this happy world, the nineteenth century brought two new facts: the breech-loading rifle and the British government. The first was welcomed as an enormous luxury and blessing; the second treated as no more than an unmitigated nuisance!. . . . The convenience of breech-loading, and still more of the magazine, rifle was nowhere more appreciated. . . . (A Roving Commission. The Mamund Valley)

Of course history marches on; old style empires disappear and new nations emerge with new ambitions or new concerns. Technology advances and weapons become more destructive but the will to independence keeps matching the will to conquest. The Duke of Wellington, as good a military strategist in his time as any, may have had far-seeing wisdom when at the time of the disastrous First Afghan War he cautioned from London, "Our military success will only be the beginning of our political problems."

The Duke of Wellington's caution translates into non-alignment and non-intervention in today's times. The militarily weak are strong in defiance, but if left alone, they will not be the instruments of contending powers in what they perceive as extraneous confrontations. The Afghan still insists on being master in his own homeland. It was in nobody's interest that he should be used merely as a convenient argument. A Swedenised South and Southwest Asia followed by a Finlandized Afghanistan may provide a way out from the impasse created by the failures and frustrations of super-power globalism and give greater hope for stability to a region which is of importance to the whole world.

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