

**AFGHANISTAN AND THE MAJOR POWERS, 1979-2011:
THE INTERFACE OF GEOPOLITICAL AND
GEO-ECONOMIC FACTORS**

**A thesis submitted during 2012 to the University of Hyderabad in partial
fulfillment of the award of a Ph.D. degree in Political Science**

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DECLARATION

I, Manoj Kumar Mishra, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**Afghanistan and the Major Powers, 1979-2011: The Interface of Geopolitical and Geo-economic Factors**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Prithvi Ram Mudiam, Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad, is an original research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Afghanistan and the Major Powers, 1979-2011: The Interface of Geopolitical and Geo-economic Factors**” submitted by Mr. Manoj Kumar Mishra bearing Regd. No. 05SPPH09 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science is an original research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Acknowledgements

Ph.D. thesis writing is a journey with full of challenges and rigorous tasks; but it can also be personally fulfilling and even enjoyable. During this process, I have been accompanied by an awesome group of people who have supported me in multiple ways. I take this opportunity with much pleasure to thank all the people who have helped me throughout the course of my journey towards producing this thesis. It is a pleasure to convey my gratitude to all of them.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Prithvi Ram Mudiam for his diligent guidance, immense patience and motivation throughout the course of my research work. He has been always available for discussion and has encouraged me with his constant co-operation. Without his inspirational guidance, enthusiasm, encouragements and help, my thesis would not have taken this shape.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Aloka Parasher Sen , Dean, School of Social Sciences, for providing the necessary facilities and environment in the school to carry out my research work. I am also grateful to Prof. Arun Kumar Patnaik, Head, Department of Political Science for doing the same in the department. I also thank and acknowledge all the faculty members of the Department of Political Science, for their kind cooperation and contributions to my learning.

I thank the office staff of the Department of Political Science their cooperation. I thank all the staff of IGM Library and Computer Centre for their kind cooperation. I thank the staff of all the libraries that I visited, for the same reason.

I also thank my friends for providing support and encouragement that I needed. I am indebted to my friends in various facets of life for providing an environment which helped me learn more. Life would not have been the same without them. They stood by me at every juncture and gave me moral and academic support in attaining my goals.

Without my parents' unconditional love and care, I would not have been able to gather the required patience for my research work. My family has been a great source of inspiration to me. I express my hearty reverence to all my family members, whose enormous confidence and faith in me enabled me to complete my doctoral thesis.

Finally, I express my profound indebtedness to God for all His blessings.

Manoj Kumar Mishra

Preface

The thesis comprises six chapters. Each chapter except the introductory one examines the interests and role of a specific major power in Afghanistan after the Soviet military intervention in 1979. The major powers under study are the Soviet Union/Russia, the US, Iran, Pakistan and India.

The introductory chapter provides the background to other chapters. It describes the geography, evolutionary process, and nature of the Afghan state, which facilitated or hindered the policies and objectives of the major powers in Afghanistan in long-term. The chapter also deals with the interests and policy of major powers towards Afghanistan till the period of Soviet military intervention.

The second chapter examines the interests and policy of the Soviet Union/Russia towards Afghanistan. In order to understand the Soviet role after its military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, an attempt has been made to explain whether its role was driven by ideology or geopolitics and secondly, to analyse whether the Soviet role was defensive primarily motivated as a reaction to the US and Pakistan's role in strengthening insurgency against the communist government in Afghanistan or it was offensive in nature. The chapter examines the shifts in the Russian policy towards Afghanistan after the Soviet disintegration.

The third chapter provides an account of the shifts in the American role in Afghanistan with the change of the power position of the Soviet Union and emergence of new conventional threats like Iran and Iraq and non-conventional threats like terrorism. The chapter also describes the deepening of American interest in Afghanistan after the emergence of Central Asia as a hub of natural resources and the corresponding role to defend its interests. It analyses as to how the US-led War on Terror was devised by America to defend and promote its interests in Central Asia after the Taliban moved away from its orbit of influence and its policies towards Central Asia received a setback.

The fourth chapter deals with the Pakistani role in Afghanistan being shaped by the controversial Durand Line, presence of powerful adversary to its east and desire to expand influence into the former Soviet Islamic states and later into Central Asian states after their independence. The chapter seeks to analyse the opportunities and the problems underlying the Pakistani drive since the Soviet intervention to the present phase of War on Terror.

The fifth chapter deals with the shifts in Iran's interest and policy towards Afghanistan. Iran's role has transformed from being an American satellite till 1979 to an independent regional player after the Islamic Revolution which also shaped Iran's role in Afghanistan after the Soviet military intervention. The second shift took place after the Soviet disintegration when Iran considered Afghanistan as a corridor to increase its influence in the energy rich Central Asia. The chapter analyses Iran's role both as a reaction to the American policy towards Afghanistan and Central Asia and its interest to see itself as an independent player in the region.

The sixth chapter examines India's ambiguous stance on the question of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan from different perspectives. It also takes into account the changes in India's policy towards Afghanistan after the Soviet disintegration.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANA:	Afghan National Army
BRO:	Border Roads Organisation
CENTO:	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS:	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CORF	Collective Operational Reaction Forces
CPSU:	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EAEC	Eurasian Economic Community
FATA:	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
IPI:	Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline
ISAF:	International Security Assistance Force
ISI:	Inter-Services Intelligence
JUI:	Jamiat-e-Islami
KGB:	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosty
KHAD:	Kedmat-e-Elela'at-e-Dawlati
LCA:	Light Combat Aircraft
LOC:	Line of Control
MEA:	Ministry of External Affairs
MMA:	Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal
MOD:	Ministry of Defence
NAM:	Non-Aligned Movement
NMD:	National Missile Defence
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFF:	National Fatherland Front
NWFP:	North-West Frontier Province
PDPA:	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PML-N:	Pakistan Muslim League
PPP:	Pakistan People's Party

SAARC:	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SALT:	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SCO	Sanghai Cooperation Organisation
SEATO:	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
TAP:	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline
UN:	United Nations
UNOCAL	Union Oil Company of California
US:	United States
USSR:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WoT:	War on Terror

Contents

	Page No
Declaration	i
Certificate	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Map	iv
Preface	v-vi
Abbreviations	vii-viii
 CHAPTER - I	
Introduction	1-40
 CHAPTER-II	
USSR/Russia and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Miscalculation and Misadventure	41-75
 CHAPTER – III	
US and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Cold War Calculations to Global ‘War on Terror’	76- 114
 CHAPTER - IV	
Pakistan and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: From Frontline state to ‘Failed state’	115-148
 CHAPTER – V	
Iran and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Ambition for a Regional Role	149-180
 CHAPTER – VI	
India and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: A Minor Player in the ‘Great Game’	181-212
 Conclusion	213-222
 Bibliography	223-242
 Appendix	



CHAPTER I

Introduction

Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia and shares its border with the Central Asia on the north, Chinese province of Xinjiang on the east, Iran on the west and south west, Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir on the south and south-east.¹ Therefore, Afghanistan is situated in the midst of many important regions of the world.

Afghanistan's geo-strategic situation as a Rimland country joining Eurasian Heartland with the Indian Ocean has enhanced its importance in World Politics. Nicholas J. Spykman modified Halford J. Mackinder's Heartland theory and argued that the real potential of Eurasia lay in what Mackinder called the Inner or Marginal Crescent, not in the Heartland. He called this area of power potential Rimland and produced another formula: "who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world".² Afghanistan as a geopolitical entity contained three most significant passes namely Khyber, Gomal and Khojak and a corridor like Wakhan that joined the Heartland with the Indus lowlands. The geo-strategic supremacy of the Rimland lies in its vulnerability to both land and sea power and in its potentiality to facilitate multidimensional strategies based on both land and sea. For the British Empire and later for the US, control over Afghanistan was vital to spread their influence into the Heartland to develop continental strategy. Similarly, for Czarist Russia and later for the Soviet Union, Afghanistan provided the way to the Indian Ocean to develop a naval strategy. Furthermore, controlling Afghanistan in Soviet perception was to gain land connectivity with Pakistan, India and China. According to Robert Jackson, Russia and Pakistan were separated by the carefully negotiated strip of Afghan territory that gave Afghanistan a common frontier with China. And beyond the Wakhan strip, Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir interposed another barrier between India and Russia.³

Afghanistan's geostrategic situation in the midst of other important regions of Asia facilitated its growth both as a trade route and route for military invasion. Afghanistan, invaded frequently by different rulers, slowly began to emerge as a trade route through which merchants and traders moved onto other lands. Later due to depredations of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, traders sought an alternative route to the Orient. The opening of the sea lanes in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries affected Afghanistan's importance as a commercial crossroad. Still the importance of land routes remained and trade with the Central Asia and Iran was carried through silk routes in parallel with the sea routes. In similar vein, Afghanistan remained a potential route for military invasion since the time of Alexander the Great who coveted Afghanistan as a stepping stone to conquests in India.⁴ Historically, Afghanistan provided the only possible line of attack on India for the Czarist Russia. There were two routes that a Russian army might have followed. One would be from Tashkent and Samarakand through Balkh and Kulm to Kabul and on to India by the Khyber pass or the Kuram route. The other would be by way of Baku and the Caspian to Merv down to Herat and on to Kandahar in Afghanistan.⁵ In the modern times, Afghanistan has been considered important to maintain influence in the adjacent regions rather than as a route for military invasion.

All these facts make Afghanistan geopolitically important not only for regional powers but also for the extra-regional powers like the British Empire in the nineteenth century and the US in the twentieth century. The geo-strategic location that Afghanistan enjoys is rarely found in world politics. This fact, rather being a boon for Afghanistan, has become a bane for it. It has become a victim in the old Great Game in the nineteenth century between the Russian and British Empires, in the Cold War period between the US and USSR and in the new Great Game going on in the twenty first century with multiple players.

Despite all the lures that the geo-strategic situation of Afghanistan offers, the internal geography of Afghanistan has been a hindrance for the major powers to realise their geopolitical objectives. Its terrain is spectacularly varied, with mountains rising over 7000 metres, broad rivers feeding fertile lands alternating with inhospitable deserts. Travelling around this landscape is difficult, for roads are sometimes so poor that neither horse nor donkey can climb the precipitous trails.⁶

Ethnic composition

Afghanistan is a multiethnic society, where the main groups are the Pashtuns, the Sunni Persian-speakers, the Uzbeks and the Shiah Hazaras, to which can be added a large number of other groups such as Turkmens, Nuristanis, Balochs, Pasha'is. Approximately, the Pashtuns represent 44 per cent of the entire Afghan population while Tajiks, the Hazara and the Uzbeks, represent 25%, 10% and 8% respectively.⁷ Geographical contiguity, racial and religious affinity

and trans-border interaction for a long time provided the ground for cross-border fraternisation between the people of Central Asia and adjoining Afghanistan. For the Central Asian states, Northern Afghanistan has been an area of strategic importance. There are about 4 millions Tajiks, 1.7 million Uzbeks, 0.6 million Turkmen in Northern Afghanistan who share their culture with their counterparts in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan respectively. On the western frontier, for most part of the history, Iran and Afghanistan belonged to the same sphere of influence. Most parts of the Afghan region were for a long time part of Iranian Empires. Herat is considered to be the area of natural influence by Iran.⁸ On the eastern frontier, there was constant movement of people across the border though the Durand Line demarcated the border between Afghanistan and the British Empire. The border currently exists in the treaty but not in practice. This line became the bone of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan after the Indian sub-continent was divided.

The Great Game between British Empire and Czarist Russia

In the nineteenth century, the British became wary of Tsarist Russia's expansion into Central Asia and of eventual menace that such expansion might hold for India. British invaded Afghanistan twice in the nineteenth century to preempt what they perceived as Russian threat to take over that country. Russia's only possible line of attack on India would have had to be through Afghanistan. It is because of impassable terrain, religious unity and aversion of people towards foreign occupation in Afghanistan, British was forced out of Afghanistan. Most of the experts on Afghanistan argue that the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42) was prompted by fears that a Russian-supported Persia was preparing to annex Herat, the western key to control Afghanistan, and that Russia would then use this as a springboard against India. Britain's attempt to place a puppet on the throne in Kabul ended in disaster but British did seize Peshawar, the southern terminus of the Khyber Pass and principal invasion route of the Indian subcontinent. However, it was not always the British fear of Russia's role in Afghanistan that determined its action. When the British invaded Afghanistan in 1839, there was little fear of any countervailing force interfering. Even though the British used the presence of a Russian envoy in Kabul as a pretext, there was no immediate Russian threat. After the capture of Kabul, the British had every intention of maintaining an occupying force in the country.⁹ But following an unsuccessful year of pacification, mass rebellion flared up, and the British force was destroyed. Thus the British at

times followed a pro-active policy to spread its influence towards the large Eurasian continental expanse but unsuccessfully.

Russia's defeat at the hands of Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire in the Crimean War (1854-56) stimulated its further advance into Central Asia. Russia suspected that the British and the Ottoman Turks were intriguing to sow unrest along its borders in the Caucasus and Central Asia. When the British war against Persia in 1856 compelled Persia to leave Herat in Afghan hands and induced Dost Muhammad Khan to pursue a policy of friendship with Britain, Moscow saw Afghanistan as having fallen into the British sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Russia's conquest of Bukhara opened the road to Afghanistan which led to the culmination of a "gentleman's agreement" that accepted Afghanistan's northern border as the Oxus River, which rises in the Himalayas and flows several thousand miles, eventually emptying into the landlocked Aral Sea. However, tensions did not subside as Russia added Khiva to its Central Asian conquests, and Britain was worried as to where it would stop. In 1876-78 the two Empires came close to war when Moscow, flush from victories over the faltering Ottoman Turks, made a drive for the Turkish Straits and sent a strong military mission to Kabul.¹⁰

Moscow was kept from the Straits at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 which also led to the withdrawal of Russian mission from Kabul. However, the British Viceroy Lord Lytton's fear that the Russians might return strengthened the British belief that the Indian Empire could be saved and its interests north to Afghanistan be served if Afghans accepted a permanent British presence in Kabul. Britain managed Afghanistan's foreign policy after the conclusion of the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-81) after paying a stiff price in the War.

However, the Great Game continued. In 1885, Russia advanced beyond the city of Merv to a near-confrontation with the Afghans who claimed the area of Panjdeh Oasis. Britain backed Amir Abdur Rahman who ruled Afghanistan from 1881 to 1901. The crisis subsided, a boundary commission produced a compromise, and in July 1887 the rest of the Russo-Afghan border was established in the northwest, where the Oxus River turns sharply into Russian territory. After eight years, the two Empires fixed Afghanistan's northeast boundary in the Wakhan area of Pamirs. This is how power realities and interests of the two great powers led to the establishment of 1200 miles Russo-Afghan border in the 19th Century.

It is argued that Soviet interest in Afghanistan at times waxed and waned depending on its relationship with the adversary power. For example, in early 1920s, the British strongly supported the counter-revolutionary movement in Russia and therefore, the Bolsheviks and Amanullah had a mutual antipathy for the British and Soviet regime emerged as the major international ally for King Amanullah. However, after the Soviets had defeated the counter-revolutionary forces and re-established relationship with the British, their interest in Afghanistan waned. It became apparent when the Soviet Union made only a feeble effort to support the King against the tribal uprisings. According to Leon B. Poullada, "Soviet support, ... was too little and came too late to save Amanullah".¹¹ Nevertheless, some scholars point out that the factors that prevented an active Soviet role in Afghanistan were not rooted in friendship or alliance either between Britain and Russia. Russians believed that British had a hand in the overthrow of Amanullah. K.B. Usha notes that when Bacha-i-Saqao captured power, the Soviet Union reached with its troops under the command of Ghulam Nabi Charkhi, the Afghan ambassador to Moscow, to help Amanullah. However, due to Basmachi¹² resistance against the Soviet troops, Ghulam Nabi was forced to stop fighting and later he withdrew troops when he came to know that Amanullah fled from Afghanistan.¹³ However, the most important factor leading to Amanullah's defeat was ideological. Bacha-i-Saqao was a peasant leader and Amanullah represented the ruling class. Therefore, Soviet Union's support for the latter could not be strong in fear of lacking support from its own masses.¹⁴ On 13 October 1929, Muhammad Nadir Shah took the throne after assassinating Bacha-i-Saqao. He dismissed Soviet advisors, pilots and engineers who came to Afghanistan by Amanullah's invitation and asked Ghulam Nabi to retire from Afghanistan permanently who had returned to Kabul from his Central Asian exile. Later, Ghulam Nabi's contacts with Primakov and his courage to revolt against Nadir Shah gave grounds to suspicions that he had got Soviet backing.¹⁵

Rapprochement between the rivals of the Great Game depended on a number of factors. In 1893, the boundary between Afghanistan and the British Empire had been defined by Russian and British design. The Durand line split ethnic groups: Uzbeks and Tajiks between Afghanistan and Russia, and Pashtuns and Baluchis between Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan. Both the Pashtuns and the Baluchis have since sought reunification with their brethren. Russia and Britain were content with these divisions, however, perhaps because it gave both an opportunity to use

these splits for policy advantage. Changing balance of power in Europe compelled both to join hands. While under the terms of the Treaty of Berlin (1878), Russia was restrained from acquiring further Turkish booty and territory by the British and the Germans, in England, there was a growing awareness of the expanding German threat. Russia being bankrupt required trade concessions and foreign loans to finance its imperialist ambitions and to compete with other powers and therefore drew France onto the scene. France encouraged Russia to come to an agreement with Britain in Central and Southwest Asia. The outcome of the agreement was the partition of Persia into spheres of influence, with Russia in the north, Britain in the southeast, and a buffer in the middle. There was to be no intervention in Tibet and Britain was to have greater influence in Afghanistan.¹⁶ According to Miron Rezun, 1907 treaty between the British and Russian Empires, which is said to have marked the end of the first stage of the Great Game, was not an alliance between them. It was merely a means of easing tension.¹⁷

Though some experts argued that the Great Game ended abruptly in 1907, when a worsening strategic position elsewhere impelled Russia to reach an accommodation with Britain, the Great Game continued unabated. Threatened in the Far East by Japan and in Europe by Germany, Russia thought Afghanistan was not worth jeopardising the prospect of friendship with Britain at a time when it desperately needed allies. However, after the Bolshevik seizure of power, Russia encouraged Afghan independence and took an anti-British orientation. Accordingly, it was the first government to enter into diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, recognising it in May 1919 and concluding a treaty of friendship on February 28, 1921. Under this treaty, the Soviet Union guaranteed the independence of the Bokhara region just north of Afghanistan. But by 1923, the USSR had absorbed Bokhara completely.¹⁸

Emergence of Afghanistan as a Modern State

The year 1747 is generally accepted as the year that Afghanistan was founded as distinctive nation-state, though borders were not completely fixed until the 1890s. Afghanistan's development as a modern state and its foreign policy was shaped in response to the powerful presence of great powers like the Russian and the British Empires in the Indian subcontinent. Afghanistan was made a buffer state between these great powers which shaped its neutral foreign policy because to favour one power and antagonize another would make intervention of the other power a possibility. Furthermore, the boundaries laid down to demarcate Afghanistan as a buffer

state provided it with an important element of state that is territory. Exercising political power within a specific territory led to the growth of Afghanistan as a modern state though its power to make independent foreign policy was severely constrained and attempt to create a centralised authority was seriously challenged by the presence of many centrifugal forces. The flipside of the boundaries that territorially shaped Afghanistan was they were designs of great powers to maintain their sphere of influence.

The expansionist move by one power towards Afghanistan was checked by the other power which took the help of Afghan rulers to thwart the imperial design finally leading to negotiations. The “gentleman’s agreement” in 1873 accepted Afghanistan’s northern border as the Oxus (Amu Darya) river. In July 1887, the rest of the Russo-Afghan border was established in the northwest. Eight years later the two great powers fixed Afghanistan’s northeast boundary in the Wakhan area of Pamirs. The south and southeast border, interposed between Afghanistan and British Empire was laid down in 1893 after Sir Mortimer Durand pressured Abdur Rahman to accept it as a cartographic line of convenience designed to augment the security of India. The boundary-making which created Afghanistan into an effective buffer between Russia and British Empire went a long way in granting Afghanistan a demarcated territory and much needed leverage to become a modern state.

Besides, Afghanistan’s emergence as a modern state was also a result of consolidation and legitimisation of power by its rulers. Abdur Rahman Khan who ruled Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901 is known for his centralization of power in the history of Afghanistan while his grandson Amanullah is known for his reforms bringing legitimacy to his rule. Abdur Rahman centralised power by breaking the military power of the tribes and peoples of all regions of Afghanistan, collecting taxes from them and by establishing a centralised military, administrative and judicial system. He could do so because of the financial and military subsidies he received from the British Empire. Rahman established the basic institutional framework of the Afghan state. He appointed professional administrators and generals rather than family members. Using his coercive apparatus, he penetrated the Afghan economy deeply collecting direct taxes on agricultural produce and land, in addition to the subsidies from British India. By suppressing the military-political organizations based in Afghanistan’s regions and subjecting the people to a hierarchical, centralized and absolutist system of rule, he was able to transfer rulership

peacefully and legally to his line of descent.

King Amanullah Khan, grandson of Abdur Rahman in a bid to legitimise his rule gave Afghanistan its first constitution in 1923, its first budget, and first development programme. His government divided the four large provinces of Afghanistan into ten smaller ones and appointed military generals as governors-general over regional groupings of provinces. Reduction of the size of provinces was aimed to increase the leverage of the administration and break up the society into more manageable and smaller units, while the governors-general served as trouble shooters, assuring the governors' loyalty to Kabul and adherence to rules. The constitution of 1923 mentioned "decentralisation of power" as one of the principles of the administration, but this seemed to refer to devolution of power to the officer in the field rather than to the people themselves. Besides, both Abdur Rahman and Amanullah invoked the symbols of Islam to consolidate and legitimise their control over Afghan population. The state did not attempt to legitimate itself in the name of Pashtun nationalism, culture or language until the 1930s. However, Nadir Shah who entered Afghanistan from British India and received exemptions from conscription and taxation from British Empire engaged in punitive raids against the Tajik areas north of Kabul, including Panjshir and kidnapping women among other forms of loot. He laid the foundation of ethnicisation of politics in Afghanistan. The role of outside powers has always affected the power balance already existing in a multi-ethnic society like Afghanistan.¹⁹

Even while centralising their authority, the rulers depended on foreign powers for subsidies and assistance to gain control over tribal population. However, the centralisation of power was very often resisted by the local forces led by feudal landowners and religious clerics who at times promoted foreign powers' intervention and assistance to oppose the state. Lack of resources for development and lack of communication and trade links among various regions caused by rugged mountains and the harsh climate kept Afghanistan economically poor and underdeveloped and created the imperative of modernisation. For modernisation also Afghanistan had to be dependent on foreign powers that had a geopolitical stake in the country. In the midst of all kinds of pulls and pressures, the rulers of Afghanistan have tried to build an independent and neutral Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's struggle for independence and neutrality

The character of Afghanistan being a small and poor state without a strong centralised authority tempted both the Russian and British Empires and later the US in the Cold War period to win it away to its own side. Multiple ethnic groups in Afghanistan in their association with external powers created different zones of influence in the country. The presence of major powers near Afghanistan's border limited the foreign policy options for the country.

But Afghanistan tried to maintain its border through a number of policy measures. The first policy measure was- not to introduce modernisation in the country so as to leave Afghanistan impassable and with less economic incentives for the external powers. The second was to maintain complete neutrality in the external relationship with the major powers and not allowing any third power to meddle. The third was playing one power against another in other areas of conflict so as to carefully avoid the military move of the major powers into its territory. The fourth was supporting a power which has the clear chance of winning the game. The last one was jihad i.e. mustering religious strength cutting across ethnic groups to force the external power out.

In the nineteenth century, two wars fought by the Afghans against the British made the latter so uncomfortable that they withdrew within a few years. The Russians probably believed that they might face the same situation if they invaded Afghanistan and recalled that their own efforts to pacify mountain Muslims in the Caucasus had taken a full sixty-five years. Therefore, they prudently stayed away. By the end of the century Russia and Britain had reached agreement that British would control Afghanistan's foreign policy but would not occupy the country or try to manage its internal affairs and Russia formally conceded that Afghanistan falls outside its sphere of influence.

Abdur Rahman believed that the very backwardness was vital to continued Afghan internal self-determination. As long as the country remained poor and inaccessible, it would be unattractive to those with imperial designs. The fastest way to build a modern military deterrent against foreign encroachment would be to develop the nation's economy with the foreign investment, but to take that course would be to invite the enslavement it was designed to forestall. Though Rahman relied on British subsidies and military assistance for centralising power, he

was averse to any loss of Afghan sovereignty.

For Rahman, national independence took precedence over other considerations, with unification of the warring tribes that made up the country taking a close second. Only after these two goals had been secured would he be willing to tolerate the foreign investment necessary for economic development. He was opposed to any kind of railroad construction in the country because once a railroad was built, the foreign troops could be called in at anytime to protect foreign investments or, indeed, merely at the whim of any great power neighbour and Afghanistan's primitive military forces would be helpless to stop them.²⁰

After the death of Abdur Rahman in 1901, his son Habibullah modernized the country by introducing the automobile, photography, and hydroelectric power to Afghanistan. He also permitted far more domestic freedom than his father. Particularly, he permitted émigrés whom Abdur Rahman had exiled to return to Afghanistan and to become politically active. Habibullah reigned at a time when pan-Islamism was spreading, and the phenomenon found reflection in his court. There were three factions, all of them anti-British and pro-Turkish in their sympathies. First, there were conservative-clericals, who saw in Turkey a state that was grappling successfully with the necessary evil of modernisation while still retaining Islam as the anchoring foundation. Secondly, there were moderates, who viewed with favour Turkish modernisation and thirdly there were modern-nationalists, the most anti-British, pro-Turkish of the three, who saw in the Turkish reforms changes that might be introduced in Afghanistan, but at a much faster pace than in Turkey, once their feasibility had been demonstrated.²¹

There was considerable pressure on Habibullah to join Central Powers in their war with Britain and Russia. But the Amir was well aware of the geographic distance between Afghanistan and the Central Powers and the immediacy of his British and Russian borders. In spite of the agitation by the modernist-nationalists for a jihad against the British, he maintained neutrality throughout the war. Habibullah followed a course of relatively benevolent neutrality toward Britain.²²

After Habibullah was assassinated, his son Amanullah came to power. Amanullah had two motives to work in line with modernist-nationalist sympathizers and shed a neutral course, which was pro-British in character. Amanullah declared war against the British. Although there is no

available record of any Soviet military commitment to Afghanistan in 1919, Amanullah might have been confident at the least of Soviet financial backing. Since the days of Abdur Rahman, the British had provided an annual subsidy of more than one million rupees for the Afghan economy. By opening hostilities, Amanullah cut himself off from this support. The USSR obligated itself to supply one million rubbles annually to the Afghans according to a treaty on September 13, 1920.²³

Despite Soviet aid and three Anglo-Afghan Wars, endless campaigns in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and Pathan irredentism, Amanullah feared Russia more than Britain. First, the Soviet suppression of Muslim separatism in Central Asia in the 1920s and efforts to extirpate religion drove thousands of Tajik and Uzbek refugees to Afghanistan and soured Kabul's attitude towards the communist regime. Indeed, on a number of occasions, Soviet troops pursued rebel Basmachi leaders onto Afghan soil. Second, communist agitation in Afghanistan alerted the leadership to the subversive aims of the Soviet Union. Finally, the Afghan elite had been educated in London, Paris, and Berlin, and their ideas of modernisation were Western, not communist. Meanwhile, Amanullah had been indulging rather freely in international intrigue. He had not only lent support to the Basmachi in Soviet Central Asia, but he had closed his eyes to British activities in the same field.²⁴ At the same time, he had not objected in principle to passage of men and arms from the Soviet Union through Afghanistan on their way to stir up trouble in North West Frontier Province of British India, though he insisted that the two proceeded separately, the arms to be under strict Afghan control during passage.

Afghanistan's support for the Basmachi movement

During Amanullah's regime, Afghanistan was active helping the emir of Bukhara and the Khan of Khiva to defend them against the Red Army and to suppress indigenous revolutionaries. What Afghans had in mind was the formation of a Central Asian confederation, with Kabul as the dominant power. Such a confederation would have provided an excellent buffer against Russian encroachments from the north, as well as furthering Afghanistan's own pan-Islamic aspirations. Amanullah opened diplomatic relations with Bukhara and Khiva in order to give them legal recognition as sovereign states.²⁵ He also wanted to include Turkestan in his projected confederation. To achieve that objective the Afghans gave direct support and discreet aid to the Basmachi, partisans who continued to resist the Soviet control in the Central Asian region.

There are two aspects of Basmachi movement that deserve attention. First, it was durable. Regular armed clashes with the Red Army went on for at least fifteen years, from 1917 to 1932. Secondly, they were well-versed in asymmetric warfare. They harassed Soviet army by various means and had the loyalty of local population. Enver Pasha was the most famous Basmachi leader who became a nationalist Bolshevik in Soviet Union. He persuaded Soviet authorities that he could rally the Central Asian Muslims into an anti-British jihad, and using Afghanistan as a base, drive the English from India. With Soviet backing he went off to Bukhara but in November 1921, under cover of hunting trip, he defected to the Basmachi. In early 1922, he helped rally and unite various Basmachi bands, quickly building an army of some twenty thousand.²⁶

Afghanistan's people support for the Basmachi movement was a key to its sustenance for a long time. Their sympathy permitted Basmachi bands to cross at will over a border too difficult for the Red Army to patrol effectively.²⁷ There was also support from the British Empire to continue the Great Game. But the USSR was eventually able to quell the movement. A Soviet-Afghan treaty was the result of this. It ruled out any further Afghan support to the Basmachi. Soviet Union also promised to back away from its role in creating troubles in NWFP of India. Amanullah played one power against the other in other areas and not involving his territory to be used by major powers. The measures undertaken by Afghanistan to ensure its neutrality status point to the complexity of the context within which the major powers pursued imperialist policies. Both pan-Islamism and NWFP of India became major irritants in the conduct of foreign policies of major powers in relation to Afghanistan later.

Bacha-e-Sequoao came to power after Amanullah was overthrown from power due to the reforms he brought about to change the Afghanistan's traditional society. But Bacha-e-Sequoao could continue in power only for nine months. Nader Shah returned to Afghanistan with the tacit British aid and captured power. Though Nader Shah suffered setbacks at the hands of Bacha-e-Sequoao's ragged army, the infusion of a few more Soviet troops would have turned the tide. Soviet leadership supported Amanullah instead of Bacha-e-Sequoao.

It is argued that ideologically, it was a wrong decision as the latter was a peasant leader and the former was a hereditary monarch. Soviet support for the latter was difficult to explain to the foreign idealists who made up so much of the USSR's support abroad. Furthermore, from a

practical standpoint Bacha-e-Sequoao was already in power and would have been much easier for the USSR to champion than to overthrow. When the USSR opted to support Amanullah it did so in such a hesitant, ineffective way that it lost more than it would have if it had nothing at all.²⁸ Nader Shah tried to maintain the neutrality of Afghanistan not by engaging the major powers in conflict with one another as Amanullah did. Rather he tried to put an end to the Afghan support to the Basmachi movement and the USSR's support to the ethnic problems in NWFP leading to separatist tendencies in India. After Nader Shah was assassinated in 1933, Zahir Shah succeeded to the throne.

Emergence of Germany as a third major power in the Region

Afghanistan was always on the lookout for a strong third power in the region which could put the influence of the two Empires at bay. Following his successful incorporation of the Sudetenland into the Third Reich, Hitler signed with the USSR a nonaggression treaty that permitted the latter to occupy the Baltic States, Moldavia, eastern Poland and parts of Finland in 1940s.²⁹ Soviet appreciation of these opportunities was not only expressed in propaganda support for Germany against British imperialism, but more concretely, in trade that supplied food and raw materials to the German economy. In 1941, the Nazi attack on the USSR had changed the USSR from a tacit Axis ally to a blood enemy. Though both the USSR and Britain were on the defensive and very hard pressed by the Axis, they had acted jointly to eliminate an effort to enlist Iran on the axis side. Had the Axis effort been successful, it would have secured Iranian oil for Germany and sealed off the USSR's southern flank as a supply route from the West. In Afghanistan, the family oligarchy around Zahir Shah looked primarily to Germany for industrial and technical assistance.³⁰ But the war seriously undermined the country's halting steps toward economic development, because Britain and the USSR pressured Kabul to terminate all ties with Germany, its principal source of assistance. Thus, Russia and Britain combined their efforts to save the geopolitically important region falling into the hands of another major power. Balance of power was maintained in the region by preventing the region from falling into the hands of any single major power.

British India and Afghanistan and its implication for Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relationship

The British in India initially adopted the 'policy of masterful inactivity' or 'closed border policy' towards the Pashtun tribal areas that straddled the border between India and Afghanistan. From the very beginning, the Durand Line was not an international border but a line of control (LoC). The Simon Commission Report of 1930 explicitly stated, "British India stopped at the boundary of the administered area".³¹ The Durand Line, which formally split the Pashtuns in Afghanistan from their co-ethnics in India, however, never existed in real terms. The tribes and particularly the nomadic groups moved across the border without proper control because of difficult terrain full of hills and forest. More importantly, the tribal groups have shown their willingness to establish relationship with each other across the border in defiance of the Durand Line. This was exemplified by numerous tribal uprisings in protest against the British forward policy and the Durand Line. Till the British Empire existed, successive rulers of Afghanistan accepted the Durand Line by entering into treaties with the British government willy-nilly. Perhaps, the prevailing power realities demanded so. Nevertheless, Kabul continued to exercise influence among tribes, believing in any case that it could control them better than the British from either Peshawar or Delhi.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his younger brother Dr. Khan Sahib dominated the politics of North West Frontier Province through their Khudai Khitmatgar Movement in the larger context of sub-continent politics. Being an ardent nationalist, he opposed to the province's inclusion into the newly created state, Pakistan and his movement sought an independent and sovereign 'Pashtunistan' with the support of Congress Party. But Pakistan being considered a legitimate successor to the British Empire like India, Pashtuns were given only the choice of joining a predominantly Hindu India or a Muslim Pakistan. Pashtuns opted for the latter. The movement to create an independent Pashtunistan, however, continued. Afghanistan was the only state in the world, which opposed Pakistan's entry into the United Nations in September 1947 due to the unresolved issue of Pashtunistan.³² This affected the bilateral relationship between the two countries from the very beginning of their coming into contact with each other. It was quite hurtful for Pakistan to receive such treatment from a fellow Muslim country, which faced difficulties in its transition into statehood and a potential threat from India. Immediately after the

British transfer of power, armed tribal incursions were encouraged by Afghanistan into Pakistan's tribal areas. Pakistan became susceptible to attack from both the sides – on the western side from Afghanistan and on the east from India and Pakistan military was too weak to face threat from both the sides concurrently. Tribal incursions on the west continuously led Pakistan to take recourse to aerial bombing of an Afghan village in 1949 which, in reprisal, led Afghan Loya Jirga to adopt a resolution repudiating all the nineteenth century treaties with British India including agreement on Durand Line.

The geopolitical interest underlying the Pashtunistan movement has been to gain territory which has an access to the sea. So far all the trade routes to south lie through the Pakistan's territory thus access to the sea is considered important to find an alternative route to become less dependent on Pakistan. For Pakistan, conceding the idea of independent Pashtunistan would deprive it of the geographic advantages that it has got vis-a-vis India to increase its trade with and influence in Afghanistan. It is primarily a geopolitical issue is borne out by the fact that Pashtunistan issue dominated Afghan foreign policy in the early 1960s despite the fact that it enjoyed little support among the Pashtuns of Pakistan. Daud sent a thousand Afghan soldiers disguised as Pashtun nomads and tribesmen infiltrated the Bajapur Agency of Pakistan's frontier tribal areas. And this infiltration was repelled by pro-Pakistani tribesmen.³³ Secondly, since Afghanistan has been ruled by Pushtuns historically for a long time, support for independent Pushtunistan has also the aim of further strengthening their role and identity in Afghanistan.

Great Game in the Cold War era: From Buffer state to Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

Afghanistan as geopolitical entity has been greatly shaped by the imperialist ambitions of both the traditional imperialist and neo-imperialist powers. After the Second World War, international norms were tightened against maintaining traditional empires and apart from that crunch in military and economic power led to the withdrawal of British Empire from the Indian subcontinent. The imperialist tendencies remained intact but it required different methods to fulfill that. The ideology of development played an important role in the Cold War period unlike the civilisational and ideological justification for physical occupation of territories of previous era. The major powers had to pursue their geopolitical and geoeconomic aspirations within the growing sovereign nation-state system. The imperialist tendencies required an ideological enemy that the US and the USSR found in each other. This provided the basis for Cold War and

neo-imperialism. Creating ideological blocs, military bases, installing pro-ideological government through regime change, engaging in proxy war to thwart regime change and winning away neutral but geo-strategically important states to its own ideological bloc are the characteristic of neo-imperialism. Afghanistan remained a buffer state between the US and the USSR in the Cold War time. In the Cold War period, Afghanistan was pressurized to sign South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and Baghdad pact but it did not.³⁴ Afghanistan's joining of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) can be understood in the Cold War context when it tried to avoid unnecessary interference of both the powers in its domestic affairs. But the need for development in case of Afghanistan and the great power's use of development as an ideology required shifts in its complete neutral policy.

Soviet Union and Afghanistan

Afghanistan's relationship with the Soviet Union had soured since the downfall of King Amanullah in 1929. The leadership in Afghanistan was not pleased with the Soviet Union's support to the resistance forces favouring the restoration of King Amanullah. King Nadir and his successor king Zahir remained cautious in their relationship with the Soviet Union and did not establish any cultural exchange programme until the mid-1950s, when King Zahir was convinced that such cultural exchange did not threaten political stability in the country. According to a 1950 United States National Intelligence Estimate, the Soviet Union had also shown no great interest in Afghanistan.³⁵ In 1948, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan ratified an agreement which precisely defined their common boundary line. Relations other than official were discouraged by the Afghan government in its desire to prevent the possible infiltration of Soviet agents and Soviet propaganda.

However, there are several theories which explain the lack of pro-active Soviet policy towards Afghanistan during this time given the latter's geopolitical importance for the former. One of the theories is that the USSR did not feel that Afghanistan represented any real barrier across the way to India, and that should military movement be required, Afghan resistance could be quickly brushed aside.³⁶ Another is that the Russians were glad to have the raw materials they were obtaining, and hence wished to avoid giving offence to the stubbornly proud Afghans. Those who held to this theory added that should the Afghan government decide to proceed with the

exploitation of oil in northwestern Afghanistan, the Russians would immediately become more active. A final theory is that the Russians realised that the adoption of a harsh policy toward Afghanistan would throw the country into the arms of the Western Powers, and at the same time alert Pakistan and India to the encroaching menace of Communism. According to this theory the Russians wished to avoid any unnecessary activities which would bring their ideological opponents up to the frontier and in touch with Muslim populated areas of the USSR which have always been restless and discontented under communist rule.³⁷ Therefore, the Soviet Union looked for a right moment to spread its influence in Afghanistan diplomatically.

The Soviet Union's restrained foreign policy shaped the US policy towards Afghanistan. When Afghanistan under the leadership of Shah Mahmood sought military aid from the US in 1944, this and subsequent requests for military assistance were ignored by the US governments on the grounds that "immediate Soviet objective is sufficiently served by the existing isolation and backwardness of the country (Afghanistan)," and since "the Soviet Union has no reason to be dissatisfied with the present situation...it is unlikely to develop a more active policy in that country under present circumstances."³⁸ The US's response to the Afghan request for military aid was shaped by the perceived role of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Therefore, the US rather than being disinterested in Afghanistan was cautious not to disturb the balance of power and allow unnecessary Soviet interference there.

Both the superpowers confined their role to meet the developmental needs of Afghanistan. Their own interest was to use Afghanistan as a showcase for the effectiveness of their own ideology and bring it to their sphere of influence. According to Hafizullah Emadi, "The two superpowers extended economic assistance to Afghanistan and subsequently increased their participation in the country's development projects with the hope of winning Afghanistan to their side".³⁹ The competitive character of superpowers' role in Afghanistan was best expressed by N.S. Krushchev when he articulated his country's policy towards Afghanistan thus: "I went there (Afghanistan) with Bulganin on our way back from India (in 1955). It was clear that America was courting Afghanistan...The Americans were undertaking all kinds of projects at their own expense...The Americans hardly bother to put a fig leaf over their self-centered, militaristic motives....It is my strong feeling that the capital we have invested in Afghanistan has not been wasted. We have earned the Afghan's trust and friendship, and it has not fallen into American trap; it has not been

caught on the hook baited with American money.”⁴⁰ Secondly, economic aid and participation in development projects were effectively linked with their respective geopolitical interests. For example, while the Soviets built highways connecting Kabul to the Soviet Union’s southern borders, the US built Kabul-Jalalabad and Kabul-Kandahar highways connecting Kabul to Pakistan borders of Peshawar and Quetta.

Therefore, the policy of economic assistance and participation in development projects in Afghanistan by one superpower was seriously viewed by another. For example, Afghan government requested the United Nations (UN) as early as 1949 for assistance in oil exploration. At the beginning the Soviet Union watched the UN activities in Afghanistan quietly, but later it thoroughly protested against the UN mission, condemning the “suspicious attitudes of the Americans” serving on it.⁴¹ Similarly, in order to thwart Soviet influence and encourage Afghanistan to distance herself from the Soviet Union and its bloc, Theodore L. Eliot, Jr., former US ambassador to Afghanistan, advised the Department of State that the United States must continue providing economic assistance to Afghanistan as a means to this end. A top secret memo from the US embassy in Kabul to the Department of State reads: “We continue to demonstrate our friendly and tangible interest through a visible American presence in this country.”⁴² The US loan to Afghanistan prior to the first Five-year plan was \$91.5 million as compared to \$5.6 million provided by the USSR. However, the USSR provided \$126.9 million during the first five year plan and \$258.3 million during the second five year plan as compared to the US’s loan of \$97.3 million and \$155.7 million for the first and second five year plan respectively.⁴³ The US looking for allies during the Cold War preferred Pakistan and Iran combination to Afghanistan. The latter had poor relationship with both Pakistan and Iran.⁴⁴

The collapse of Helmand Valley project because of improper land survey which failed to discover that there was substratum of impenetrable boulder conglomerates a few inches below the soil surface allowed the Soviet Union to play a major economic role in Afghanistan and more importantly helped in the growth and acceptance of the supporters of socialist ideology in the country. When the project collapsed, the state transferred many landless Pashtun peasants to the northern part of the country among other nationalities such as Uzbek, Turkman, and Tadjiks. It is due to this reason that Pashtun tribes got widely scattered throughout the country, especially in western and northern areas of the country where the indigenous people do not have any historical

ties with the Pashtun tribes. The arbitrary settlement of Pashtuns in other areas of the country was carried out through displacement of the indigenous population and appropriation of their landed properties. The implementation of this policy was followed by a bloody confrontation taking place between the new settlers and the local people. Peasant uprisings in rural areas became an everyday phenomenon. Meanwhile, a section of the ruling class within the state apparatus concentrated around Premier Mohammad Daoud were dissatisfied with political and economic developments in Afghanistan and opted for state guided economic development as an alternative development strategy and turned to the Soviet Union for economic and technical assistance. The Soviet Union loaned Afghanistan \$3.5 million to assist the country's development projects and to alleviate the agrarian problem in the country.⁴⁵ The Soviets participated in organising two big citrus fruit farms with a total area of 5,000 hectares in the Jalalabad Valley. These farms-Hadda and Ghaziabad-were the country's mechanised agricultural enterprises built by the Soviet Union absorbing most of the formerly landless peasants as workers. Collapse of Helmand project, rise of Pashtunistan issue and closure of border by Pakistan forbidding transferring Afghan goods through its territory during Daoud's premiership brought Soviet Union and Afghanistan into very close relationship. This came as an opportunity to the Soviet Union to expand its influence into Afghanistan and beyond it.

The US allowed the USSR to play a major economic role in Afghanistan. While the US's economic role was dominant prior to the first five year plan, the USSR's role became dominant during the first, second and third five year plans. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Allen Dulles believed that "The Soviets were inclined to look on Afghanistan much as the United States did on Guatemala".⁴⁶ However, the US was cautious of any Soviet role in Afghanistan undermining Afghan sovereignty.

When Premier Daoud requested military assistance from the US and sent his brother Mohammad Naim to Washington on 8 October 1954 to make a personal appeal to John Foster Dulles in this regard, two months later the US government informed the leadership in Afghanistan of its decision of withholding the delivery of military assistance to the country until the latter resolved the "Pashtunistan" dispute with the government of Pakistan. This was a form of coercive diplomacy that the US followed to bring Afghanistan to its sphere of influence. However, when Daoud turned to the Soviet Union for military assistance and renewed the Afghan-Soviet

Neutrality and Non-Aggression Treaty which was concluded between the two countries in 1931 for supply of military equipments, the US government got alarmed and revised its policy toward Afghanistan by providing small amount of military aid and scholarships for a limited number of military officers to study in the US. Approximately 487 military officers received training in the US from 1958 to 1978.⁴⁷

The geopolitical situation of the Soviet Union and the bilateral dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the Pashtunistan issue brought the USSR and Afghanistan into tight relationship economically and militarily. While Pakistan accepted the British imposed Durand Line of 1893 as the border between itself and Afghanistan, the latter declined. Once it became clear to Afghanistan that neither Britain nor Pakistan had any intention of holding a plebiscite to let the Pathans living on the Pakistani side of the border to choose whether to stay with Pakistan, to create an independent state of Pashtunistan or to merge with it, Afghanistan began to incite Pathan tribes and support movement for independence in NWFP. The USSR, which at times backtracked to pursue its interests beyond Afghanistan through it during the predominance of British Empire waited for a right moment to resume its traditional role soon after Britain left the Indian subcontinent.

As Pakistan closed its territory to obstruct Afghan trade in response to the demand of Pashtunistan by Afghans, the USSR was quick to sign a transit agreement with Kabul, allowing passage of Afghan goods across its territory. It also concluded a four-year trade pact in July 1950, greatly expanding the existing minimal trade. Pakistan cut off the importation of petroleum products into Afghanistan for about three months in 1950. The Soviet Union undertook to export oil products and cotton cloth, among other commodities to Afghanistan while Afghanistan would export wool and cotton to the USSR. The Soviet Union also offered the services of its own oil-prospecting technicians, after having been assured of an indefinite suspension of the UN project for oil exploration. During Daoud's premiership as the demand for Pashtunistan became more pronounced and Pakistan closed its territory in reprisal denying Afghanistan both route and market for its products, the Soviet role in Afghanistan increased. The Soviet Union provided military equipments such as 11 MiG-15 fighters, 1 TL-15 Cargo plane, 2 MI-4 helicopters, 24 mobile radio units, and small arms. It also promised major economic aid to Afghanistan's modernisation and development projects.⁴⁸

US policy towards Afghanistan till the Soviet Intervention

The US took Afghanistan seriously during the Cold War between the US and the USSR. After the Second World War, the US looked beyond Europe to play a global role and contain the growing power of the USSR in other continents. Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman played an important role in shaping the geopolitical thinking of America which, in turn, influenced American foreign policy making. Mackinder⁴⁹ while underlined the importance of Eurasian heartland in terms of developing continental strategy and for its resources, Spykman⁵⁰ foregrounded the importance of Rimland countries like Afghanistan in containing a continental power and preventing it from developing multidimensional strategy to play a global role.

However, diplomatic relationship between the US and Afghanistan had started in the inter-war period. Afghanistan joined the League of Nations in September 1934. In the same year full diplomatic relations between the Afghanistan and the United States began. Shortly after the end of World War II, His Majesty King Zahir Shah dispatched Abdul Hussein Aziz as the first Afghan Ambassador to the United States. President Roosevelt appointed William Hornibrook as the first U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, on November 14, 1935.⁵¹ Afghanistan continued to pursue a policy of strict neutrality during the Second World War and Kabul did not align either with Allied or the Axis powers. By following a policy of neutrality, Afghanistan wanted to enjoy goodwill of both the US and USSR in the Cold War period. In 1946, the US supported Afghanistan's admission to the United Nations.

The bilateral relationship took concrete shape in the Cold War period. Afghanistan, following the end of the Second World War, demonstrated an unprecedented desire for quick economic development. The US made grants of about \$15 million by the end of 1955 for technical assistance. The US granted another \$10 million plus a loan of \$5 million to improve air transport. Export-Import Bank loans to Afghanistan, beginning in April, 1950, have amounted to \$ 39.5 million. The major portion of this sum had been expended on the Helmand-Arghandab Valley project, the most vital irrigation project in the country.⁵² It is, however, argued that the US Export-Import Bank helped finance an Afghan agricultural development project being undertaken by Morrison-Knudson, an American company. This government support, however,

probably resulted more from the company's political clout than because of any official interest in Afghanistan. However, American government's interest in Afghan socio-economic development was not any less. Since the mid-1950s, the US showed its interest in the organisation and curricula of village and vocational schools, and teachers' training. The United States Agency for International Development provided 4 million dollars for the construction of the Afghan Institute of Technology (AIT) in 1951 and provided AIT with teachers, advisors, and laboratory equipments.

The American active participation in modernising the country's educational system began in the early 1960s.⁵³ In 1964, the United States extended economic assistance to modernise and enlarge Kabul University. Colleges previously dispersed in various sections of Kabul were consolidated on new campus with USAID assistance. Classrooms, administrative buildings, laboratories, and a dormitory were added. USAID paid \$7,156,221 towards this purpose. The College of Engineering was established with USAID aid. The programme and administration of faculty followed essentially an American model. Most of the faculty received graduate training in the United States.⁵⁴

The US also provided scholarship for students and scholars to study in US universities and about 105 American personnel served in Afghanistan, excluding Peace Corps and other volunteer groups. The US also participated in modernising Afghanistan's media and film industry and provided training opportunities for people with journalism backgrounds and other related fields. The Soviet Union in contention with the US for influence in Afghanistan also participated in modernising Afghan educational sector since 1965. During the 1950s and 1960s, Afghanistan became an "economic Korea" divided between the Soviet Union in the north and the United States in south.⁵⁵

The thrust of American foreign policy in the Cold War period was not to allow Afghanistan move into Soviet sphere of influence. Unlike in the Great Game of nineteenth century, ideology played a major role both for the US and the USSR to expand their influence in Afghanistan. In the Cold War period the US did not want to spread its influence into the heartland which was firmly in the control of the USSR. Therefore, containment strategy was developed by George F. Kennan⁵⁶ to prevent the heartland power from gaining naval strength and deny it sea routes to vital

destination of natural resources, for example, Persian Gulf. However, the USSR viewed the containment policy as a policy of encirclement and, therefore, a move to divide the heartland power. Afghanistan, a Rimland country was vital for both the states to realise their objectives as it along with other Rimland countries like Pakistan joined the heartland with the Indian Ocean.

Though in the Cold War period, some US officials like Joseph Foam had written about the presence of rich deposits of minerals like chrome ore, manganese, zinc, lead, and silver in Afghanistan, their importance was dwarfed by a secret study by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1953, which concluded that 'Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States'.⁵⁷ It noted Afghanistan had an extremely underdeveloped infrastructure, with some of the most rugged terrain in the world. However, Afghanistan was considered a springboard for the realisation of strategic objectives elsewhere even though it was never the final destination for both the countries.

According to Maya Chadda until the 1978 coup, both the Soviet Union and the US were able to maintain a rough equilibrium that alternated between a growing Soviet influence during the premiership of Daoud between 1953 and 1963, with a decade of pro-American policies under Zahir Shah who in turn was ousted by Mahommad Daoud in 1973.⁵⁸ The western educated elites of the upper and middle classes concentrated around King Zahir regarded Premier Daoud's close ties with the Soviet Union a danger to Afghanistan's independence. The period of Zahir Shah's rule from 1963-1973 is considered as a decade of experimental democracy in Afghanistan. A new constitution was drafted in 1963 and was endorsed a year later. The constitution legalised the existence of political parties, granted freedom of speech and assembly, and allowed publication of private papers, subject to state censorship after publication. All these rights were denied during Daoud's premiership under the predominant influence of the Soviet Union. The US's influence on King Zahir is perceptible in the latter's appointment of Mohammad Hasim Maiwandwal, minister of information and culture and former Afghanistan ambassador to the United States, as the new prime minister. Later, Maiwandwal had to resign from his office after being accused of being a CIA agent.

Though the US played an important role in Afghanistan in balancing the power of the Soviet Union after the British left the Indian subcontinent, there are many reasons that led to the growth

of Soviet influence there. Lion. B. Poullada ascribes the increase of Soviet influence in Afghanistan to the failure of American diplomacy. First, indifference to Afghan overtures for more economic and military aid was a product of remoteness and the narrow tunnel of vision of American political leaders, who remained blissfully unaware of the strategic importance of Afghanistan. Secondly, Career diplomats assigned to Kabul or supervising Afghan affairs in Washington had little knowledge of the country, its language and culture. Thirdly, American diplomacy rested on the belief that interference in Soviet borderland would quickly invite Soviet reaction.⁵⁹

Apart from the failure of American diplomacy, Alam Payind points to the practical conditions that prohibited the US-Afghan alliance coming into existence. According to Payind, the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1920 (updated in 1931) prohibited alliance of both with third states that would be against the interests of one of the contracting parties was still in force in the Cold War days. Secondly, territorial disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan made the welding of these states in alliance with the US impossible. Thirdly, in the eyes of Afghans, the presence and acknowledgment of limited American influence, without a formal military alliance, was adequate to discourage pressures from the Soviet Union.⁶⁰

Soviet Union and the April Coup, 1978

After Daoud came to power in 1973 through a coup assisted by left wing Parchamite army officers, he appointed pro-Soviet leftists to government positions at local and national levels and lodged a protest against Iran's arms build-up. The Soviet Union, in turn, pledged support for Afghanistan's natural gas industries, irrigation, roads and fertilizer factories. Afghanistan also got enormous military and economic assistance in other areas from the Soviet Union. Daoud in order to get maximum support from the Soviet Union categorically denied the involvement of any foreign power in the coup and justified the ground of the coup by alleging the former government as corrupt that had pursued bankrupt economic and social policies.

However, Afghan leaders had tried throughout history to make Afghanistan an independent and neutral country. It was the need for modernisation and for the recurring Pashtunistan problem with Pakistan which required military build-up that Afghanistan had to approach great powers for economic and military assistance. Daoud said that "Our whole life, our whole existence,

revolves around one single focal point, freedom. Should we ever get the feeling that our freedom is in the slightest danger, from whatever quarter, then we should prefer to live on dry bread, or even starve, than accept help that would restrict our freedom.”⁶¹

To reduce Afghanistan's excessive dependence on the Soviet Union, Daoud made a noticeable shift in his policies in the last two years of his rule. He sent more military officers and students to Egypt and India for training and increased the number of students going to the US. He began to purge members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) from the government agencies and tried to rehabilitate the monarchists and rightists by appointing them to high government positions. He agreed to normalisation of relation with Pakistan on Pashtunistan issue. Along with the acceptance of aid from Iran and Pakistan, Daoud signed three agreements worth a total of 40 million dollars with the US. In order to exert its influence the US continued its development projects and offered financial aid to Afghanistan's modernisation projects. According to available statistics the total US economic assistance to Afghanistan during the period of 1973-78 was estimated to be approximately \$89.8 million outweighing the Soviet assistance during the period of 1976-78.⁶²

Against this backdrop, Daoud was invited to Moscow by Brezhnev to discuss the developments in Afghanistan. During the discussions Brezhnev advised Daoud to “get rid of all those imperialist advisers” from his country. Daoud replied “When Afghanistan had no further need of foreign advisers, they would all be asked to leave.”⁶³ The Soviet dislike of Daoud's move for seeking good relations with the United States and its allies under his policy of neutrality shows that the immediate objective of the then Soviet policy was to stop Daoud's move to weaken the Afghan-Soviet relations. As the relationship between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union deteriorated, the two factions of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Khalq and Parcham agreed to reunite and form a single party in the early summer of 1977. It was at this time that President Daoud tried to further strengthen Afghanistan's relations with Western countries and visited Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in April 1978. When he returned home from his last visit abroad, he did not use any leftist-oriented terminology as he had at the beginning of his three years of rule. Instead he talked about Afghan nationalism and national pride. It was during this period that Mir Akbar Khayber, a leading ideologue of the Parcham faction of PDPA, was assassinated on 17 April 1978. During Khayber's funeral on 19 April 1978, the PDPA members

and loyalists staged a large-scale anti-US demonstration in Kabul. While this gave Daoud the opportunity to arrest the leaders of PDPA, he did not arrest PDPA members in the Afghan armed forces. The state of military readiness provided an opportunity to military officers of the PDPA within the army to execute the preplanned coup on 28 April 1978. After the release of PDPA leaders, Afghanistan was proclaimed a democratic republic with Noor Mohammad Taraki as president of the country. Though communists hailed the Afghan event as a revolution, in reality it was a coup. The geopolitical interests of the USSR rather than ideology determined Soviet role in Afghanistan. It was a coup because a small group of military officers without any popular mandate took over power. It was only a successful attempt of the armed forces to topple the prevailing government. No mass uprising broke out. Except the Kabul city where the palace is situated, there was no fighting or revolt or any other trouble. The rest of the country was calm and peaceful.

Though there is lack of substantial evidence to find the extent of Soviet role in the coup due to the secrecy of both the Afghan and Soviet sources, several factors point to Soviet involvement. After the coup, Taraki said later in November 1978 that “This has been organised on the basis of profound studies and specialised advices. During the first days of the revolution some persons who had specialisation in the Party Organisation came to Kabul at the invitation of the secretariat of the party and studied for three months party affairs here and consequently they gave specialised advice that the party is well organised.”⁶⁴ It can be assumed that the ‘advisers’ Taraki referred to were communists from the Soviet Union. Michael Voslensky of Lumumba University said: “Without Soviet approval the communists would have immediately called the coup against Daoud a ‘fascist putsch’ of CIA agents.”⁶⁵ The precision of air bombing of Daoud’s palace where around 2000 guards were present indicates that the operators were not Afghans. It is reported that the Soviet pilots were flying the planes. A Soviet intelligence Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosty (KGB) defector after the coup revealed the Soviet confirmation of its support after the Afghan communists consulted the Soviet embassy in Kabul. According to an Afghan journalist, “anyone who believed that Soviets were not involved in the 1978 coup, was either uninformed about the role of Soviets in the Afghan military or was confirming Lenin's assessment that there will always be useful idiots who would inadvertently support the communist cause.”⁶⁶ The Soviet Union recognised Taraki’s government almost immediately, even before other stunned foreign missions could establish telephone contact with the PDPA

authorities.⁶⁷

Iran's role in Afghanistan till Soviet Intervention

Iranian linguistic and cultural identity in general has always been strongest on the Plateau which includes most of Afghanistan and Iran, and much of Pakistan.⁶⁸ For most part of the history, Iran and Afghanistan belonged to the same sphere of influence.⁶⁹ Iran's present interest in Afghanistan is partly ordained by history. Most parts of the Afghan region were for a long time part of Iranian Empires. This was the case during the rule of the Achaemenid (553-330 B.C.), Parthian (247-224 B.C.), Sassanid (224-642), and Safavid (1501-1722) Empires. These periods provided Afghan lands with Iranian bureaucracy, language and culture, especially in the western region. Moreover, both Iran and Afghanistan were conquered several times by the same invaders.⁷⁰

Iran and Afghanistan became part of Arab empires in the seventh century and remained in their control until the eighteenth century. Afterwards they were ruled by Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century and were conquered by the Mongols and Timurids in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. In all these cases Iranian bureaucracy, language and culture proved to be strong enough to survive. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, Afghanistan was fought over by the Mughal Empire and the Safavid Dynasty of Persia (now Iran), with the Safavids mostly controlling Herat and western Afghanistan, and the Mughals controlling Kabul and the east. A monarchy ruled by ethnic Pashtuns was founded in 1747 by Ahmad Shah Durrani, who was a senior officer in the army of Nadir Shah, ruler of Persia, when Nadir Shah was assassinated and Persian control over Afghanistan weakened.⁷¹

However, the foreign conquerors adopted elements of Iranian culture and the invaders were slowly assimilated by the Iranians.⁷² Thus, when Iranian dynasties re-conquered Afghan areas, they could build on existing ties. Iran's ability to reestablish its control over Afghanistan several times is reinforced by the ethnic fragmentation of the country. Khanna describes Afghanistan as a "microcosm of the entire region"⁷³ where none of the ethnic groups "constitute a majority of the population." This made Afghanistan continuously receptive for cultural, economical, political and military influence by outside powers like Iran especially in the border regions. Furthermore, some periods saw Iran and Afghanistan under the rule of independent regional kingdoms.⁷⁴

Here again, Iranian culture and language was the prevailing and connecting element, and trade and fine arts benefited. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Iranian attempts to rule over parts of Afghanistan came to an end for the time being. This was caused by the interference of Russia and the British Empire in the 19th century. Both countries successfully extended their sphere of influence at Iran's cost. Finally, Britain forced Iran to limit its rule to lands west of Herat.⁷⁵ Since then, the Iranian eastern border exists basically in the contemporary form. The British actions are seen in Iran by many still as humiliation and the idea of 'Greater Iran' – at least in a cultural sense – is an important theme in national thinking. Rubin suggests that Iranians perceive that "Tehran has a legitimate historical claim to Afghanistan. Regardless of religiosity, Iranian nationalists see Afghanistan as part of Iran's near-abroad."⁷⁶

After the British withdrew from the Indian subcontinent, the US tried to fill the power vacuum. The nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in the early 1950s by Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mussadeq was viewed by Britain as a hostile act as the British company had a monopoly over production, supply, pricing and distribution of oil. Both Britain and US collaborated and removed Mussadeq through a coup in August 1953 and restored the monarchy and leadership of pro-West Shah. This acted as a turning point in relations between Iran and the US. During the Cold War Iran became part of the American sponsored Baghdad pact which later turned into Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). Iran maintained balance in the region after the US's direct involvement in Afghanistan through aid was replaced by military alliance with Pakistan in the form of SEATO. The Shah of Iran, an ally of the US in Cold War politics, had long been concerned over the dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan and had played a key role in their resumption of diplomatic relations in 1963. Shah tried to play a mediatory role to defuse the border problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan and bring Afghanistan closer to the US. Iran was the common friend of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Shah of Iran succeeded in normalizing relations between the two countries, when he visited Islamabad and Kabul in June-July 1962. Shah's good offices produced positive results when, in May-1963, trade relations between these two countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan) were restored.⁷⁷ However, the boundary dispute between them remained unresolved. Later, Shah's effort brought positive results when he succeeded in normalising the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan which

deteriorated after the ascendancy of Sardar Mohammad Daud. This time, Shah increased Iran's influence in Afghanistan by providing \$ 2 billion economic aid to Afghanistan. Shah's persistence and new oil wealth persuaded Daoud to opt for more pro-Islamic foreign policy. The first step he took was to defuse the Pashtunistan issue. The new "old guard" Mohammadzais close to him counseled disengagement from a policy that had led to less than cordial relations with key Muslim nations in the area, namely, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Those countries were then all enormously rich and were potentially important source of economic support to tide over Afghanistan's ailing economy. Daoud and advisers finally accepted the fact that by pressing the Pashtunistan issue they "played into Soviet hands by increasing Afghan dependence on Soviet aid." While diversifying aid from different sources, Afghanistan tried to pursue its age old policy of neutrality. To resume a more prominently neutral stand, "Daoud began to send Afghan military personnel for training in India and Egypt and expanded the number being trained in the United States, clearly in an attempt to lessen Afghan dependence on Soviet military training."⁷⁸ This change in Daoud's policy was instrumental in the change of Soviet attitude towards Afghanistan. However, anti-Shah movement in the form of Islamic Revolution and the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979 led to the American loss of its key ally in the Gulf giving rise to the perception that balance of power in Afghanistan had been lost.

Pakistan and Afghanistan till Soviet Intervention

Pakistan being concerned with tribal incursions from Afghan territory imposed economic blockade against Afghanistan. Afghanistan as a landlocked country had always been dependent on Pakistan and its port facilities at Karachi for its connectivity with the international market. Thus the economic blockade was to be the harshest response from Pakistan to punish Afghanistan for its acts. Afghanistan, on its part, was always in the lookout for alternative trade routes to have an access to the international market so as to make itself less dependent on Pakistan. The role of the erstwhile USSR to provide such route to Afghanistan in the Cold War period can be viewed as its interest to get an egress to a geopolitically sensitive region while for the latter it fulfilled the ambition to find an alternative route to the routes provided by Pakistan. The larger aim of Afghanistan was to deny Pakistan any hegemonic role in the east after the departure of the British. Whereas Pakistan did not have the required military strength to play hegemonic role in Afghanistan like the British and moreover faced threat from both east and west, the USSR thought it pertinent to step in to play a major role in a geopolitically sensitive

region.

Like Afghanistan, Pakistan became a part of the Cold War politics partly because the US showed more interest in Pakistan to make it a regional ally after India's then Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru elucidated country's overarching foreign policy of non-alignment in Washington to the host's utter disappointment. From the beginning, Pakistan attracted greater western sympathy than India. This was the case partly because personal contact with Muslim Pakistanis was easier than that with predominantly Hindu Indians whose sometimes complex mental framework and remnants of bitter anti-colonial feelings created obstacles to better understanding.⁷⁹ The US was thought to be the inheritor to the British imperialism. Furthermore, John Foster Dulles' anti-communist approach left no space for non-alignment policy as he declared there could be no neutrality in the Cold War between "good" and "evil" and that is immoral.⁸⁰ Besides, Nehru's interest in socialism and the Soviet Union's support for India on the Kashmir issue just after Pakistan became an ally of the US brought India into close proximity with the Soviet Union while getting distanced from the US. Afghanistan, during Daoud's premiership leaned very much towards the USSR. Both India and Afghanistan remained formally non-aligned, in reality they depended on the USSR for economic and military aid. To make the regional balance of power in its favour, Pakistan later on developed friendly relations with China, the latter viewed Soviet assistance to both India and Afghanistan as a policy of strategic encirclement. Pakistan, from its side also showed interest to be a part of Cold War to make itself militarily strong and economically viable through military and economic aid from the US. To be a regional ally came as a windfall gain for Pakistan. Pakistan was inducted to South East Asia Organisation in 1954 and Central Treaty Organisation in 1955 by the US, both the pacts involving military aid package.⁸¹ Though the US through Iran attempted to mediate relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and draw the latter into the CENTO pact, the USSR threw its support behind Pashtunistan.⁸²

The One Unit Scheme in Pakistan in 1955 brought its border areas into a single political unit to maintain parity with other regions for electoral purposes at the cost of the historical policy of granting autonomy to those areas.⁸³ This led Afghanistan to mobilize seventy thousand reservists on the border. However, in the same year normal diplomatic and trade relations resumed. But that could not continue for long. Mohammad Ayub Khan after coming to power in a military

coup in 1958 pursued a more aggressive foreign policy orientation. Pashtunistan dominated Afghan foreign policy in the early 1960s despite the fact that it enjoyed little support among the Pashtuns of Pakistan. Zahir Shah came to power in Afghanistan citing Daoud's incapability to stem the growing tensions with Pakistan, which was becoming more and more powerful with US's military assistance and emerging friendship with China. The new policy that Zahir Shah embarked upon was to continue moral support for Pashtunistan without endangering Afghanistan's diplomatic relation with Pakistan. One Unit Scheme was done away with in the year 1970 which helped in the further improvement in relationship between the two countries.⁸⁴ Thus Zahir Shah's ruling period was the best in terms of fostering friendly relationship with Pakistan in the history of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

Daoud Khan again returned to power in a military coup in 1973 in which leftists in the country played a major role to induct Daoud to power. Afghanistan's failure to capitalize on the weakness of Pakistan during its war with India and push forward the Pashtunistan issue effectively was the justification provided Daoud for the coup. The USSR was the first country to recognise Daoud's government. Many military officers belonging to pro-Soviet PDPA aided the coup. Even the then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto recognised Daoud's government despite Daoud's avid support for Pashtunistan. In spite of friendly gestures from Bhutto, Daoud supported the insurgency in Pakistani Baluchistan, sheltering rebels and establishing training camps on Afghan territory. Daoud wanted to further weaken Pakistan after East-Pakistan seceded from rest of the Pakistan forming Bangladesh so as to strengthen the cause of Pashtunistan. As a counter policy, Bhutto decided to arm and support Islamists though he himself was a socialist and opposed by domestic Islamists. It was calculated that after the death of ailing and aged Daoud, the power vacuum left in Afghanistan could be filled by such Islamists. This was a strategic policy that matured by being gradually expanded by Pakistan and exploited by the US after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's counter policy of arming Islamists forced Daoud to reconsider the issue of Pashtunistan and an agreement was nearly reached between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the recognition of Durand Line.⁸⁵ Daoud being concerned about growing influence of Soviet Union in Afghanistan tried to move closer towards regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia. In a similar vein, Pakistan having failed to secure substantial aid from the US during its wars with

India in 1965 and 1971 tried to foster friendly relationship with Muslim countries. Iran, an ally of the US tried to bring Afghanistan and Pakistan to negotiating table. But Bhutto was overthrown in a military coup and then assassinated before an agreement was reached between the two countries. Though Zia-ul Haq, who rose to power after the coup continued with the Bhutto's effort to reach an agreement, Daoud too was overthrown in a PDPA led coup in 1978 shattering the hopes of fostering friendly relationship. Genocide in East-Pakistan, Bhutto's nuclear programme in 1972 and the military coup and dictatorship of 1977 isolated Pakistan from the West. Furthermore, the American Embassy in Islamabad had been ransacked in 1979 estranging the bilateral relationship between the US and Pakistan. The Islamic revolution in Iran in the same year and the Soviet invasion, however, changed the relationship dramatically.

India and Afghanistan till Soviet Intervention

Unlike the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the relationship between India and Afghanistan is very old. Cultural and trade relation between the two countries existed during the Indus culture that flourished in the Indus Valley. Whether Aryans originated in India or came to India through the northwest and the Hindu Kush, the very language attests to an intense cultural and economic interchange. The Afghans call their land Aryana, the Aryan land. The Rig Veda has a prayer to the four rivers of Afghanistan, including the Kubha (Kabul river) and the Krumu (the Kurram). The celebrated text of Brhatsamhita by Varahamihira in 6th Century AD refers to a group of people named Avagana along with the Huns and Chinese, which, in later period turned to Afghan.⁸⁶ Panini, who simplified and resurrected the Sanskrit literature, was Pathan by birth. He has written about the trade and economic relationship between the two countries in his texts. He mentioned about the reputed wine Kapisayana from Kapisi or Begram, Afghanistan. Excellent quality of raisins was grown at Kapisi and widely exported. Bindusara had imported the raisin wines from Afghanistan. Kautilya also testifies that the wines were brought for the kings of Pataliputra from Afghanistan.⁸⁷

During the height of the Maurya Empire most of present-day Afghanistan, that part south of the Hindu Kush, was incorporated into India. In 1957, a bilingual inscription of Ashoka was discovered in Kandahar. The common history continued during the Kushan Empire based in Afghanistan, from the first century AD.⁸⁸ Trade fostered close political and people-to-people

contacts. Gandhari, mother of Kauravas, came from this region. The Kushan Empire had its summer capital in Afghanistan at the wine centre, Kapisi. Sanskrit is the mother language of Pashto and Persian. Afghanistan lay on the famous ancient Silk Route, India's major pathway of international trade. Spread of Buddhism provided further impetus to the close economic and cultural association between the two countries. Throughout the medieval period, during and after the British rule in India, Afghanistan remained a major supplier of dry fruits, fresh fruits, raisins and spices to India. The 2, 600 kilometer long Grand Trunk Road stretching from Kolkata to Khyber Pass in Afghanistan built in the 16th century AD by Sher Shah Suri passes through Varanasi, Amritsar, Lahore and Peshawar. Popularly known as the "Long Walk" to the 17th century European travelers, it has been the hub of transport and trade of the Indian sub-continent. More than a century of external interference, of policies guided by considerations decided in London rather than in the region had nonetheless broken the thread of common history. Since the British took decisions based on broader policy aspects relating to Europe - hostility against the French or the expansion of the Russian empire, the safeguarding of the sea-routes or the needs of the British exchequer, the policy of divide and rule - they had to break up the long-term historical trends and the common history between India and Afghanistan.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, characterized the bilateral relationship between India and Afghanistan saying "the history of our relationship shows conflicts as well as long periods of friendship and cultural contacts. It has been a great satisfaction to us that these old contacts have not only been renewed between independent India and Afghanistan but have actually progressed. And we are, therefore, on the friendliest terms with the latter. No political change can put an end to our memories and to our old links."⁸⁹ The Congress party after independence wanted to reverse the deteriorated Indo-Afghan relationship during the British rule. The 1950 treaties of friendship and of trade and commerce in a way characterised this renewed trust and confidence. Even before independence, the Congress party showed its willingness to rebuild the historical relationship with Afghanistan. At first with some hesitation, but thereafter with increasing boldness, the leaders of the freedom struggle backed the demands of Afghanistan for total independence from even the vestiges of control by the British of their external relations. In return, the Afghan rulers supported the Indian freedom struggle.

However, although the bilateral relations were friendly with high-level visits, expanding trade, aid projects and facilities for training after the independence of India, there was no support for Afghanistan on the issues it regarded as critical. The Afghans showed their disappointment in particular by taking an even-handed position during and after Pakistan's aggression in 1965.⁹⁰ Just after Independence, India hoped that after the ceasefire in Kashmir, the historical bonds between India and Pakistan would continue. India also believed in the principle that historically determined borders, such as the Durand Line, should be respected. Therefore, revision of the Durand Line, an Afghan demand has never been categorically supported by India. Talking about Afghanistan and the demands of the Pashtuns in 1950, Nehru said the Government of India was “intimately interested but it is a matter for abiding regret to us that we can only be interested from a distance without being able to help in any way”.

To sum up, Afghanistan has been characterised by the absence of central authority, fragile economy and difficult terrain. All these attributes have rendered Afghanistan weak. However, its geostrategic situation has attracted many a state to meddle in its internal affairs and try to exploit its weakness. The British and Russian Empires had long term geostrategic goals in the region. While the Russian Empire was moved by its interests to reach the warm waters of Indian Ocean, the British Empire wanted to occupy the passes that joined the Rimland with the Heartland in Eurasia. Afghanistan provided important passes like Khyber, Gomal and Khojak and corridor like Wakhan which joined Heartland with Indus lowland. Therefore, Afghanistan provided the routes for a continental power to develop naval strength and the naval power continental strength. Besides, Afghanistan traditionally served as an invasion route as it was situated at the crossroads of West Asia, South Asia and Far East. In the modern times, it was considered important to get accessibility to different regions to maintain spheres of influence. Military presence of a distant power in Afghanistan puts it only 400 miles away from the vital oil region of the Gulf, posing a major threat to other states to access oil from the Gulf and oil shipments through the straits of Hormuz. During 1970s when the Soviet Union did not have a firm foothold in the Gulf region, its presence in Afghanistan was perceived as a threat to the western interest in the Gulf.

A certain balance of power was maintained by the major powers in Afghanistan almost till the Soviet military intervention in 1979. As a part of the game, third power was never allowed to interfere in the Great Game between the Russian and British Empire. It was thought that in the

conflict situation between two powers, the third power would gain the most. Therefore, any interference from the third power having the potential to overwhelm Afghanistan led to cooperative strategy between the two powers. Beginning in World War I and continuing in the inter-war period, the Afghan government dealt with Germany as a possible counterweight to both Russia and England. But the cooperative strategy of Russia and British led to the end of the role of Germany in the region.

Afghanistan is also characterised by its continuing struggle to maintain neutrality. Apart from the role of Russian and British Empire to make Afghanistan a buffer state, the role of Afghanistan in saving its territory from the major powers' influence was commendable. Afghanistan's role in the pan-Islamic movements to provide leadership for the creation of Central Asian Confederation and its support to Basmachi movement in the Central Asian region to challenge Russian Empire points to the fact that Afghanistan could both be vulnerable to and source of such movements. Afghanistan maintained strict neutrality during the two World Wars. It joined NAM during the Cold War. In marked contrast to Pakistan's foreign policy which has consistently sought refuge in external alignments and alliances to preserve and promote its security, Afghanistan assiduously avoided the temptation to rely on foreign influences to ensure its survival.

The Soviet Union was always on the lookout of maintaining preponderance of power in Afghanistan. However, due to the growth of international norms and laws, the Soviet Union tried to penetrate Afghanistan through the ideology of development and economic aid. Daoud's pro-Soviet policies helped it consolidate its position in Afghanistan. It along with the communist party of Afghanistan-PDPA helped Daoud come to power through a coup. During this time, PDPA strengthened itself by receiving all kinds support and patronage from Daoud. When Daoud decided to curb the role of the Soviet Union and its counterpart in Afghanistan, he was also toppled through a coup in April 1978.

In the Cold War period, the US was not inclined to be directly involved in Afghanistan to maintain balance with the USSR after initial attempts to maintain a sphere of influence through aid and building dam on Helmand River did not bring expected results. It was more interested in Pakistan, which was a part of its military pact. The continuation of boundary conflict between Pakistan and Afghanistan made an alliance between the US and Afghanistan unlikely. But

balance of power was maintained in such a strategically important region through Iran. Therefore, after the fall of Shah of Iran, there was an increased presence of the US in the region. King Zahir's period of constitutionalism and liberalism and the Daoud's period of pro-Soviet policies also balanced the role of the US and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

However, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in October 1979 shattered this balance and Afghanistan became the theatre of a proxy war between the two superpowers for a decade with disastrous consequences for the region and beyond. It is against this backdrop that the interests and role of major powers vis-à-vis Afghanistan after 1979 will be analysed in the subsequent chapters.

Endnotes

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⁸⁴ Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid*, Westview Press, Colorado, 2002, p. 117.

⁸⁵ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, p. 100.

⁸⁶ Amiya Chandra, "India and Afghanistan: Renewing Economic Relations", in K. Warikoo (ed.), *Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities, Vol. 2 – The Challenges*, Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, Pentagon

Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 163.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 164.

⁸⁸ P. Khosla, “Indo-Afghan Relations: Looking into the Future”, in Sreedhar (ed.), *Afghanistan in Transition*, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, 2003, p. 116.

⁸⁹ This was said by Nehru in his speech to the Parliament in 1950. For details see, Khosla, “Indo-Afghan Relations: Looking into the Future”, p. 117.

⁹⁰ See for details Jafri Hasan Ali Shah, *Indo-Afghan Relations 1947-67*, Sterling Publication, New Delhi. 1976, pp. 84-86.

CHAPTER II

USSR/Russia and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Miscalculation and Misadventure

Afghanistan was geopolitically important for the Czarist Russia and later for the Soviet Union because it was considered the soft underbelly of the country historically. The British Empire and later the United States too got involved in Afghanistan for the same reason and manipulated Afghan politics to limit Soviet penetration further south. All the powers tried to maintain at least rough balance of power in Afghanistan. Russia and Britain were content with the divisions of ethnic groups along the Durand Line as it gave both an opportunity to use these splits for policy advantage. However, if one of the powers tried to gain preponderance of power in Afghanistan, the other power along with Afghanistan thwarted its hegemonic designs. The Great Game continued but the changing balance of power in Europe compelled both to join hands and the 1907 treaty between the British and Russian Empires was a result of this. During the Cold War, brute force was shunned in favour of ideology as a means to realise national interests. The US and the Soviet Union tried to maintain balance through economic aid and modernisation projects. Russians probably believed that the adoption of a harsh policy toward Afghanistan would throw the country into the arms of the Western powers, and at the same time alert Pakistan and India to the encroaching menace of Communism. The US being a distant power might have calculated that military penetration into a country bordering the Soviet Union would invite quick reprisal from the latter.

However, balance of power moved decisively in favour of the Soviet Union during Daoud's premiership. Failure of Helmand project, rejection of the Afghan request for military aid and American preference to Pakistan over Afghanistan in its regional security alliance structure moved Afghanistan closer to the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, Daoud's espousal of Pakhtunistan issue and the Soviet Union's support for it, Pakistan's trade blockade as a response to it and the Soviet Union's help in this regard further tightened the relationship between the two countries. However, during the Zahir Shah's regime, the US tried to offset the imbalance in power relationship in Afghanistan but by that time the Soviet Union already had an effective representation in Afghanistan in terms of bureaucrats and military advisors. Daoud came to power in 1973 with the help of Afghan communists and adopted a pro-Soviet policy line. But during the last years of his rule, he diversified aid from different countries and asked the Soviet personnel to leave the country and jailed many members of Afghan

communist party. The Soviet Union's role in installing the PDPA's rule and removing Daoud from power was to preserve its preponderance in Afghanistan.

One of the most important factors responsible for the Soviet thrust into Afghanistan was shifting of balance of power in the USSR's favour in Afghanistan and in the region in 1970s. The decline of American military will after the Vietnam War led to a deterioration of its logistical ability to support forces in Afghanistan in Soviet perception. During this time Soviet Union developed a logistical network capable of supporting operations in remote areas such as Angola, Yemen, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Soviet perceptions of an American retreat from forward positions in Asia and Africa were reinforced by the US's decision to withdraw from Indochina and disengage from commitments to governments challenged by domestic unrest, such as the struggle in Angola. Moscow viewed the Watergate scandal, Congressional and popular assaults on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the overall tendency of the Carter Administration to avoid conflict situations as a pointer to the decline of American power and will. Furthermore, the US's half-hearted response to the Soviet role in Hungary and Czechoslovakia might have shaped the Soviet Union's foreign policy assuming a more pro-active character.¹

The United States with Iran as its surrogate, had protected the three monarchies of Iran, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia known as the Red Sea Entente. With the ejection of the Soviets from Egypt in the early 1970s, their position in West Asia had weakened considerably. Soviet activities in North Africa, its initial support of Somalia and then of Ethiopia, its encouragement of the Dhofar rebellion in Oman and the establishment of its military presence in South Yemen, were all aimed at securing a foothold in the region of the Red Sea and the Gulf from which the USSR could counter the US-backed Red Sea Entente. The fall of Haile Selassie in 1975 provided the Soviets with the first opportunity to break the Entente and extend Soviet presence in the area.² The regime of Shah of Iran fell four years later ending the US's Gulf strategy from the Soviet point of view. It was obvious that power by proxy would be replaced by the direct presence of American forces and bases in the region. The only way for the Soviets to counter this was also to extend its own power into the region. In this context, it was believed that the Soviet Union might increase its influence in Baluchistan, the entrance to the Persian Gulf from the East. The Soviet Union's presence in Afghanistan could create instability in Pakistan and promote Baluch irredentism. The US's

power position in Pakistan faced quick reverses when following the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran and the imprisonment of its personnel, “a Pakistani mob was not only permitted to march on the American Embassy, but to attack and destroy it, in the process killing two Americans assigned to the Embassy staff”.³ In Soviet perception, the declining power position of the US in the Middle-East, South-West Asia and South Asia created a power vacuum that facilitated the Soviet Union to move towards its south.⁴

Had the détente between the two superpowers been successful, the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan would not probably have arisen. The US-Soviet détente became less useful in 1970s as the Jackson Amendment limited the flow of technology to the Soviet Union and Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT II) appeared to be in trouble in the US Senate due to Washington’s focus on human rights. Relationship between China and the US grew despite the détente which the Soviets perceived quite threatening. From the Soviet perspective, the benefits of détente were minimal and therefore, the cost of losing it was also minimal.

The Soviet geopolitical interests in Afghanistan

The Soviet Union’s dominant role in Afghanistan followed by its invasion is related to its aspirations to gain naval supremacy in 1960s. The British Empire successfully contained Russia’s ambition to move southward to the Indian Ocean by making Afghanistan a buffer state. However, with the departure of the British from the Indian subcontinent, the Soviet Union began to strengthen their naval presence in the Indian Ocean.⁵ The Soviets began invigorating their role in the Ocean as early as 1967, when their strategic publication *Military Strategy* for the first time included South and Southeast Asia in the Soviet sphere of interests and in its search for new facilities for Russian naval vessels along the shores of the Indian Ocean. The Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean became quite visible when, in January 1971, a number of Soviet warships passed through Singapore as if they meant to parade their strength before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers then in conclave there. The oil crisis of 1973 added economic dimension to Soviet Union’s striving for naval supremacy. It revealed how vital the oil supplies from the Indian Ocean region were for the industrial West and how vulnerable the West is to oil pressures. This realisation encouraged the Soviet Union to make determined effort to gain control over the oil sources in West Asia and the Gulf. To make politico-economic and military advances in the Indian Ocean region the Soviet Union

concluded 'friendship' treaties with a number of nonaligned countries on the Indian Ocean littoral and in the hinterland since 1971. Afghanistan, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Mauritius, Mozambique and Tanzania were the countries which were tied to the Soviet Union through friendship treaties. However, except in a few cases, these 'friendship' treaties afforded the Soviet Union a convenient means by which it could influence the domestic and foreign policies of those littoral countries.⁶

There are scholars like Wilhelm Dietl, who argue that the Soviet Union had enough presence in the Indian Ocean by the end of 1970s and therefore Soviet interference in Afghanistan was not intended to secure a route to the sea.⁷ However, it is noteworthy that it was only through Afghanistan that the Soviet Union could open a land corridor to the Indian Ocean. From the Soviet point of view the opening of a land corridor to the Indian Ocean was of great strategic importance since otherwise, in the event of a war, the West could effectively check Soviet naval operations by controlling various choke-points such as Helsingor, Skagerrak, the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, Gibraltar, Suez, the Malacca Straits, the Panama Canal, and the Tsushima Straits, and bring the operations to a grinding halt. A direct opening to the Indian Ocean through Afghanistan-Balochistan can more than make up for such action, and in fact is the only corridor through which the Soviet Union could hope to reach the Indian Ocean quickly and circumvent the effects of choke-points under the control of the west. Moreover, the Soviet Union's military presence in Afghanistan placed itself only four hundred miles away from the vital oil region of the Gulf, posing a major threat to access to oil from the Gulf and oil shipments through the straits of Hormuz.

Furthermore, Soviet Union's presence in Afghanistan could provide it with the nearest sea routes to get linked with various countries of the Indian subcontinent. According to Robert Jackson, with the Suez Canal closed, the Soviet Union's sea communications with both India and Pakistan via the South Atlantic and Indonesia are even longer than those between the sub-continent and Western Europe, Japan, or the United States.⁸ In the similar vein, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan could provide it with overland routes to Pakistan and India. To realise the same, apart from the diplomatic activity to encourage good neighbourly relationship between India and Pakistan, the Soviet Union tried to put pressure on Pakistan by helping insurgency in Baluchistan. According to Rasul Bux Rias, there were enough allegations that the Soviet Union and Afghanistan had been giving training and equipment to

Baluch insurgents.⁹

Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan-1979

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was more of a military move than a decision to save socialist revolution in a neighbouring third world country. According to Lawrence Ziring, the decision to militarily intervene in Afghanistan was difficult one for the Politburo, and that it was only under pressure from the Army high command that the order to advance across the Oxus was finally given.¹⁰ The Soviet leadership did not consider Afghanistan to be a Socialist state, nor had Afghanistan truly undergone a Marxist revolution. In fact, the Soviet leadership perceived more threat from the Afghan leadership and their socialist policies than from the resistance groups. A Soviet official said “If there is one country in the developing world where we would like not to try scientific socialism at this point of time, it is Afghanistan.”¹¹ A Soviet diplomat opined that, under People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), “The newspapers are terrible, and the cultural life is barren”. A US Embassy report noted that “there are indications that the Soviets regret their close association with the Taraki regime.”¹² The Soviet Union developed strong dislike for Amin who promoted purges and radical policies. In a July 1979 speech, Amin stated publicly that the regime would not share power with classes that had been overthrown during the Saur Revolution. This speech was believed to be an affront towards the Soviets.

According to Fred Halliday, the comparison of Afghan intervention with those in Hungary or Czechoslovakia is quite inapposite. In the latter interventions there was no substantial counter-revolution sustained from abroad, and the sustained regimes, headed by Imre Nagy and Alexander Dubcek respectively, were, on the available evidence, rather popular ones. In Afghanistan, by contrast, it was precisely the scale of this counter-revolution which had brought matters to a head, and Amin was an extremely unpopular President whose very position relied on day-to-day Russian support.¹³ Halliday argues that intervention to be morally defensible has to satisfy two criteria: 1. that such interventions either command a genuine basis of popular support in the country concerned or have a reasonable chance of subsequently winning that support ; and 2. that the international consequences, in terms of provoking imperialist retaliation, are not such as to outweigh the probable advantages.¹⁴

After the intervention, the Soviet Union justified its act with reference to the 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Afghanistan and declared that the Soviet troops had been invited in to defend the revolution. This was a highly contentious reading of events. Although Taraki, as leader, had requested military aid at various times since 1978, the fact that Amin, the internationally recognised leader of Afghanistan and the only person with the constitutional right to ask for military assistance, had been killed by the invading Soviet troops undermined Moscow's case.

External interference in a country which was committed to a policy of Neutrality and Mutual Non-aggression with the Soviet Union signed in June 24, 1931 extended in December 1955 and pursued a policy of Non-Alignment proved the fact that it was not merely the ideology that governed the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was unlike that of Czechoslovakia and Hungary who were part of the Soviet Socialist system. Although the friendship treaty of 1978 between the USSR and Afghanistan provided the possibility of armed assistance, such intervention was not obligatory. Afghanistan was neither a member of Warsaw pact nor of Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), though it enjoyed observer status with the latter group. Thus, there was no governmental obligation for the USSR to protect communist government in Afghanistan.

Moscow's military intervention in Afghanistan cannot be explained solely or even primarily as a defensive reaction to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism either. The assumption is based on a facile comparison with the Khomeini revolution in Iran, but there are important differences between the two cases. It was relatively easy for Khomeini to blend nationalist and religious symbolism in Iran, where followers of the Shia branch of Islam are concentrated and Shiite religious identity has become fused historically with Iranian national identity. This fusion of nationalism and religion was complicated in Afghanistan by the fact that most of the Peshawar-based resistance groups espouse the militant, fundamentalist variety of pan-Islamism identified with the Muslim brotherhood.¹⁵ Operating throughout the Islamic world, the brotherhood denies the importance of separate Afghan nationalism. Just after the Soviet intervention, Afghan fundamentalist leaders were isolated from the mainstream of Afghan political life.

The Soviet Union also maintained that its action in Afghanistan was in line with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides for the states' inherent right to collective or individual self-defence for repelling aggression and restoring peace. A leading Soviet commentator asserted that the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan was only "a reply action" to the thrust into Afghanistan undertaken by the US with the help of China and Pakistan's authorities. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Soviet invasion was largely provoked by the covert support that the US had begun providing to anti-government groups in Afghanistan months prior to the Soviet invasion. This assistance was provided despite the calculation that it would induce a Soviet military response. The US hoped to embroil the Soviet Union in a bloody conflict comparable to the American experience in Vietnam. This would slowly bleed the Soviet Union and prevent it from politically or militarily penetrating further south towards West Asia. They wanted to use this space to build up a deterrent military capability in the Persian Gulf.¹⁶

However, the Soviet Union's action in Afghanistan cannot be defined solely in defensive terms considering the growing nexus between Pakistan, China and the US in mounting insurgency against the Afghan government before the Soviet invasion. The American attention in 1979 was on the internal problems that Pakistan was facing rather than launching offensive against the Afghan government. The flow of refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan gained considerable momentum by the end of 1978. Around this time the ruling military junta was also getting ready to hang Bhutto and the Carter administration was tightening the screws on the junta on the twin issues of human rights and the nuclear programme. The US policy around that time was clearly aimed at disciplining Pakistan rather than encouraging it to launch an adventure in Afghanistan. Pakistan's announcement for purchasing a reprocessing plant from France in 1976 also soured its relationship with the US.¹⁷ Furthermore, until the tragic assassination of Ambassador Donald Dubs on February 14, 1979, the US was quite content to carry on business with the new government in Afghanistan. There was a regular exchange of contacts between the Afghan foreign office and the American diplomats, both in Kabul and elsewhere.

However, in contrast to the contention of some of the pro-American scholars that the US policy towards Afghanistan had consistently been one of neglect, the US had been constantly active in Afghanistan throughout the Cold War days.¹⁸ In fact, during PDPA's regime in

Afghanistan, the Department of State instructed its embassy in Kabul that “the DRA has not asked us to pack our bags and leave but on the contrary has accepted the policy of maintaining our interest and presence. Closing out our efforts in Afghanistan would likely to be seen as an abdication of responsibility and would accomplish for the Soviets one of their objectives, namely to reduce further the US and Western influence in Afghanistan and the region.”¹⁹ The US began supporting and recognising Islamic fundamentalists who were in exile in Pakistan and providing them with financial and military assistance to fight the “democratic” regime in Kabul. The Pakistan based Islamic parties, however, carried out a repressive policy against nationalist, revolutionary, and patriotic individuals throughout the country under the pretext of fighting communism, which in turn isolated them from the people. Washington believed that the policies of the Pakistan-based Islamic parties²⁰ do not serve the interests of the US in the region. It diversified its support to veteran bureaucrats, King Zahir, former premier Mohammad Yusuf along with feudal landowners and top businessmen and other pro-Western technocrats in the hope that these forces would be able to provide a leadership to the uprising in Afghanistan.²¹

Therefore, it can be argued that neither the role of the US and nor that of the Islamic forces posed an imminent threat to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the US was trying to invigorate its role in Afghanistan but due to Pakistan’s internal problems and oppressive measures adopted by the Pakistan based Islamic parties; it could not strengthen the insurgency against the ruling leftist party. Moreover, the Islamic fundamentalists failed to reconcile themselves with the Afghan national identity. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, flouted ideological and moral principles to give effect to its geopolitical interests in the Southwest Asia region. The Soviet Union tried to take advantages of the power vacuum in the region after Shah was removed in Iran in an Islamic revolution and during this time Pakistan was undergoing internal problems and the US Embassy was attacked.

The Soviet diplomacy after its Intervention in Afghanistan

The intervention in Afghanistan isolated the Soviet Union internationally. The purpose of fundamentalist groups and that of the supporters of the Afghan national identity got fused temporarily to get rid of a foreign power. The Third World retreated from what had become an increasingly anti-American position, and the Muslim world found that once again it had to confront two superpowers rather than concentrating its attentions on one. While Saudi

Arabia, Egypt and other Islamic nations suspected that the Carter administration would give Israel permanent jurisdiction over the Muslim holy places and deprive Palestinians of a future homeland, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan spelt more danger for these nations. Egypt offered military bases and entered into joint military exercises with the US. Saudi Arabia denounced the invasion and became the first nation to commit itself to a boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Iraq, which was considered a Soviet ally prior to the intervention condemned the Soviet act and linked it with Soviet activities in other regions, such as its incursion into North Yemen. A Conference of Islamic nations convened in Rawalpindi in January 1980, issued a joint denunciation of the Soviet invasion. Ironically, the same conference issued a milder denunciation of US support for Israel which happened for the first time. The invasion also led to the institutionalisation of Sino-American military cooperation. In the US, the priorities of the domestic political debate were shifted away from economic problems towards foreign security issues. The focus of the defence budget debate was altered in favour of conventional armaments and logistical programmes at the cost of strategic nuclear weapons.²² An American nation deeply divided since Vietnam and Watergate responded with remarkable unity to what was seen as a major foreign policy challenge. In Iran, the Islamic revolutionaries maintained distance from the US and the Soviet Union. Just after Soviet intervention, Iran provided assistance to various Shiite groups in Afghanistan to thwart the possibility of a pro-Soviet regime there.

To tide over the emerging situation in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union adopted a three pronged strategy. Militarily, the USSR followed the policy of defeating the important mujahideen units, protecting Soviet lines of supply, particularly Panjsher valley and acquiring full control over the cities and lines of communication. Politically, it tried to install a suitable candidate at the helm of affairs and broaden the base of PDPA so that it could become more popular. In fact, the Soviet Union instituted Barbrak Karmal, its preferred man, as the head of the Afghan government and instructed him to broaden his base. Diplomatically, the Soviet Union worked for the recognition of the Karmal regime, and at the same time, held out the prospect of negotiated settlement of the Afghan issue. It encouraged the UN to continue talks towards a settlement of the Afghan crisis till 1984.

As part of its diplomacy, the Soviet Union tried to woo Iran and Pakistan so as they would not take a hardline anti-Soviet stance against its intervention in Afghanistan. After the Islamic

Revolution, Iran anticipated UN sanctions against it on the issue of hostage crisis and blockade of all of Iran's ports in the Persian Gulf. However, the erstwhile Soviet ambassador assured that Iran could use the Soviet Union as a transit route to Europe. Later, while the Soviet forces occupied most of the important regions in Afghanistan, it did not dominate the Hazarjat region in central Afghanistan, the stronghold of the Shia community.²³ The Soviet Union did not want to antagonise Iran which had already turned anti-American.

Towards Pakistan, the Soviet Union adopted a carrot and stick policy. Sometimes it offered economic and technical assistance and other time, threatened its independence. Gromyko, the then Foreign Minister of the USSR, had warned Pakistan that "it will lose its independence if it continues its present policy of supporting Afghan mujahideen in Afghanistan."²⁴

The Soviet Union to win away non-aligned India to its side raised the spectre of Chinese and US aggression in the region. Pravda argued that India's fears of US and Chinese attempts to "encircle India" were justified. After the intervention, Moscow immediately sent its Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to New Delhi to underline the significance of continued close relations between India and the Soviet Union. Gromyko tried to justify the Soviet act in Afghanistan as a defensive action to preempt interference and aggressive designs of the US, Pakistan and China. India's External Affairs Ministry's spokesman, J. N Dixit, though avoided anti-American language, said "many things are happening in the world which impinge on the situation in Afghanistan".²⁵ India's friendly ties with the Soviet Union and conflicting relationship with China and Pakistan deterred India from taking an anti-Soviet stance while world opinion was slowly getting united in terms of denouncing the Soviet role in Afghanistan.

Domestically, the Soviet Union was engaged in false propaganda. A new security service known as Kedmat-e-Elela'at-e-Dawlati (KHAD) was formed in January 1980 to handle rebels. It was organised and trained by Soviet intelligence agency Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosty (KGB). While interrogating, KHAD tortured men, women and even children under the direction and presence of Soviet advisers. However, KHAD was immensely successful in gathering intelligence and in contributing to consolidation of power by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union tried to make Afghanistan look like itself in terms of institutions and ideology. The constitution and organisation of PDPA began to look like those

of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The political terminologies used were Soviet terms. Russian was taught in schools. Textbooks printed in the USSR were brought to Afghanistan and distributed in schools. The Afghan history was rewritten. A former student from Ghazni said “we used to have books dealing with Islam and its philosophy. Now they have changed all this with books about Lenin and Marxist thought...religious science has been repressed.”²⁶

When all these measures seemed to fail to consolidate the role of PDPA and the Soviet Union, Babrak Karmal was asked to broaden popular support to his regime by forming National Fatherland Front (NFF), which included religious, tribal, ethnic and political leaders. The NFF came into existence on 15 June 1981. More than 900 representatives from different classes and sections participated in the founding Congress of the NFF. As per the Constitution, the purpose of the NFF was to attract vast masses of people to participate actively and consciously in constructing democratic and progressive Afghanistan and in observing respect for the sacred religion of Islam. However, KHAD, a security and intelligence agency was allowed to play a significant role in the functioning of NFF. It followed a divide and rule policy to deal with different groups through the departments of the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs resulting in the loss of people's trust in NFF.

Soviet failure to turn Afghanistan into a Soviet satellite

All the measures that the Soviet Union adopted in Afghanistan failed because of multiple reasons. First, Afghanistan had historically prioritised nationalism above any other ideology. It was the Afghan nationalism that protected Afghanistan from the incursions of British and Russian Empire. The control and influence of PDPA was limited to Kabul while people of the rest of Afghanistan remained with their tribal and local identity. But such local identities usually got transformed into national identity at the time of threat to the country. According to Robert M. Cassidy, the Soviet invasion fused Islamic ideology with the cause of national liberation. After the invasion, thousands of officers and soldiers of the Afghan Army defected to the mujahideen, and the insurgents seized hundreds of government outposts, most of which had been abdicated by defecting soldiers. For example, Massoud gained control of the entire Panjshir Valley during the spring of 1980, whereas before the invasion his forces had been confined to a much smaller part of the upper valley.²⁷

Secondly, balance of power was always maintained in Afghanistan by the great powers either directly or through their proxies. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan disturbed such balance of power and therefore met with quick reprisal. Though international conditions prior to the invasion changed the balance in the Soviet Union's favour, the US quickly responded to the situation by increasing arms and aid to its allies. Moscow might have thought that Washington's half-hearted response to the Russian role in Hungary and Czechoslovakia might be repeated in case of Afghanistan. Minton F. Goldman argues that the Soviet Union felt free to invade Afghanistan in December 1979 because it expected no serious resistance-beyond words and symbols of disapproval from the United States or any other concerned nation.²⁸ The fact that was overlooked was that Afghanistan was geopolitically more important for the US in terms of its containment strategy.

Thirdly, intervention in a neutral and non-aligned Third World Muslim country led to international opprobrium against the Soviet role. Despite Soviet propaganda, something close to a universal consensus quickly developed on the injustice of the Soviet Union. Even the leaders sympathetic to the Soviet Union such as Indira Gandhi of India, Assad of Syria, Gaddafi of Libya called upon the Soviets to withdraw their forces. The Muslim states of West Asia were angered as the invasion increased the region's fragility and disunity.²⁹ The world public opinion largely turned against the Soviet Union in the case of Afghanistan unlike on the issues of Soviet role in Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

Fourthly, the USSR became a victim to the asymmetric warfare that the hills and difficult terrains of Afghanistan facilitated. While for the Soviet Union the Afghan War was a limited war, for the resistance forces it was a total war. For the latter it was a war for the survival and the future of the country. The Afghan guerrillas proved Kissinger's maxim- "the guerrilla wins if does not lose; the conventional army loses if it does not win."³⁰ The Afghani resistance forces effectively countered the Soviet strategy of annihilation by conducting a protracted war of attrition. The Afghan guerrillas did not require much time and creativity to anticipate the predictable offensives from the Soviet forces. They would simply leave the area under aerial and artillery bombardment and come back after the Soviet forces had returned to their bases. On the other hand, before and after each one of these offensives, the Afghan fighters knew the avenues of approach and return, and were able to ambush the weary Soviet columns.

Fifthly, using force indiscriminately without having a proper counterinsurgency campaign undermined the Soviet efforts in Afghanistan by alienating the population. The indiscriminate form of rural counter-offensive and the mass repression in the towns were not only morally reprehensible, but they also seemed to have fuelled the flames of counter-revolution and enabled the opponents of the PDPA to mobilise wider support. The Soviet policy of destroying agriculture and de-populating the countryside further alienated the rural masses. However, technologically, use of helicopter by the Soviet forces helped them cover vast areas and tackle the decentralised nature of operations in Afghanistan. It was after the Gorbachev's assumption of power in March 1985 that the Soviet forces in Afghanistan better employed their technological advantage to improve their performance. They made particularly effective use of the MI-24 and MI-25 Hind helicopters and of the insertion of Special Forces units behind enemy lines.³¹ While on the one hand the process of negotiation was going on among the major powers involved in the Afghan war particularly after Gorbachev assumed power in the USSR, the volume and dangerousness of the war increased at the same time on the other hand. To turn the tide of the war militarily, Gorbachev named General Mikhail Zaitsev, one of the most illustrious Generals, to oversee the Soviet war efforts.³² In April 1986 the Americans decided to provide the mujahideen with Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles and this marked a turning point in the war. The Afghan fighters were then able to undermine a key Soviet technological advantage- the mobility and firepower of helicopters.

Sixthly, one of the mistakes that the Soviet Union committed in the conduct the Afghan War was to employ the ethnic forces of same origin from the Central Asian states as that of the Afghan guerrillas. As a result, they started helping the guerrilla forces when they realised that the only people they were fighting in Afghanistan were Afghans. The Afghan war accentuated ethnic unrest within the Soviet army and went a long way in discrediting it. Even in the early 1980s, the reliability of Central Asian soldiers was questioned and they were often removed from active combat duties in Afghanistan. When they served combat duties, the Generals perceived them as being soft on Afghan civilians. For example, on September 12, 1985, following the execution of an Afghan civilian, there was an ethnic mutiny in the Dast-I Abdan base near the city of Kunduz in the northern part of Afghanistan. The Central Asian troops fired at the Russians and 'some 450 people from both sides...and 500 military vehicles were entirely destroyed'.³³

These are some of the very important reasons behind the weakness of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan which led subsequently to Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Ideology, culture (includes ethnicity and religion) and technology played a very important role in determining success in the Afghan war. The first two are important in recruiting material support and legitimacy. However, the primary motive behind the major powers' role in Afghanistan is geopolitical. While the Soviet Union's decision to intervene in Afghanistan was moved by its geopolitical interest to take advantage of the power vacuum in the Southwest Asian region, ideological discrepancy with the PDPA, lack of true communist revolution in Afghanistan, neutral and non-aligned character of Afghanistan, intervention in an Islamic country in a region where Islamism was gaining strength after the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet decision to recruit the people of the same origin from Central Asian republics to fight Afghan guerrillas were some of the factors weakening Soviet hold in Afghanistan.

Negotiations for settlement of Afghan problem

The UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim appointed Perez De Cuellar as his personal representative to Afghanistan in 1981 to study the complexities of the situation there and discuss with the parties concerned about a negotiated settlement of the problem. During Brezhnev's presidency Moscow took an unambiguous stance on the conditionalities of negotiation. Brezhnev said, before the Soviet Union withdraws "the infiltration of the counter-revolutionary gangs into Afghanistan must be completely stopped. This must be secured in accord between Afghanistan and its neighbours. Dependable guarantees required that there will be no new intervention. Such is the fundamental position of the Soviet Union, and we adhere to it firmly".³⁴ The first proximity talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan began in June 1982 in Geneva but without any result. During the second round of talks which began in April 1983 Yuri Andropov was the Soviet head of the state. Unlike Brezhnev, he took a conciliatory approach towards the Afghan problem but during this time neither the US nor Pakistan was interested in a compromise solution. The last months of Andropov and the period of Chernenko's leadership (February 1984 to March 1985) saw no political and diplomatic movement on Afghanistan, but rather an intensification of military activities in the country. After Gorbachev assumed power, he underlined the importance of negotiations and talked about Soviet withdrawal. However, on the other hand he tried to turn the tide of the

Afghan War in favour of the Soviet Union through technological superiority. During his regime helicopters were massively used to conduct the war. According to Fred Halliday, while at a meeting of the Politburo on 17 November 1985 Gorbachev said that he had told Karmal on the previous day that Soviet forces would be out 'by summer of 1986', it took, however, more than two and a half years from that meeting for the Soviet withdrawal to begin.³⁵

The Soviet Union did not want to leave Afghanistan without its interests being safeguarded. It installed Najibullah in power after Babrak Karmal failed to broaden his base. The Soviet Union facilitated a new 'National Reconciliation Policy' to negotiate with declared enemies. However, after a brief period of success, the policy failed as both the government and mujahideen received enormous funds from outside and the military-political situation remained deadlocked. The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan as part of a negotiated international peace process but at the same time it left enough military force to defend its interest in Afghanistan. According to Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, "despite post-war claims that they had been humiliatingly defeated, Soviet forces in reality withdrew in good order, and left in place a regime in Kabul with (in principle) more than sufficient military force to defend itself".³⁶ According to GPD, Gorbachev assured everyone that "national reconciliation and the establishment of a coalition government" in Afghanistan "is purely an internal Afghan issue" and warned presumably the Americans and Pakistanis by saying it was neither "our business nor yours for that matter" to interfere in the reconciliation process.³⁷ The Soviet Union knew that Najibullah's men were the biggest and most united force in Afghanistan. The Soviets had offered to withdraw probably because they were aware of the strategic importance of this group in an Afghanistan of warring tribes. Moscow thought that Najibullah and the ruling party in Kabul could not be thrown out as traitors nor were the Mujahidden going to inherit Kabul from them. To see an anti-American government in Kabul, Gorbachev courted Iran and said "it should not stand aside from a political settlement".³⁸

The Soviet Union's support in terms of armaments went a long way in strengthening the Afghan regular army. It is argued that the collapse of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan was not a consequence of mujahideen military victory. It was the ongoing process of disintegration of the Soviet Union that led its foreign minister to pledge to cut off all military and economic aid to Najibullah by January 1992. However, despite all Soviet

attempts to safeguard its interests in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of Soviet army and disintegration of the Soviet Union were related to protracted Afghan War.

Afghan War and the Soviet disintegration

The development of 'new political thinking' in the Soviet Union, as many experts argue, was the major factor that led to Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and its eventual disintegration. It was argued that in 1980s, the Soviet economy could not meet the demand for consumer goods from the rising urban middle class. As the incremental economic and political reforms were sabotaged by an alliance of corrupt central and regional leaders, *Perestroika*, a large-scale systemic reform was initiated to overcome the obstacles. However, it turned into a Frankenstein, causing the breakdown of the Soviet Union.³⁹ Some scholars attribute the Soviet collapse to the Soviet policy of *Glasnost*. *Glasnost* allowed some freedom to different ethnic communities constituting the Soviet Union. Secessionists perceived Moscow's attempts to accommodate their demands as a sign of Moscow's weakness. In order to exploit such weakness, they demanded complete independence. Other scholars emphasise the high costs that the Cold War imposed on the Soviet Union leading to its disintegration.

However, Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash argued that it was the Afghan War that led to a change in the political thinking in Moscow. They argue that the leadership-based explanations to the Soviet disintegration fail to address two critical questions. First, why did the disintegration of the Soviet Union begin towards the end of the 1980s? Second, why only in the mid-1980s did the Soviet leaders acknowledge the impossibility of sustaining their economic and foreign policies? According to them, from summer 1984 to summer 1986, Gorbachev seemed to follow the policies of his predecessors on Afghanistan. However, the use of new technology and armaments by the mujahideens in the Afghan war and the consequential growth of Soviet casualties in 1986 changed non-Russian nationalities' perception on the war.⁴⁰ Many soldiers were drawn from the non-Russian Soviet republics to fight the Afghan war and since their presence and role often were not acknowledged by the Soviet authorities who wanted to play down the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, these soldiers became openly critical of the Soviet leaders. Moreover, these soldiers often believed that they were involved in an unjust war by fighting their own ethnic kins in Afghanistan. The poor performance of the Soviet army in the Afghan war changed the perception of the pro-secession leaders and they thought that Soviet might was not invincible and resistance

was possible. Since the military was the important pillar of the anti-*perestroika* camp, the reverses in Afghanistan weakened anti-reformists, hastened *perestroika* and facilitated the collapse of the system.

Russia, Central Asia and Afghanistan

The Soviet Union's disintegration and emergence of Russia put an end to its proactive role in Afghanistan. Russia shunned the Soviet crave for global reach by gaining both continental and naval supremacy. It tried to consolidate its position in the divided heartland. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was power vacuum in the strategic area of Eurasia. The Caspian region of Eurasia is geopolitically important as it provides land connectivity to different places and constitutes the largest continental area of the world. Furthermore, the natural resources and the landlocked character of Central Asian states add to the geopolitical importance of the region.

According to the estimates of geologists, the oil deposits of the Caspian Sea may not be quantitatively comparable to the deposits of the Persian Gulf, but they are still considered of excellent quality and able to provide a significant alternative source of energy in the 21st century. In particular, it is estimated that the entire Caspian Sea is a basin full of oil and natural gas, starting from Azerbaijan and continuing to the opposite shore in the territory of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. These deposits carry enormous importance because of the expected exhaustion of the deposits of Alaska and the North Sea by the year 2015.⁴¹

Russia has both geopolitical and geoeconomic interests in Central Asia. It considers Central Asia its strategic backyard and has a monopoly over pipeline diplomacy as it supplies the Central Asian natural resources through the pipelines existing since Soviet times. Russia's role in Afghanistan has been shaped primarily by the threats to the region emanating from and facilitated by the latter. The Russian policy has been to contain the US's penetration into the region and prevent the Central Asian Republics from radical Islamic influences and drugs generating from Afghanistan. For the US, the region is important to develop a continental strategy to contain the influence of Russia, Iran and China as all these major powers are geographically connected to and has stakes in the region and the natural resource potential also attracted the American attention towards the region. The American plan of laying down an alternative route for transfer of Central Asian resources to the world market through

Afghanistan threatened Russia's interests.

The flight of many Soviet Muslims during Stalin's brutal collectivisation campaign and nationalist purges created a permanent Soviet exile population in Afghanistan. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the resultant weakening of its control over the Islamic republics, Russia believed that a radical Islamic regime in Afghanistan would push these people towards the north. Secondly, the regime through its Islamic influences would use the exiled population to destabilise the newly independent Central Asian Republics. Rise of Islamic opposition groups in different Central Asian states strengthened such Russian belief.

The increase in the production and trafficking of drugs is also related to the collapse of the Soviet-era economies and the elimination of Soviet-policed borders. Between 1992 and 2000, Russian border guards in Tajikistan seized about ten tonnes of drugs including a tonne of heroin. These seizures are believed to be a fraction of what actually gets through, given the multitude of river crossing points and other factors, for instance the openness to corruption of underpaid Tajik and Russian soldiers and border guards, the extreme poverty of the population on both sides of the long border where unemployed young men are prepared to take risks as smugglers, and the existence in northern Afghanistan of a flourishing drugs industry.⁴²

Rising opposition movements and drug-trafficking in Central Asia were genuine concerns for Russia. The growth of Taliban in Afghanistan was constant irritant for Russia. Sergie Ivanov, the head of Russian Security Council, threatened to launch missile and air strikes against Afghanistan after accusing the Taliban government of assisting the Chechen resistance. Moscow further accused the Taliban of giving sanctuary to Islamists from some of the Central Asian states and allowing them to train for guerrilla warfare to destabilise the states. During the Afghan civil war, Russia kept pouring weapons and money in support of Uzbek and Tajik warlords. When the civil war entered a decisive phase, Russia in order to push the Taliban out of Tajik and Uzbek areas threw its weight behind Ahmad Shah Massoud who had bases in Tajikistan.

However, it is argued that Russia exaggerated the role of radical Islamic groups to retain control over the former Soviet republics. The developments in Chechnya, Central Asia (civil

war in Tajikistan) and Afghanistan were seen as part of a larger plot hatched by a secretive network of Islamic activists and terrorists whose main goal, according to Russia's Federal Security Service has been to create a Great Islamic caliphate. However, scholars like Rasul Bakhsh Rais argue that the link between the Taliban and the Islamic movements in Central Asia is questionable. According to him all these movements have indigenous roots and Russia and the ruling elites in Central Asia exaggerate the transnational links among the Islamic movements to divert attention from their own political failures.⁴³

Afghanistan and Russia's Central Asian strategy

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia's policy towards Central Asia was consolidated into two tracks. According to Trenin, Russia's policy was in the pursuit of economic opportunities and in shoring up stability by the military means of buffer-building. And common to both tracks is the desire to keep the Central Asian states within Moscow's orbit, and to minimise outside influence in the region.⁴⁴ Russia has been seeking to direct as much as possible the oil and gas exports of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan through Soviet pipeline routes and re-establish economic links through cooperation projects. However, Central Asian Republics like Turkmenistan were looking for alternative pipeline projects to reduce their dependence on Russia. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline project is an example of this. Nevertheless, Russia was pushing economic cooperation through the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Russia's three Central Asian allies, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which was upgraded in October 2000 to a Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC).

Russia had tried to prevent the US from developing long-term military bases in the Central Asian region for power projection with a plea to provide security to the weak states, to promote and safeguard the pipelines and to contain the penetration of other major powers into the region prior to 9/11. On the other hand, Russia developed military strategies for its own power projection in order to show that the Central Asian states can rely on it for their security. Russia expressed its willingness to play a major role in containing the spillover of terrorism and drug trafficking from Afghanistan into the Central Asian region. It played a major role in stemming civil war like situation in the region. The civil war in Tajikistan and unrest in Uzbekistan were considered Afghan exported phenomena. After the Tajik civil war in 1992, Russian engagement in Central Asia became clearer. The Collective Security Treaty

was activated. By 1997, Russia consolidated its involvement in the face of an enhanced US presence in the area, which included a military base in Kazakhstan and joint exercises with the Central Asian Battalion (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan).⁴⁵

Russia developed an ideology of 'sovereign democracy' to strengthen the role of leaders in the Central Asian politics and contain the American influence in the region according to Simon Shen.⁴⁶ In order to spread influence into Central Asia, the US insisted on democratic transformation and observance of human rights and played a major role in coloured revolutions in the region. However, Putin considered Russian-style democracy was always likely to accord a far greater role to the state than in the west. In his Millennium Address in December 1999, he said, "The public looks forward to a certain restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state, proceeding from Russia's traditions as well as the current state in the country".⁴⁷

Apart from developing the ideology of 'sovereign democracy' and military strategies to tighten its control over Central Asia and creating a buffer between Central Asia and Afghanistan, Russia tried to handle the Afghan issue diplomatically. Russia stressed the centrality of Iran to the settlement of conflict in Afghanistan. After disintegration of the USSR, Russia and Iran formed some kind of 'strategic alliance'. While greeting then presidential candidate Hashemi Rafsanjani on a visit to Moscow immediately after Khomeini's death in June 1989, Gorbachev had given full recognition to the validity and importance of Iran's ideology. Gorbachev said that "we are receiving a representative of the state which is our old neighbour and which embarked on the path of revolutionary renewal". He further remarked that "the emergence of the new political thinking in the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran on the other hand, have created a basis for deepening ties and good-neighbourly cooperation, proceeding from respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, and mutually beneficial constructive cooperation."⁴⁸ Iran considered Russian role in the Persian Gulf crucial to keep the American forces out of the region. Moscow repeatedly called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Gulf. In Afghanistan, rise of Sunni extremism under the Taliban and the American plan to use the Taliban for an alternative pipeline system running through Afghanistan bypassing Russia and Iran brought the two countries together. For Iran, withdrawal of Soviet troops meant victory for America and Saudi Arabia. Both Iran and Russia provided assistance

to Masoud with Tajikistan facilitating it by allowing its territory to strengthen anti-Taliban forces in Pakistan. At times, both the countries also supported the Uzbek warlord, Dostum against the Taliban. Iran also facilitated dialogue between Moscow and Shia parties in Afghanistan to unite them against the Taliban.

However, Iran and Russia's support for anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan could not prevent the Taliban from achieving success as the Northern Alliance represented warlords having divergent interests. For example, Massoud in order to receive arms and aid from the west complained about Iran's interference in Afghanistan. Therefore, Russia at times tried to make peace with the Taliban. Russia's then Prime Minister, Victor Chernomyrdin met four of the five Central Asian presidents on 4 October 1996 to examine urgently the situation which was developing on the southern border of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the discussions any military aid to anti-Taliban forces inside Afghanistan was denied. Instead, Russia along with the United Nations brokered peace between the Taliban and the Tajik government which enabled tens of thousands of Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan to return to their homes. According to Sreedhar, the Russians threatening to bomb the training camps and sanctuaries provided by the Taliban to dissident groups of CIS have not been able to do anything on the ground, other than increasing their number of border guards to counter-terrorism. This Russian hesitation to use force to neutralise the Taliban radicals resulted in a series of clashes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in July-August 2000. Russia came round to the view of engaging the Taliban through Pakistan in constructive dialogue. The months of August and September 2000 saw a flurry of diplomatic activity between Moscow and Islamabad.⁴⁹

Moscow's attitude towards international terrorism was formed through its struggle with the militants in Chechnya and resurgence of Islamic radicalism and drug trafficking in Central Asia. Vladimir Putin had long been arguing that the Russia and the West were fighting a common enemy in militant Islamism and September 11, 2001 attacks on the US proved that his analysis that the world was confronting 'a crescent of Islamic terrorism' stretching from the Philippines through Afghanistan, Chechnya and on to Kosovo had been correct. So far many Western commentators were reluctant to admit any international influence in the Chechen uprising. However, September 11 provided the opportunity for Russia to get international support on Chechnya issue. Disputes over oil were at the heart of Russia's

decision to go to war against Chechnya in December 1994, because its sole operational pipeline for Caspian oil, which goes directly through troubled Dagestan and Chechnya, was under threat from the radical Islamic forces of Chechnya. Russia's geo-economic reasons for establishing a firm control over Chechnya are related to the need to control the resources of the Caspian. Apart from Russia's concerns in Chechnya, to contain the increasing Islamic opposition movements and drug-trafficking in Central Asia, the prospect of Northern Alliance coming to power in Afghanistan and the need to reset the relationship with the West in the post-Cold War period were some of the important factors in Russia's calculation to join the US sponsored 'War on Terror'. Russia had supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in terms of arms and economic aid during the Afghan civil war. To see the Northern Alliance in power Russia provided key support to the alliance during the 'War on Terror'. For example, it provided the Northern Alliance with 60 T-55 battle tanks, 12 T-62 K command tanks and 30 infantry fighting vehicles during the War. Nevertheless, the Northern Alliance's progress towards Kabul was resisted by Islamabad and Washington.⁵⁰

After September 11, Putin described the al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the US as 'barbaric' in a TV broadcast to the Russian people on 14 September 2001 and said that "Russia would provide all the information at its disposal about terrorist bases, and its secret services would cooperate fully with the West".⁵¹ A Russia-America Working Group was set up in 2000 to consult on counter-terrorist activities in Afghanistan. However, more controversial was allowing the US access to military bases in Central Asia. While Russia's Foreign Ministry initially considered that the Central Asian states were independent states and could allow the US to establish military bases, the Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov ruled out any NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) presence in the region. The Chief of the General Staff, Anatoli Kvashnin said "Russia has not considered, and is not planning to consider, participation in a military operation against Afghanistan". He reminded the Central Asian states of their 'bilateral and other obligations' to Russia.⁵² The national security document of January 2001 and military document of 29 September 2001 of Russia listed international terrorism in Chechnya and Dagestan as the most important threat and next to it was the US and NATO assertiveness in the former Soviet republics.⁵³ However, the US assured both Russia and Central Asian States that its use of bases would be only temporary and Putin accepted the idea and persuaded the Defense department to facilitate the US military bases in the region.

To Russia's disadvantage, Central Asian states believed that the powerful US would be an effective security guarantor in the region. Furthermore, these states were interested to see diminution of Russia's role in the region. Therefore, Central Asian leaders were quick to show themselves as US allies in the Bush administration's 'Global War on Terror'. Kyrgyzstan provided basing for the US and coalition forces at its Manas airbase, Tajikistan provided a refueling facility near Dushanbe, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan provided overflight rights and other support and more importantly Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov had signed a bilateral agreement with Washington permitting the US military to use its base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2), just 60 miles away from Afghanistan. As the outcome of the war became clear and the Taliban regime fell, the US Secretary of State said in December 2001 that the US did not intend to withdraw from Central Asia even after the war in Afghanistan since America had long-term interests in the region. The US Assistant Secretary of State to Central Asian states Elizabeth Jones stated that the US would support the states in their reforms and more aid would come depending on their reforms and she further said that US's interest lay in the 'transparent development of Caspian energy resources'.⁵⁴

Russia's increased interest in Central Asia and Afghanistan

In response to the American role in the region, Russia accentuated its military role in the region. In October 2003, Russia established its first new regional military base since the Cold War at Kant, Kyrgyzstan. Russian and Kyrgyz officials also discussed to establish another major Russian military facility in southern Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan granted Russia's 201st Motorised Infantry Division a permanent base near Dushanbe in October 2004. In June 2004, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a Treaty on Strategic Cooperation which provides for additional Russian military assistance to Uzbekistan and the creation of a joint anti-terrorism institute.⁵⁵

In May 2005, the US critically responded to the Uzbek government's excessive use of force to suppress a violent uprising in the city of Andijon. It called for an independent investigation into the issue with international involvement and aligned its long-term interest in Central Asia with promotion of democracy and human rights there. Nevertheless, before the Andijon incident the US's policy in the region was directed to strengthen the role of authoritarian leaders in order to get facilities to establish military bases. However, the Andijon incident led

to a downturn in the bilateral relationship between Uzbekistan and the US. The Russian ideology of 'sovereign democracy' and the continued policy of supporting the leaders in Central Asia reaped better results for it. In November 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a treaty on Allied Relations that pledged mutual military assistance in the event either becomes a victim of "aggression".

To secure an American withdrawal from the region, Russia initiated a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) declaration in 2005 to fix time limits on the temporary use of infrastructure and on the length of military contingents by the anti-terror coalition. The SCO was formed in June 2001 when Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five – Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – which had first met in 1996. Uzbekistan, which strongly resisted the Russian effort to bring Central Asia into closer security cooperation, joined SCO because Russia's presence there is balanced by China. Currently, India, Iran and Pakistan enjoy the observer status in the group. The SCO's declared purpose was security cooperation in relation to terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and separatism. However, after September 11, the organisation also seeks to counter Western influence in the region. Afterwards, America's withdrawal from the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan became a priority of Russian policy. The Kyrgyz President, Bakiyev speaking in Moscow after a lengthy haggling session in which he had secured a \$2 billion loan from Russia, said that the Americans would be given six months to withdraw. Since the mid-2000s, the Manas airbase had been under attack in the Russian and local press, which succeeded to a large degree in shaping public sentiment against the presence of the US in Kyrgyzstan. In April 2009, Russian television broadcast a documentary alleging that Manas was a cover for a large-scale US spying mission on Russia.⁵⁶

However, the Russian aim of ending the US use of the base was frustrated by the fact that US payments for use of the base represented a substantial financial assistance to Kyrgyzstan. When Uzbek President Islam Karimov announced that a cargo airport in the Uzbek city of Navoi could be used for airborne transport of NATO supplies to Afghanistan and that a major renovation at that airport would turn it into a world-class airfreight hub, the Kyrgyz government announced a deal with the US allowing Americans to continue using Manas Air base as transit centre. Moreover, the Kyrgyz government - like the governments of other Central Asian states- had good reason to believe that if the US and NATO troops were not

able to defeat Islamist extremist in Afghanistan, then sooner rather than later Islamists would become active in Central Asia.⁵⁷

Instead of opposing the US and Kyrgyz government, Russia looked for a new military base in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, which was to be a key component of the new Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CORF) under the auspices of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). In June 2009, the CSTO formally created CORF as part of its ambition to create forces 'on par with NATO forces' and in view of the unstable situation in Afghanistan. However, Uzbekistan has objected to the opening of this military base. The Uzbek leadership has argued that the continued destabilisation in Afghanistan is largely in Russia's interest, in so far as Russia has used the conflict there to justify an expansion of its military presence in Central Asia. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is likely to view a Russian-led military presence in the volatile Ferghana Valley - regarded as Central Asia's heartland- as a factor impinging on its ability to continue to exert its hegemony on its smaller Central Asia neighbours.

The deal between the US and the Kyrgyz government was probably a major reason that Russia in July 2009 agreed to allow the US to transport troops and weapons across Russian airspace en route to Afghanistan. As the US had managed to maintain transit arrangements to Afghanistan through Central Asia, it had become meaningless for Russia to continue pursuing its objective of cutting off US supply lines. That agreement signed during a Russian-US summit in Moscow, permits 4, 500 American flights per year and allows NATO to transport lethal weapons along Russian and Central Asian railways, an overland supply route known as the 'Northern Distribution Network'.⁵⁸

However, according to Dmitri Rogozin, the Russian envoy to NATO, Russia wants to help the US and Afghanistan as part of the international community but on its own terms. He said that they "negotiate from a position of strength" on Afghanistan. According to Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, in 2010, traffic along the Northern Distribution Network "was still dogged by heavy delays and disruption, while Russian and American military bases continued to jostle for influence in Central Asia, and Russian criticism of the ineffectiveness of NATO counter-narcotics operations grew louder".⁵⁹ Therefore, the relationship that the Obama administration developed with Russia and claimed to be strategic was far from being so.

Russian and American purposes in Afghanistan differed. America's military objective was limited to stabilising Afghanistan and reducing Taliban influence there: there was no intention to meet all the security challenges of the region. Russians claimed that Central Asia's borders were their southern borders and that Russia was vulnerable to a wide range of security threats within Central Asia. Not all of these threats concern America. It was argued that the Afghanistan campaign might have actually exacerbated the security problems by dispersing Taliban groups into Central Asia. Moreover, the issue of drug-trafficking which the Russians insisted to be firmly dealt with was not seriously taken up by the Americans. The warlords on whom the American-led Afghan operation depended never wanted drug production and drug-trafficking to be part of the operation.

M. K. Bhadrakumar, a former Indian diplomat, argues that Russia negotiated with the NATO for transit route facilities that it found difficult to deny given the presence of France and Germany, which favour greater involvement of Russia in NATO affairs. At the same time, it was aware of the American plan of an alternative Caucasian route that would bypass Russia.⁶⁰ It was also aware of the fact that the US wanted to be less dependent on it for its war efforts in Afghanistan as the American containment strategy towards Russia could not be sustained if there was critical dependence on it. However, Russia has not lost its monopoly over pipeline diplomacy despite the recognition by the Central Asian states that the diversification of pipeline routes was prerequisite for their economic security. It is because there is lack of incentives for Central Asian producers to abandon long-term gas supply contracts with Russia and secondly, the Russian-Georgian war made export routes from Central Asia crossing the Caspian even less viable than before. Thirdly, the American policy of sanctions against Iran has made the west more dependent on Russia for supply of natural resources. Russia's monopoly over supplies of Central Asian natural resources allows it a larger role in the region. For example, Russia through its company Gazprom prevented Turkmenistan from exporting its energy products in 1997.⁶¹ Perhaps because of Russia's overriding influence due to its monopoly in oil supplies, the Central Asian states have agreed to strengthen CSTO as an alternative to NATO. In one of the top-level summit meetings, the CSTO leaders unanimously agreed that countries outside the regional security bloc would only be able to establish military bases on the territory of a member-state with the consent of all member-states. The Russian president Medvedev said "the decision we have made with

regard to military bases in a third country is very important for the consolidation of positions within the CSTO”.⁶² The CSTO member states’ such decision assumes significance in view of the reported American plans to redeploy to Central Asia some of the forces that will be pulled out of Afghanistan in 2014.

Being aware of the long term American interests in the region, Russia wants the American stay in the region to be temporary. Russia avoids building strategic relationship with the US to fight terrorism in Afghanistan. Moscow said it would just stop short of sending troops to Afghanistan. Russia’s Foreign Minister stated that under “no circumstances” would Russian soldiers return there.⁶³ At times, Russia preferred to “let the Americans waste their money and troops”.⁶⁴ However, Russia’s interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan led Russia to compromise with some of the American policies in the region and it does not want a hasty American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, after Russia’s interest to see Northern Alliance dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks in power was resisted by the American forces and Karzai, a Pastun and pro-American leader, was instituted to power, Russia tried to maintain friendly relationship with him. Russia’s Foreign Minister Ivanov said, Moscow was “far from indifferent to what position a new Afghan leadership will adopt in respect to Russia”.⁶⁵ Ivanov wanted ‘stable and friendly relations’ and to this end, met with Karzai on a number of occasions. Furthermore, within days of the fall of the Taliban, Russia provided emergency aid to Afghanistan which “helped avert a large-scale humanitarian disaster in the region”, and thereafter sought to work with the UN and Karzai government to help rebuild a strong and stable Afghanistan.⁶⁶

Later, American criticism of Karzai’s incompetence distanced him from the US. This came as an opportunity for Russia to increase its relationship with Karzai at the cost of the US. Karzai repeatedly tried to use the Russian option while dealing with the US/NATO. On the other hand the Russian Federation was one of the first foreign states to welcome both presidential and provincial council election results in 2009.⁶⁷ Russia welcomed the returning of Karzai to power as a stabilising factor for the political development of Afghanistan. Russia wanted to further cooperation at all levels political, economic and humanitarian as well as anti-terror fight with the approval of the Karzai government. To strengthen the relationship with Afghanistan, Russia wrote off 93 per cent Soviet-era debts.⁶⁸ Since 2007 Russia’s intelligence

apparatus reactivated their relations with the Northern Alliance members and warlords and Russia re-opened its consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif in a bid to promote its interest in Afghanistan. While not contributing troops to Afghanistan, Russia responded positively to the Karzai government's request for military equipment supplies. Russia along with Iran opposed the US led Taliban reconciliation strategy. It is of the view that any reconciliation strategy that is proposed has to be Afghan led. Russia has so far successfully used Iran's nuclear programme as trump card in its geopolitical game with the west. It does not want a political resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue as such a resolution could only come about if Iran halted its nuclear programme in exchange for massive Western investment, security guarantees, and recognition of Iran as the West's principal partner in the Islamic world. As a result, the West would find in Iran the best possible pipeline route option to export the Central Asian energy resources bypassing Russia.⁶⁹ Russia wants that the political and military resources of the west to be focused on Iran. Russia has so far vetoed all effective sanctions against Iran as it thinks that would lead to a political resolution to the Iranian issue. Iran is content with Russia's investment in its nuclear programme.

Russia in order to lessen its dependence on the US to fight terrorism and drug-trafficking and gain some control over radical groups tried to develop relationship with Pakistan. The example of this is the quadripartite summit of Russia, Pakistan and Tajikistan hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev in August 2010 at the Black Sea resort, Sochi where Moscow decisively moved to de-hyphenate its relationship with Islamabad and New Delhi. Sochi was a turning point in a sense that Mr. Medvedev's bilateral meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit was marked by uncharacteristic warmth and both the leaders decided to have "very regular and frequent contacts" and engage in "good political dialogue" unlike in the past.⁷⁰

Russia's President Medvedev has also pressed for an increased regional involvement in the Afghan problems, not only with the collaboration of the Central Asian republics and other regional states, such as Pakistan, but also with the SCO.⁷¹ Afghanistan, in turn, has expressed its willingness to gain maximum assistance possible from the platforms of CSTO and SCO. In March 2009, the SCO held a special conference on Afghanistan in Moscow which aimed at establishing the SCO as an important stakeholder or investor in the security and stability of Afghanistan. In order to check the Chinese influence in the region, Russia is also promoting

CSTO-SCO cooperation.

There are instances of consultations between India, Iran and Russia to devise ways and means to deal with the Afghan problem. For example, Russia's first Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov, India's Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi sought closer coordination between their countries to keep the Taliban out of power.⁷² However, the consultations between these countries are sporadic and there is nothing like Russia-Iran-India alliance has come into existence on the Afghan issue.

The bottom-line of Russia's interest in Afghanistan is securing a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. To attain this objective, Russia lent quick support to the US led War on Terror. It agreed to the American need of establishing bases in Central Asia. It provided emergency aid to Afghanistan saving it from a humanitarian disaster. It cooperated and maintained friendly relationship with the Karzai government in its initial stages knowing that it was pro-US.

However, whenever opportunity arose, Russia did not hesitate to hinder American interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan. After the Andijon incident in Uzbekistan, Russia tried to rollback the US's influence in the region. It did not contribute its troops to Afghanistan although the US requested for the same as it might have believed that loss of American troops and money would rob its energy to project its power in a region vital to Russia's interest. Even while both Russia and the US established military bases in different parts of Central Asia, their direct contacts have been surprisingly limited. In April 2005, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said "Russian and US military bases in Kyrgyzstan are not bothering each other".⁷³ Nevertheless, it did not want the situation in Afghanistan to deteriorate to such an extent that problems of terrorism and drug-trafficking would engulf the entire region and therefore there was cooperation between the US and Russia. But the cooperation was far from being full-fledged. It is argued that Russia is interested in an unstable Afghanistan where role of the radical groups is partly curtailed by the US and international actors. It exploited the unstable situation in Afghanistan to tighten its grip over Central Asia. However, to contain American interest in Afghanistan as it is already noted, Russia called for a larger role of the regional organisations like SCO and CSTO in securing security and stability in Afghanistan, reactivated its old relationship with the Northern Alliance, assured Karzai of its support when

the US criticised him as incompetent and welcomed the 2009 election results which the US alleged to be fraud. Karzai, in turn, used Russia as an option to deal with the West. It has also diplomatically handled Iran and Pakistan to undercut American influence in Afghanistan.

To sum up, economic underdevelopment and lack of modernization called for a greater role of major powers to invest in the socio-economic development of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union and the US were keen to undertake such investments given the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan. During the 1950s and 1960s, Afghanistan became an “economic Korea” divided between the Soviet Union in the north and the United States in south. But the failure of Helmand project, Afghanistan’s bilateral disputes with the important US’s allies in the region such as Iran and Pakistan and the American refusal to provide military aid to Daoud without solving the Pashtunistan issue with Pakistan drove Afghanistan closer to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was looking for an opportunity to get a foothold in Afghanistan. Previously, the Soviet Union had restrained itself from following a harsh policy against Afghanistan as it believed that would bring ideological opponents up to the frontier. The US allowed the Soviet Union playing a more dominant role in the socio-economic development Afghanistan without compromising its sovereignty. During Daoud’s premiership, the Soviet Union penetrated into Afghan society with its bureaucrats and advisors. When Zahir Shah came to power, the US tried to maintain balance of power in Afghanistan by influencing him to bring liberal reforms. The US also increased its aid and had CIA agents working for it in Afghanistan. However, Daoud came to power in Afghanistan for the second time with the Soviet help and courted the Soviets for economic and military aid. During this time the Soviets had effective presence in Afghanistan in terms of its bureaucrats and advisors. Balance of power in Afghanistan moved decisively in the Soviet Union’s favour. Internationally, the attack on the American Embassy in Pakistan, fall of Shah of Iran, loss of American will after Vietnam War, and increased Soviet military capabilities in 1970s moved the balance of power in the Soviet Union’s favour.

The Soviet Union militarily moved into Afghanistan taking advantage of the power vacuum. Though it tried to justify its act in terms of ideological necessity to save the revolution in Afghanistan, in actuality there was no such revolution as the authority and activities of PDPA were confined to Kabul. Moreover, the decision to intervene in Afghanistan was taken by the military. The interests underlying the Soviet role in Afghanistan were to lay down a land

route to the Indian Ocean, to ensure overland communication routes to the Indian subcontinent by putting pressure on Pakistan and more importantly, to enhance its power through putting pressure on the West and the Gulf countries by situating itself near the Persian Gulf and straits of Hormuz. The Soviet Union, lacking a foothold in the Gulf region, would have thought its presence in Afghanistan would place it nearest the important sea routes for oil supplies to the West. To realise its geopolitical interests, the Soviet Union tried to eliminate insurgency against the PDPA, wiped out leaders assumed to be threats to its interests and advised pro-Soviet leaders to broaden their base. It also tried to influence the culture and history of Afghanistan. Internationally, it tried to diplomatically cultivate India, Iran and Pakistan so that none of the states took a hardline anti-Soviet stance. The long-term interest of the Soviet Union was in installing a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan without any substantial threat. The Soviet Union failed to turn Afghanistan into its satellite because of a number of factors. Afghanistan prioritized nationalism over socialism or for that matter any other ideology historically. Furthermore, the Soviet intervention overlooked the fact that balance of power was always maintained in Afghanistan by the major powers. Besides, the Soviet Union intervened in a non-aligned Third World Muslim country which largely turned world public opinion against it. In addition, to conduct the Afghan War, it employed the people of same ethnic origin as that of the Afghan guerrillas who sympathised with their co-ethnics and it was also victimised by the asymmetric warfare techniques adopted by resistance forces. Though these factors weakened the Soviet position in Afghanistan and brought Gorbachev to the negotiating table, the Soviet Union kept supporting the Najibullah government and was not interested to withdraw without safeguarding its interests.

Gorbachev found in Iran a strategic partner with which the Soviet Union and later Russia worked to counter the American strategy in Persian Gulf and Central Asia. They also developed strategies together in Afghanistan by arming and aiding the Northern Alliance forces against the Taliban. After disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia's role became more defensive in relation to Afghanistan and offensive in relation to Central Asia. Russia became busy in finding ways and means to keep the divided heartland under its control. Russia seemed neither interested nor capable in securing a pro-Russian regime in Afghanistan as was the case during the Cold War. Russia, to contain the two non-conventional threats namely drug-trafficking and Islamic fundamentalism emerging from Afghanistan, required the American presence - a conventional threat in the region. Therefore, it facilitated the

American presence in the region to conduct its War on Terror, though not unconditionally. However, Russia seems to be aware of the American plan to install a pro-US regime in Afghanistan. Therefore, it has reactivated its relationship with the Northern Alliance since 2007 to hinder American interest in Afghanistan. In order to contain the influence of the US in the region, it has taken recourse to multilateral bodies like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Diplomatically, Russia has supported Iran in its nuclear programme and opposed heavy sanctions against it. Russia believes continuing stalemate on nuclear issue would sap American energy and weaken its role in the region. Iran and Russia share the common perception on the American intentions in the region. Both the countries agree that any reconciliation strategy to include the Taliban must be Afghan-led rather than being American-led. Russia perceives threat from the long-term presence of American forces in Afghanistan and existence of military bases in Central Asian states.

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CHAPTER III

US and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Cold War Calculations to Global ‘War on Terror’

The US inherited the western interests in Afghanistan from the British Empire. The new ‘Great Game’ between the US and the Soviet Union went beyond treating Afghanistan as a mere ‘buffer’ and introduced an ideological element into the rivalry. During the initial period of Cold War years, both the superpowers invested in the socio-economic development of Afghanistan. However, the Helmand project, the major American development project in Afghanistan failed.¹ Afghanistan’s bilateral disputes with the important US’s allies in the region namely Iran and Pakistan also prevented the US from allying with Afghanistan. The Soviet Union tried to cultivate Afghanistan to the disadvantage of US by extending support to Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue. The US refused to provide military aid to Afghanistan without amicably solving the Pashtunistan problem with Pakistan which in turn drew Afghanistan closer to the Soviet Union. Contrary to the American interests in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union became Afghanistan’s largest trading partner whenever Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan. After Daoud came to power in Afghanistan in 1973 through a coup assisted by left wing Parchamite army officers, he appointed pro-Soviet leftists to government positions at local and national levels and also invited Soviet bureaucrats and military officers for Afghanistan’s socio-economic development and training of Afghan Army. It was during the last two years of Daoud’s premiership that Afghanistan tried to reverse its pro-Soviet policies which threatened Soviet interests and its overwhelming presence in Afghanistan. Apart from this, change in superpowers’ role in regional geopolitics also determined Soviet action in Afghanistan and American response to it.

In the 1970s, there was dramatic increase in Soviet weapons expenditures when the US government was emphasising détente and the mutual limitation of strategic nuclear arsenals. The US retreated from forward positions in Asia and Africa with its decision to withdraw from Indochina and disengage from commitments to governments challenged by domestic unrest, such as struggle in Angola. At that time, Watergate scandal, Congressional and popular assaults on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the overall tendency of the Carter Administration to avoid conflict situations signaled diminishing will of America to engage militarily in far off

places in Asia and Africa. Removal of Shah of Iran, a Cold War ally further robbed the US's strength eliminating its presence in Iran.² Islamic Revolution in Iran had a strong anti-American content which led to seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran and the imprisonment of its personnel.³ Following Tehran incident, a Pakistani mob comprising mostly of university students was permitted to march on the American Embassy in order to attack it in Islamabad. In the process they killed two Americans assigned to the Embassy staff. These developments were not lost on the Soviets. Carter Administration's initiative in 1978 to achieve a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, a treaty which Saudi Arabia and other Islamic nations feared would give Israel permanent jurisdiction over the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem was interpreted by the Soviet security establishment as a sign of further weakening of American ties with the Islamic nations in the region.⁴

Along with the decline of military will of the US after Vietnam War, the USSR had developed a logistical network capable of supporting its operations in Afghanistan. The fact that the US failed to present an effective opposition to Soviet inroads in Ethiopia, Angola, and Indochina or to Cuban operations enhanced the Soviet confidence to play a major role in Afghanistan.⁵ Within Afghanistan, the American power position received a setback due to Daoud's pro-Soviet policies and import of Soviet bureaucrats and military officers.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a calculated maneuver prompted by the spreading power vacuum in Southwest Asia and declining American will to intervene in other areas. However, the USSR failed to fully appreciate the international context surrounding Afghanistan and the domestic situation there which began to unravel after the invasion. Afghanistan was subject to either mutual negligence both by the USSR and the US or the latter allowed the former playing a dominant role only in the economic area. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan glossed over the important American stakes involved there. Moreover, it overlooked the stakes of the American Cold War allies in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was considered vital to deny the Soviet Union an egress to the Indian Ocean to develop naval strategies. It was assumed once a continental power was able to develop maritime strategies efficiently, it could have global reach. The containment policy of the US aimed at

preventing Rimland states like Afghanistan from falling under the influence of the Soviet Union which was a continental power. This policy was based on a series of alliances: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO from Norway to Turkey), Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO from Turkey to Pakistan), South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO from Pakistan to Philippines in the East, New Zealand in the south).⁶ Furthermore, the US perceived serious threats to its economic interests in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Earlier, the Soviet president Leonid I. Brezhnev had explained to Somalian President Said Barre, that “our aim is to gain control of the two great treasure houses on which the West depends – the energy treasure of the Persian Gulf and the mineral treasure house of Central and Southern Africa”.⁷ Richard Nixon argued that “the Soviet leaders have their eyes on the economic underpinnings of modern society. Their aim is to pull the plug on the Western industrial machine. The Western industrial nations' dependence on foreign sources of vital raw materials is one of our main vulnerabilities.”⁸

To counter the Soviet Union's southward move, the US with the help of Pakistan had developed healthy relationship with China which had then bitter relationship with the Soviet Union. Even détente between the two superpowers could not prevent the development of friendly Sino-US relationship. According to Henry Kissinger “our relationships to possible opponents should be such...that our options toward both of them are always greater than their option toward each other” and “the hostility between China and the Soviet Union served our purposes best if we maintained closer relations with each side than they did with each other”.⁹ The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan reactivated the friendly relationship between the US and China as both the countries saw serious threats in the Soviet southward march. For Pakistan, Soviet Union's southward march would have certainly caused more alarm than occasional anti-US outbursts influenced by Islamic Revolution in Iran. It was feared that once Afghanistan was occupied by the USSR, it would not hesitate to constitute an “independent” Pushtunistan and Baluchistan. A federation among Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Pushtunistan would then be fashioned to make a viable Socialist state. This Greater Afghanistan would also ensure the long-desired outlet to the sea for Soviet Union. It was hoped that India with which the USSR had developed close ties in the Cold War period would prefer a rump Pakistan to none at all. The Soviet Union would then yield to India's desire for a buffer between itself and the new Soviet-dominated Afghan federation.¹⁰

Despite US-Iranian tensions during Soviet invasion, there were many in Moscow who feared that the inherent anti-communism of the Iranian mullahs would win out over their anti-western rhetoric. Strategically, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan threatened the traditional influences and interests that Iran has had in western Afghanistan, particularly in Herat. However, the end of strategic partnership with the US after the Iranian hostage crisis and the US's call for international sanctions against it compelled Iran to play a measured role in Afghanistan. After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Iran while covertly supporting various resistance groups, refrained from participating in the "Washington-Islamabad-Riyadh" axis as a "frontline" state, which openly supported Pakistani-based resistance against the Soviet occupation. Like Iran, Saudi Arabia, an old ally of the US also saw its Islamic influences outside being threatened with the advance of communism and its spread to Islamic societies.¹¹ Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt had been useful American allies in guarding its interests in West Asia.

To forestall the threat of Soviet southward move, Soviet bases in Egypt had been closed and Soviet diplomats had been excluded from the most important diplomatic negotiations affecting West Asia. In the Indian Ocean region an undeclared alliance was maintained by the US with Pakistan, Japan, and China to counter the Russian influence. Détente received a serious setback with the Jackson Amendment limiting the flow of technology to the Soviet Union. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT II) appeared to be in trouble in the US Senate. Furthermore, as already noted détente had not prevented the growing Sino-American relationship despite bitter relations between the USSR and China.

Therefore, though certain developments in the international context pointed to the decline of American will to engage militarily in Asia and Africa in 1970s, geo-strategic situation of Afghanistan having a shared boundary with Iran and Pakistan, high American stakes involved in Afghanistan and the stakes that the US's Cold War allies carried there made the southward march of the Soviet Union a costly affair.

The measures that the US took just after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan point to the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan for it. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan restored active

US support for Pakistan. Although Pakistan denounced SEATO during the Vietnam war, when that alliance appeared to have potential costs for Pakistan, the US relationship with Pakistan was reaffirmed in various ways even in the 1970s. During the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 arising out of Bangladesh's ultimately successful efforts to achieve independence, the Nixon Administration followed a policy of "tilt toward Pakistan," which firmed up the US relationship with Pakistan. The US offered enormous diplomatic support and military and economic aid to Pakistan just after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In addition, it responded to the invasion by temporarily withdrawing its ambassador to Moscow; curtailing Soviet air flights, cultural exchanges, and consulates; threatening to boycott the Moscow Summer Olympics; curbing Soviet fishing activities in American waters and limiting grain and high technology exports to the Soviet Union for which the US appealed for allied support.¹²

The US undertook a diplomatic offensive in the Third World. It looked for new bases in West Asia, renewed discussion of a possible Indian Ocean fleet, undertook defence consultations with China, and held joint military exercises with Egypt. It is noteworthy that in marked contrast to the Hungarian and Czech interventions, that into Afghanistan was followed by extensive pressure from the West and, again in contrast to these two earlier cases, compounded other processes of deterioration in relations between the NATO and Soviet bloc, above all in the field of arms control.

Just a few days after the Soviet invasion, Carter signed a new presidential finding on covert action to supply lethal weapons to the mujahideen, through the Pakistani authorities, for the purpose of harassing the Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan. The first arms-mainly .303 Enfield rifles-arrived in Pakistan on January 10, 1980, fourteen days after the Soviet invasion.¹³ Carter gradually increased the level of aid to the insurgents, and Ronald Reagan expanded it considerably. In the mid-1980s, the success of the mujahideen, combined with more aggressive tactics by the Soviet forces, led to a further increase in the US involvement.¹⁴ The escalation of conflict was authorised in a March 1985 National Security Decision Directive. In the latter part of 1986, the US brought the first ground-to-air missiles in the form of American Stinger, a hand held, "fire and forget" anti-aircraft missile to Afghan territory to fight the Russian forces.¹⁵ This shows the continued Congressional interest in the covert action programme. The level of the US

aid to the Afghan resistance is believed to have risen to over \$400 million annually at the height of the programme in fiscal years 1987 and 1988.

The US in order to gain preponderance of power in Afghanistan did not agree to a 'neutral, friendly' Afghanistan as it hoped that the mujahideen would come to power after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from there providing Washington with necessary leeway in the region. The economic sanctions that the US slapped on the Soviet Union after its invasion of Afghanistan deliberately excluded Eastern Europe from its purview. The policy was consistent with the reality of an increasingly independent Eastern Europe, and with a longstanding US effort which, under various names (such as "building bridges to Eastern Europe," under President Lyndon Johnson), and with various emphases, had sought to distinguish between the Soviet Union and the bloc.¹⁶

While calling for a Soviet withdrawal, neither Pakistan nor the US was making it easy for Moscow to do so. In 1984 the Reagan Administration secretly altered its policy on Afghanistan, to one of aiding the guerrillas to fight, to the pursuit of victory over the Soviet Union. The US changed its policy of containment to one of maintaining sphere of influence in Afghanistan and weakening the continental power. The United States and Pakistan pursued an anti-Soviet "rollback" policy (equivalent to the British "forward policy") to wipe out Soviet influence in Afghanistan.¹⁷ The US tried to rationalise its active engagement in Afghanistan and recruit support for its action there in the name of fighting freedom struggle. The March 1985 National Security Decision Directive not only authorised increased aid to the mujahideen, it also included diplomatic and humanitarian objectives as well, including guaranteeing self-determination for the Afghan people. However, when many Afghans considered the jihad ended with the departure of Soviet troops, the rollback policy increasingly relied on Salafi Arab fighters who joined the jihad for very different reasons than Afghans had.

From the actions taken by the US in Afghanistan, it becomes clear that it wanted to weaken the continental power with the intention of dividing the heartland. The American policy of bleeding the Soviet Union till the last vestiges of its presence in Afghanistan remained incurring highest amount of human and military losses point to that end. Furthermore, the diplomatic measures like excluding the Eastern Europe from the purview of economic sanctions meant for the Soviet

Union could have no other objectives other than dividing the heartland which was then firmly occupied by the Soviet Union.

The US role in the Afghan war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union

According to Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, the existing explanations on the Soviet breakdown surprisingly underemphasise the impact of the Afghanistan war.¹⁸ They are of the view that though the Afghanistan war initially was visualised by Soviet leaders as a small-scale intervention, it grew into a decade-long war involving nearly one million Soviet soldiers, killing and injuring tens of thousands of them. According to Fred Halliday, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan of 1979-89 occupies an important place in the history of the last phase of the Cold War, and in the account of the collapse of the USSR itself.¹⁹

The Soviet Union was seriously overstretched by trying to wage a war in Afghanistan while maintaining its far-flung military commitments in Africa and West Asia and propping up the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The US President Carter might have thought it a propitious moment to step up arms supply to Afghan insurgents to bog down the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

There was a tide of Islamic revivalism that began to sweep the Muslim world in 1970s. Though in the beginning, Afghan nationalism and Islamic resistance against communism in Afghanistan did not fuse into a broader movement, later the Afghan resistance to the Soviet presence was propelled by Islamism and as well as by nationalism. The strength of Afghan resistance was well known since the days of Great Game between the British Empire and Czarist Russia. Therefore, the US role in arming and financially assisting the Islamic forces went a long way in incurring huge military and economic losses for the USSR.

Reuveny and Prakash argue that mujahideen being armed with US-supplied surface-to-air missiles, rockets, mortars, and communication equipment won many confrontations with the Soviet army. The casualties mounted and the number of disabled soldiers seen in Soviet cities grew substantially, and the war veterans (Afgantsy) increasingly became part of the Soviet urban landscape. Since many Afgantsy belonged to the non-Russian nationalities, opposition to the war

from citizens in non-Russian Soviet Republics increased. Since their presence was not acknowledged by the authorities, who wished to play down Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, these Afgantsy became bitter and openly critical of the Soviet leaders.²⁰ Therefore, the US's increasing supply of arms and aid to the mujahideen and resolve to continue the war also brought internal divisions in the multinational Soviet army to the fore which later became instrumental in the disintegration of Soviet Union.

Ahmet Davutoglu provides a geo-strategic explanation to the end of Soviet hegemony and its eventual disintegration. According to him, the end of the Cold War strategic balance based on bipolarity has created a huge geopolitical and geo-economic vacuum in the zone where the North-South passes intersect with the East-West belt of the Rimland.²¹ The passes and corridors from the Central Asian Heartland to the surrounding Rimland have been the lines of demarcation for the global struggle for domination, starting with the nineteenth century Anglo-Russian struggle for hegemony over this significant geopolitical belt. Afghanistan with its passes such as Khojak, Gomal and Khyber and corridor like Wakhan corridor from Central Asia to the Indus lowlands has been the buffer area in the old Great Game and in the struggle between superpowers in the Cold War too. The 1979 Soviet attack on this buffer zone became a turning point of the Cold War strategic balance and its failure led to the fall of the Soviet strategic pillar in Asia.²²

The US and the Afghan civil war

Though the Afghan war brought many benefits for the US in terms of weakening the continental power and breaking the heartland, it strengthened Islamic forces which turned against the US later. The American intelligence agency, the CIA, let the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan handle everything during the Afghan war.²³ American military forces were not involved in the war and therefore not a single American soldier died in the war. No more than a hundred of CIA operatives were involved in the Afghan effort. In response to the unofficial requests by officers at the Pentagon that the American military be involved, one CIA officer's caveat was "The strategic lesson of the Afghan war is do not go there". ISI siphoned off a substantial portion of the weapons and either sold them or kept them for other battles, most notably in Kashmir and the Punjab. The CIA neither monitored the inflow of weapons nor arranged to get

weapons into the hands of the commanders in the field. The main recipients of the arms were parties in Peshawar who were also engaged in illegal drug trade.²⁴

When the Najibullah government did not fall as was expected after the departure of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, not only were the mujahideen unable to overthrow Najibullah, but the dominant fundamentalist strain in the movement - an estimated 85 per cent of the mujahideen - seemed to be turning increasingly against the United States. While many Afghans considered the jihad ended with the departure of Soviet troops, the American rollback policy relying on Salafi Arab fighters alienated mujahideen from the US. A civil war like situation emerged in Afghanistan. The US, which did not have military presence in Afghanistan had to quit the region in such a situation. Iraq's growing power in the Middle-East region and annexation of Kuwait compelled America to concentrate on another strategically important area which led to the Second Gulf War. Both the US and Russia developed cooperative strategies to deal with Iraq to curtail its power and regional ambitions.²⁵ This resembled the cooperative strategies developed by the British Empire and the Czarist Russia to keep Germany out of Afghanistan. While the American and Soviet role in Afghanistan was regarding gaining control over that Rimland country, Iraq was an unruly Rimland country. Geopoliticians like Spykman recommended that the basic land and sea powers cooperate for the control of unruly Rimland countries due to the potential of these countries to develop multidimensional strategies.²⁶

The centrality of Afghanistan to US policy in Central Asia

During the Cold War period, West Asia and South Asia were seen as the key areas of geopolitical concern to the US. South Asia's importance was derived from the fact that it was the site of Cold War rivalry involving the US, the USSR and China. These rivalries were partly mediated through the India-Pakistan face off. The end of the Cold War fundamentally eroded Sino-Russian and US-Russian rivalry in South Asia. The American attention shifted from South Asia to Central Asia where huge power vacuum erupted after the disintegration of the USSR. The US wanted to reach out to the former Soviet Republics to prevent Russia from consolidating its control in the Eurasian heartland once again. Secondly, resource potential of the Central Asian states which was much publicised in the 1990s attracted the American attention to exert control over these natural resources and come out with a plan to multiply the pipeline system to rid them of both

Russian and Iranian control. The Clinton Administration fostered regional cooperation with Central Asia relying on multilateral institutions such as NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative (PfP) and the Central Asian Economic Community. PfP allowed the partner Central Asian countries to build up an individual relationship with NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation. Starting from late 1990s, the US Congress passed bills that called for diversification of energy supplies from the Central Asia and Caspian region.²⁷ The Bush Administration after assuming office released an energy policy report indicating that the exploitation of Caspian energy resources could not only benefit the economies of the region, but also help mitigate possible world supply disruptions, a major US security goal.

Both Clinton and Bush Administration considered Afghanistan vital for the American Central Asian strategy for variety of reasons. First, it is geographically contiguous with most of the Central Asia states. It is natural that an increasing role in Afghanistan would facilitate a greater American role in Central Asia. Secondly, it provides an alternative route to transfer Central Asian energy resources to the world market bypassing Russia and Iran. Thirdly, influence in Afghanistan is vital to realise the American plan of a 'Greater Central Asia' to move Central Asia out of Russia's orbit of influence towards Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁸ Fourthly, military bases in Afghanistan and in the surrounding region are considered important by the US foreign policy makers to check the moves of Russia, China and Iran, the primary conventional threats in the post-Cold War era as Afghanistan is situated in the middle of various continents and provide inter-linking routes. Fifthly, it is believed that the geo-strategic situation of Afghanistan would allow the US to develop multidimensional strategies based on ocean and land as well. Historically, all the great powers wanted to master both naval and continental strategies but could develop only one and therefore their power was challenged at one time or the other.

It is noteworthy that that in 1990s it was through Afghanistan that the US sought to spread its influence towards Central Asia. There were signs of American support for the Taliban as a counterweight to Iranian influence in Afghanistan and further its influence in Central Asia undercutting both Iranian and Russian influence there. According to Achin Vanaik, "Even after the accession of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 1996, the US was by no means averse to improving relations with a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, including giving formal diplomatic

recognition. It came close to doing so on a number of occasions between 1996 and the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in East Africa”.²⁹ As Ahmed Rashid observed, “The Clinton Administration was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban, as they were in line with Washington's anti-Iran policy and were important for the success of any southern pipeline from Central Asia that would avoid Iran. The US Congress had authorised a covert \$20 million budget for the CIA to destabilise Iran, and Tehran had accused Washington of funneling some of these funds to the Taliban – a charge that was always denied by Washington.”³⁰

To justify their support for the Taliban, the US officials, on different occasions, said that the Taliban should be acknowledged as an ‘indigenous movement’ and that they were vital to stability in Afghanistan as they had demonstrated staying power. Robin Raphel, the in-charge of the Central Asian region in the US State Department, paid two visits to Kabul to meet the Taliban government functionaries. The US State Department spokesman Glyn Davies said that the US found ‘nothing objectionable’ in the steps taken by the Taliban to impose Islamic law. He described the Taliban as anti-modern rather than anti-western. By declaring its neutrality in the Afghan civil war, the US had in effect withdrawn its recognition of the national unity government of President Rabbani, and had therefore, by implication, given recognition to the Taliban.³¹ However, with the Taliban turning away from the US, the American interests in Central Asia received a setback.

There were three factors that alienated the Taliban from the US. The 1998 bombings of the US embassies in East Africa, violation of human rights specifically women's rights, opposition to which found resonance in various protests in the US and unwillingness to cooperate with the US to apprehend Osama bin Laden distanced the Taliban from Washington. However, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was reported to have said that, were the Taliban to cooperate with Washington on bin Laden, it would facilitate US recognition of the movement as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.³²

Though overt US military action against Taliban occurred only after 9/11, there are credible reports that point to the planning in the US to take military action against Afghanistan and oust Taliban months before 9/11. Once the US realised that the Taliban could not be a trusted ally to

foster American interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it started covert military operations against the Taliban.³³

Failure of American policies towards Central Asia

In 1990s, while on the one hand the US considered good relationship with the Taliban vital for its long-term interests in Central Asia, it adopted policies based on democracy and human rights in Central Asia on the other. After the disintegration of the USSR, the Clinton Administration believed that by aggressively engaging the newly independent Central Asian states, the US would be seen as taking advantage of Russian weakness and hurt bilateral relations between the two nations which were vital to contain emerging regional powers like Iran and Iraq. Narrowing the focus to the Gulf region in the post-Cold War era, Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, warned that while keeping Iraq weak, the US would also have to be watchful of Iran.

The end of Cold War also reposed state actors' faith in the international laws and norms in the absence of the ideological rival. In this context, the US declared "New World Order" to ensure its primacy through pushing the ideas like democracy and human rights. The "doctrine of Enlargement" was developed by Lake to spread American influence to the areas of strategic importance.³⁴ However, the ideas of democracy and market economy were to be cautiously followed in the former Soviet Republics so that Russia was not antagonised.

As America's energy politics was facilitated by the ideology of liberal democracy, the US Congress signed the "FREEDOM Support Act" in October 1992, which tied aid with promotion of liberal democracy in Central Asia.³⁵ The US in its Silk Road Strategy Act in 1999, "authorised enhanced policy and aid to support conflict amelioration, humanitarian needs, economic development, transport and communications, border controls, democracy, and the creation of civil societies in the South Caucasus and Central Asia".³⁶

However, the incremental approach based on democracy and human rights towards Central Asian states did not allow the US to play a major role in Central Asian region. The Central Asian states which are dynamic actors after their independence resisted to be part of US hegemonic influence

cast through the ideas of democracy and human rights. For example, throughout the 1990s, Uzbekistan was not perceived to be a cooperative partner who would buy into the US vision of bilateral relations built on shared commitment to democratic values, economic liberalisation, and a non-zero sum approach to international relations. American role in the coloured revolutions as part of its strategy to promote democracy in Central Asia was much criticized by the authoritarian rulers. The Central Asian states were also cautious not to allow an extra-regional power to play a major role in their security affairs and challenge the Russian role in a major way.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the formation of which in 1996 was viewed by the US with indifference on the assumption that the political and military interests between Russia and China could not be reconciled stood firm against the American interests in Central Asia. Both Russia and China shared common perception on the US's grand design in Central Asian landscape. Russia did not want the American penetration into its strategic backyard. China, which shares border with Central Asian region, did not want American influence near its border. Iran along with Russia saw in the rise of American influence in the region and policy of diversification of energy supplies a looming threat.

Increasing threats to America's geopolitical interests and its militaristic response

In 1990s, the American engagement with the Central Asia on the basis of democratic and human rights principles, however, did not define its role in the larger international context which was becoming more militaristic. In contrast to the Cold War era, when the US could develop a grand strategy due to the presence of clear threat and therefore could mobilise allies, there seems to be little consensus on how to prioritise the myriad national security challenges facing the United States in the post-Cold War era. In this era, threats are both numerous and diffuse. The US grand strategy has to involve more concerns about rising powers, emerging non-conventional threats in the form of terrorism, global energy supply, and spread of military technology and the enlargement of the democratic/capitalist sphere.

Unlike in the Cold War when the US was getting easy and quick support from its allies to pursue its geopolitical interests from the pro-capitalist and anti-communist Islamic countries, the overarching ideological threat got evaporated in the post-Cold War era and in its place arose a

number of conventional and non-conventional threats. Terrorism emerged as the most dangerous non-conventional threat and geopolitical challenge to the US in the post-Cold War era. The supreme leader of the Islamist-jihadist movement Ayman al-Zawahiri asserts in his book “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner” that the struggle ahead will be over the control of the energy-rich heart of Asia and transportation routes connecting it with the rest of the world. He says, “If the Chechens and other Caucasian mujahedeen reach the shores of the oil-rich Caspian sea, the only thing that will separate them from Afghanistan will be the neutral state of Turkmenistan. This will form a mujahid Islamic belt to the south of Russia that will be connected in the east to Pakistan, which is brimming with mujahedeen movements in Kashmir”.³⁷ It is noteworthy that the US has not only to deal with terrorism, it has to contain the power of Iran, China and Russia and diversify energy supplies so as to contain the influence of these powers in energy politics.

To deal with both the conventional and non-conventional threats and pursue its geopolitical objectives, America followed a militaristic approach. To meet diversified threats, many states increasingly relied on the United States for either the actual provision of security or the training and equipment necessary to perform security functions. To fill up the power vacuum after the Soviet Union’s disintegration and to pursue its geopolitical interests in various regions, the US in addition to formal treaties, offered protection to a number of countries under its security umbrella either by law or by policy. Another host of countries were offered special security provisions through major Non-NATO ally status.

The ideas of democracy and market economy which found their ultimate expressions during Bill Clinton’s Presidency received setback after the Administration explicitly rejected “dovish” prescriptions to abandon “America’s forward strategic presence”.³⁸ The Clinton’s Presidency was engaged in military deployments with missions that varied from providing logistic support to UN peacekeeping missions to stability operations in the Balkans. Douglas Ross and Christopher Ross, two Canadian observers noted that an imperial approach to world affairs “is more likely to be created under a Democratic rather than a Republican presidency in the name of human rights and democratization”.³⁹

George Bush though in the initial years of his Presidency wanted to steer clear of Clinton's era excessive commitments outside, post-9/11 restored US's aggressive primacist vision. It is argued that President Bush's strategy did not represent a revolutionary change when compared to its predecessor, but it did represent the culmination of a strategic adjustment process that has effectively settled on primacy – in one form or another – for the post-9/11 period. According to Walter Russell Mead, the Bush Doctrine, far from being a neoconservative innovation, was in fact well within the mainstream of US foreign policy and very much in keeping with the vision of America's founding generation, as well as the practice of the early Republic's statesmen.⁴⁰

The US-led War on Terror

By the end of 1990s and beginning of a new century, the Taliban had moved away from the American sphere of influence, American policies towards Central Asia failed and numerous and diffused threats emerged as primary geopolitical challenges. As a result, the US interests and role in Central Asia received a blow. The US looked for an overriding global threat around which it could organize its geopolitical interests. After the al Qaeda's attack on twin towers in the US on September 11, 2001, terrorism assumed such global significance and the US's militaristic approach culminated in the War on Terror. According to Barry Buzan, when the Cold War ended, Washington seemed to experience a threat deficit, and there was a string of attempts to find a replacement for the Soviet Union as the principal adversarial power to give effect to US foreign and military policies. Buzan says that the terrorists' attacks of 9/11 offered the solution as the War on Terror right from the beginning had the feel of a big idea that might provide a long-term cure for Washington's threat deficit.⁴¹ The assertion that the War on Terror will be a long war can be compared to a similar kind of zero-sum, global-scale, generational struggle against anti-liberal ideological extremists who want to rule the world. Buzan is of the opinion that the significance of War on Terror is more political in nature than anything. It might justify and legitimise US primacy, leadership and unipolarism, both to Americans and to the rest of the world.⁴² Buzan seems to be right in view of increased US access to and activities in Central Asia after the War on Terror began. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) pipeline project, which was put to halt after the relationship between the US and Taliban broke was again pushed forward in 2002. More importantly, the proposal to create Greater Central Asia in the first decade of 2000, to move Central Asia away from Russia's orbit towards Afghanistan and Pakistan was a clear US

move to pursue its geopolitical interests in a vigorous manner. Greater Central Asia project and the TAP pipeline project go together as they cover the same geographical areas vertically.

Prior to September 11, though US concerns about the Taliban were widely shared in Uzbekistan, as well as rest of the Central Asia but Uzbek leaders roundly rejected US strategies for addressing the challenge posed by the Taliban, including political reform, human rights, and economic liberalisation, for fear of causing domestic destabilisation. These long-term concerns were sidelined after the 9/11 attacks. Uzbekistan became the United States' strategic ally and the frontline state in the war on terrorism overnight. Similarly, other Central Asian states also shed their long-term concerns with Washington's ideas of democracy and human rights and cooperated with it.⁴³ The US, on the other hand, strengthened the authoritarian rulers in Central Asia putting its ideological baggage on the back-burner. The US stopped harping on these ideas and called for all sorts of assistance from the Central Asian states to meet the common enemy in order to secure a firm foothold in Central Asia. The US's interest in Afghanistan was derived from the fact that it provided the long-term justification for the former's stay in the region with its problem of terrorism and drug-trafficking.

The US-led War on Terror expanded the American presence and role in Central Asia considerably. Its military involvement in Central Asia included temporary forward basing in Uzbekistan, Kirgystan, and Tajikistan; access to airspace and restricted use of bases in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; coalition-building by high-level visits to Central Asia, intelligence sharing, improved coordination within the US Central Command, and increased assistance. Operation Enduring Freedom brought the Central Asian states to the frontlines of the campaign in the anti-terror war. According to Achin Vanaik, what the US had now achieved, which it did not possess before 11 September 2001, was a new legitimisation of its specifically military conduct abroad. Its second great and new gain was its military political entry into Central Asia on a depth and scale that it had never before had. The one weak spot in its post-Cold War effort to dominate the Eurasian landmass was Central Asia and the Caspian region. This area is not just the 'backyard' of Russia but abuts Iran and China, which along with Russia are considered by imperial America's most determined protagonists as its most serious potential rivals.⁴⁴ Central Asia was seen not only as a platform for operations in Afghanistan, but it was

also significant in its own right being a potential breeding ground for terrorism given the nexus between the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al-Qaeda. For Russia, the War on Terror was a suitable opportunity to treat Chechenyan problem as one of terrorism and link it with the global crusade against it and for China it was to mitigate the secessionist problem in Xinxiang. The US successfully linked the War on Terror with several longstanding security concerns facing Central Asian states, Russia and China like crime and trade in drugs and the technologies for weapons of mass destruction.⁴⁵

Despite the American success in gathering the momentum for a long-term war plan, it led to a series of academic debates and discussions as to the real interests underlying US action in Afghanistan. Some commentators argue that the real motive behind the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan is related to America's direct interest in the natural resources of Central Asia. According to Frank Viviano, "the hidden stakes in the war against terrorism can be summed up in a single word: oil. The map of terrorist sanctuaries and targets in the Middle East and Central Asia is also, to an extraordinary degree, a map of the world's energy resources in the 21st century..."⁴⁶ With the intention to revive the TAP pipeline project and exploring the potential for post-Taliban energy projects in the region, President Bush appointed a former aide to the US-based oil company, Union Oil Company of California (UNOCAL), Afghan-born Zalmay Khalilzad, as special envoy to Afghanistan. As already noted the TAP pipeline project was revived in April-May 2002 once the Karzai government was installed and received international legitimacy.⁴⁷

However, reducing everything to oil does not allow one to understand the larger geopolitical interests the US has in Afghanistan and through it in Central Asia. The US has enough of oil beneath its own soil and it also easily secures oil from the Latin American countries. From a military and strategic perspective, Afghanistan provided the US accessibility to a large continental expanse to operate against both conventional and non-conventional threats. Apart from the economic value and utility of natural resources, its production and supply carry a geopolitical significance. In this context, Afghanistan's importance as an alternative route to transfer Central Asian resources needs to be underlined. First, multiplying the pipelines would end the hegemony of a few particular powers. Secondly, controlling the production and supply of

natural resources would require military projection of power and that would go a long way in securing supply of these resources to regional allies and denying the same to countries adopting adversarial foreign policies. Therefore, natural resources can be used as an instrument to control and shape foreign policies of state actors. Thirdly, the supply routes for their safety would require military presence and thereby would contribute to development of military strategies of the controlling power. Finally, the ports and routes for the transfer and trade of natural resources can have dual use: commercial and military. Therefore, despite the commercial non-viability of the alternative pipeline projects, they were given utmost importance by the US. Williams and others argue that the US went to the extent of invading and destroying Iraqi oil resources to shoot up the price of oil to give effect to its financially nonviable projects.⁴⁸

America's conduct of 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan

The disproportionate response to the 9/11 terrorist attack by waging a war against Afghanistan instead of applying legitimate methods to capture a group individuals who masterminded the act points to America's larger interests in the region. According to Gerard Toal "One can find evidence of a counter-modern tendency in certain geopolitical crises where global threats are territorialised as threats from 'rogue states'. The problem of weapons of mass destruction, for example, becomes the problem of Saddam Hussein and what to do about Iraq...Terrorism becomes the problems of 'rogue states' like Sudan and Afghanistan."⁴⁹ The War on Terror aimed at toppling the Afghan regime led by the Taliban which refused to hand over Osama bin Laden, the culprit of 9/11 terrorist attack to the US. However, the UN Charter prohibits change of regime in a country by external actors as that defies sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The article 2 of the UN Charter prohibits the use of or threatened use of force against another state.⁵⁰ It is argued that the Taliban refused to turn over bin Laden because there was no extradition treaty existing between the US and Afghanistan. Secondly, there is a long tradition in Muslim countries to treat foreign visitors as guests. Nevertheless, the Taliban expressed its willingness to deliver bin Laden over to the US or to a third country if US officials provided convincing evidence that bin Laden had, in fact, been complicit in the 9/11 attacks. The US President George Bush's response was that the US officials would not furnish any such evidence to the Taliban government.⁵¹ After 9/11 attack, the US received sympathy from almost all countries of the world. However, instead of capitalising on those positive feelings to isolate bin

Laden and his aides, the US reacted to the occasion in a knee-jerk military fashion. According to Arturo Munoz, the US opposed to reconcile with the Taliban in early December 2001. He notes: “A peace process among the Afghans was discussed at the time, only to be repudiated by the Americans.”⁵² The US quickly divided the world into two categories of nations, American allies who supported the War on Terror and enemies who opposed or even maintained neutrality. Soon, Iran was included as part of the latter category in Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech.⁵³ The American President Barack Obama replicated his predecessor’s military and security centric strategies. According to M. J. Williams, “the US has and remains overly inclined to use military power to fix a problem, even when that problem ultimately defies the ability of the military to provide a solution. While the new Obama Administration has a more evolved view of the Afghan issue, the continued US over-investment in defence illustrates the preference of tools in the American psyche.”⁵⁴

The US was more interested in waging a war to eliminate the enemy and spread its influence in the region than building a peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. To conduct the war in Afghanistan, the US resorted predominantly to air power and limited its ground-troops presence. And for ground operations, it depended on Afghan warlords. While, on the one hand, the US wanted to limit the casualties on its army, the increasing use of air power led to the growth of death of Afghan civilians. Moreover, the US dependence on Afghan warlords militated against the idea of peaceful and democratic Afghanistan. The warlords practiced no less violence than the Taliban. They used the American military and economic assistance for consolidating their role in different pockets of Afghanistan. The intelligence provided by the warlords to the US was based more on their desire to sort out personal feuds with other warlords than to give authentic information about al Qaeda and Taliban hideouts. Instead of creating an independent Afghan National Army, it was suggested at the Bonn conference that the Afghan National Army (ANA) be recruited from these militias.⁵⁵ The American military-driven foreign policy was explicit in the reports pointing to Afghan detainees being tortured in Bagram and other US detention centres. An article in the *Guardian* (UK) stated that in Bagram and eighteen other US detention centres and firebases around Afghanistan, Afghan detainees were regularly tortured.⁵⁶ Patience, which is required for successful nation-building process is found to be lacking among US troops. Copies of Koran have been found to be burned by US troops and a US soldier opened fire and

killed 16 people in a village near Kandahar.⁵⁷

Williams argues that Afghanistan poses virtually no threat to the US and its NATO allies in the way that Nazi Germany threatened Europe or that Soviet Russia threatened NATO. It is the absence of power in Afghanistan - the ability of the government to hold a monopoly on the use of force, to curb narcotics production, to root out warlordism and to defeat an insurgency – that causes problems for NATO allies.⁵⁸ Nation-building, which requires continued engagement in social, economic and political restructuring of a society after a war was not part of the American Afghan War plan. The various peacekeeping operations in the 1990s of which the US had been a part - in the former Yugoslavia and Haiti, for example - were held up by key administration figures like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as proof of strategic vacuity of the Clinton administration. They, instead, believed that the military was to be fundamentally transformed and should not to be used for ‘policing’ or for open-ended peace-keeping missions linked to the notions of nation-building. The transformation of the military was to be essentially based on high-technology, rapidly deployed, short-duration combat missions, in which victory could be achieved quickly and forces speedily withdrawn. To conduct the Afghan War, the American forces confined their activity to a high-technologically driven military role while the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission was portrayed as post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction. Between 2001 and 2005, the US spent eleven times more on military operations in Afghanistan than it did on reconstruction, humanitarian aid, economic assistance and the training of Afghan security forces combined.⁵⁹ According to Dobbins, the inadequate resources especially in Afghanistan “represented both an exaggerated confidence in the efficacy of high-tech warfare” and “an aversion to the whole concept of nation-building”.⁶⁰

According to Munoz, the paltry investment of the US resources in Afghanistan was only one reason for the American mission stalling there. Another reason was the way those resources were applied. He argues: “Instead of honouring Afghan terms of peace, utilising village institutions to maintain security, and training Afghans to do most of their own fighting and rebuilding..., the US and NATO tried to impose Western ways of doing things.”⁶¹ The US applied a top down approach to ensure security and socio-economic development in Afghanistan. On the security front, this has meant building the Afghan National Security Forces – consisting of the Afghan

National Army, Afghan National Army Air Corps, Afghan National Police, and Afghan Border Police – as the bulwarks against the Taliban and other insurgent groups. On the economic and development fronts, this has meant improving the central government's ability to deliver services to the population. But “there were few efforts to engage Afghanistan's tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and other local institutions,” laments Seth Jones, who worked closely with US Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan.⁶²

While to get a foothold in Central Asia, the US strengthened the hands of the authoritarian rulers in the name of creating a common front against terrorism, the same country followed the ideology of “liberal democracy” to keep the war-ravaged Afghanistan weak by not allowing the state to consolidate power. According to Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, “Warlordism and the absence of an effective bureaucracy were the absolute natural by-products of an externally dictated and implicitly decentralising economic agenda in Afghanistan”.⁶³ The agenda was based on the principle that the state should be the enabler rather than the provider of economic growth. International aid was tied to the global private sector which was entrusted with the task of reconstruction and as a result Afghanistan remained as a weak and rentier state. Furthermore, these two scholars also point to the problem of tying aid to the purchase of America-sourced products and services. According to them, a full 70 per cent of US aid was made conditional upon US goods and services being purchased or employed.⁶⁴

Durability of American interest and presence in Afghanistan

In contrast to the arguments of many scholars that globalisation has rendered geopolitics irrelevant, the American role and interest in Afghanistan has largely been geopolitical and long-term. The US role and NATO's intervention in Afghanistan “confirms rather than undermine the value of conventional military capabilities although in the form of lighter and more flexible infantry forces supported by strategic airlift”.⁶⁵ Since the break-up of the Soviet Union's heartland domination, *Geopolitic* has even experienced a veritable renaissance in both academic and policy circles. Al Qaeda-organised and sponsored terrorist attacks have only intensified an already existing belief that the heartland bestows a geopolitical advantage to the power that controls it. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth argue that previous leading states in modern era were either great commercial and naval powers or great military powers on land,

never both.⁶⁶ At the dawn of the Cold War the United States was clearly dominant economically as well as in air and naval capabilities. But the Soviet Union retained overall military parity, and thanks to geography and investment in land power it had a superior ability to seize territory in Eurasia. Thus, the US strategy in the post-Cold War has not only been to keep Russia weak to consolidate its control over the heartland, it is also keen to develop its land power capabilities. Afghanistan borders Central Asian states in the north and American ally Pakistan in the south. Therefore, control over Afghanistan was vital to acquire a line of communication between Indian Ocean and Eurasian landmass and develop multidimensional strategies.

Being located at the centre of many regions, Afghanistan and Central Asian region provide point of access to these regions. While Afghanistan is situated in the middle of major Asian regions like Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia and Far-East, Central Asia being part of larger Eurasia joins Europe with Asia. Therefore, both the regions are important in terms of controlling various other regions. In Zbigniew Brzezinski's words both Afghanistan and Central Asia region are geopolitical pivots. Geopolitical pivots are the states "whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potential vulnerable condition for the behaviour of strategic players".⁶⁷ However, it needs to be underlined that neither Afghanistan nor the former Soviet Republics after their independence are completely passive actors. They constantly shape the will and capacity of the geostrategic players pursuing their geopolitical interests. According to Brzezinski, geostrategic players are the states that have the capacity and the national will to exercise power or influence beyond their borders in order to alter the existing geopolitical state of affairs.⁶⁸ The US, Russia, Iran, India, China and Pakistan can be considered as geostrategic players according to this definition.

The importance of the geopolitical pivots for the geostrategic players has been enormous despite the resistance from the geopolitical pivots and vulnerable conditions arising from the presence of other active geostrategic players. Saul B. Cohen has described Eurasia as a "convergence zone". According to Cohen the importance of this area is that it is "where five of the world's geopolitical power centres – Maritime Europe, Russia, China, India and Japan – converge upon it. The countries and regions within the Convergence Zone serve as land, air, and water transit-ways for flows of capital, people, technology, manufactured goods, energy, and other mineral

resources. Increasingly the importance of the area to its abutting powers has been magnified by its natural resources, especially oil and natural gas, specialised agriculture, tourist services, and relatively low wages for off-shore manufacturing operations, and negatively as bases for terrorists and the smuggling of arms and drugs”.⁶⁹ Thus, Afghanistan and Central Asian region are important for multiple civilian and military purposes. Being bridge to different areas the regions serve the civilian interests as they are not only emerging as the major centres of natural resources, they also provide one of the largest markets of millions of people and more importantly, they provide the transit-ways for multiple inter-continental transactions.

According to a former diplomat of India, by the end of 2008, the US taking advantage of the interconnectivity that Afghanistan provides began developing an altogether new land route through the southern Caucasus to Afghanistan which steers clear of Iran, Russia and China. He believes the project, if materialised, would be a geopolitical coup – the biggest ever that Washington would have swung in post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus.⁷⁰ At one stroke, the US would be tying up military cooperation at the bilateral level with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and the US will be able to consolidate its military position in southern Caucasus. Furthermore, Washington looked for new supply routes from and militarily bases in Central Asia even though its close partnership with Pakistani military continued. He says, “the US has done exceedingly well in geopolitical terms, even if the war as such may have gone rather badly both for the Afghans and the Pakistanis and the European soldiers serving in Afghanistan”.⁷¹

Professor S. Frederic Starr of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Hopkins University articulated the vision of Modern Silk Route seeing the enormous trade potential in the region. In the first half of 2009, the US established several new transit corridors to deliver non-lethal goods to its forces in Afghanistan. These routes, put together, are termed as Northern Distribution Network.⁷² Many US officials are interested to see this network being transformed into Modern Silk Route.⁷³ However, it must be noted that many political ideas like the Greater Central Asia project are justified through this economic logic. In reality, the supply routes and ports once put in place can be used for dual purposes-both civilian and military.

Apart from Afghanistan's importance as a bridge to Central Asia, discovery of huge potential of mineral deposits in Afghanistan has further enhanced the geopolitical importance of the entire region.⁷⁴ However, it is argued that tapping into these resources is a long-drawn and expensive process as Afghanistan lacks materials and technical expertise to benefit from such discoveries and exploration of these resources also requires extensive field work to determine whether the minerals are commercially viable.

The US interest to stay in Afghanistan and Central Asia for long time became clear after the Lisbon Summit between NATO and Afghanistan. Both signed a declaration, the thrust of which was on affirming "their long-term partnership" and building "a robust, enduring partnership which complements the ISAF security mission and continues beyond it".⁷⁵ The Lisbon summit confirmed that the NATO military presence in Afghanistan would continue beyond 2014, the timeline suggested by President Hamid Karzai for Kabul to be completely in charge of the security of the country. Going by the spirit of the declaration, NATO will maintain its counter-terrorism capability in Afghanistan even after 2014. The declaration said that NATO would be present in Afghanistan so long as it did not have confidence that the Al-Qaeda was no longer operative and was no longer a threat. NATO may even undertake combat operations beyond 2014 if and when need arises.⁷⁶ The US President Barack Obama said, "by 2014 the NATO footprint in Afghanistan will have been significantly reduced. But beyond that, it is hard to anticipate exactly what is going to be necessary...I will make that determination when I get there".⁷⁷ In May 2, 2012, the US and Afghanistan entered into Strategic Partnership Agreement. The countries agreed to oppose threats to the sovereignty of Afghanistan by cooperating closely on defence and security. The Agreement stipulates that even after US forces withdraw in 2014, the US would continue to support training, equipping and sustaining Afghan Security Forces "to ensure terrorists never again encroach on Afghan soil and threaten Afghanistan, the region and the world".⁷⁸

The US, so far, has tried to shape the Afghan war unilaterally according to its own geopolitical interests. It has tried not to give Iran and Russia any major role in developing Afghan war strategy. It has tried to secure most of the military bases and supply routes for western troops in Pakistan and Central Asia. The US has tried to temper its overtly unilateral policy by 'divide and

rule' tactics. It has tried to engage Central Asian states bilaterally. It is argued that once Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two key players in Central Asia step out of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and SCO and directly deal with the US and NATO then these two organisations would be effectively kept out of Afghan cauldron. The US allowed NATO at the same time to negotiate with Russia for transit route facilities. Therefore, the US has engaged the regional powers bilaterally robbing their collective strength that could have been expressed through the organisations like CSTO and SCO.⁷⁹

The unilateral role of the US has also been facilitated by the political problems that characterise the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan, India and China, Iran and Pakistan and Russia and China. To gain Pakistan's cooperation, the US has used 'India card'. It has, at times, asked India to play a larger role in Afghanistan. Similarly, to contain India, it has tried to raise Chinese specter.⁸⁰

However, Pakistan has been considered the key for the realisation of the American plan in Afghanistan and Central Asia. After bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan, the US-Pak strategic relationship began to show the signs of strain. It lay bare the divergences of interests that both the states pursued in Afghanistan. However, it is believed that both the states would try to balance their relationship as they are interdependent in the formulation of strategies to realise their respective objectives in Afghanistan. The US has rarely any chance of making its plan of reconciliation with the Taliban successful without Pakistan's assistance. Pakistan's military and intelligence wing, ISI reserve strong connections with the top Taliban leaders and Haqqani network. Similarly, Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan would remain a distant dream without the American military aid and economic assistance.

Post-Soviet challenges to American interests in Afghanistan

With the disintegration of Soviet Union, a new era has been ushered. It has led to American foreign policy makers' belief and practices that in the post-Cold War era, coercive diplomacy could work wonders for the US. Success in Kosovo strengthened the US's belief in unilateralism. Cases like Iraq and Afghanistan bear testimony to the fact that even force could be used against certain states and legitimacy could be derived from the UN after that. And this policy could be

emulated whenever and wherever America's national interests demanded such response. Such policies could be afforded so far as America has the military superiority and economic edge over other states. Russia's dependence on the west for its development and security points to the fact that it cannot veto all the US proposals in the UN as it was doing in the Cold War period. American military superiority and the economic benefits it provides to other states have led regional powers to woo it to side with them to maintain balance against each other and even to the extent of allowing it to interfere in regional affairs. However, there are many limitations to the US unilateral policies to protect and promote its geopolitical interests and many changes have taken place at the international level in the post-Soviet era, which pose formidable challenges to such interests.

Limitations of unilateralism and military perspective on security

There is the question of legitimacy involved in such kind of wars like the War on Terror in Afghanistan in which civilians die in numbers. The War is not against the state but against a group of people. If the enemy is no longer the opposing state and its people but a regime or leadership, then bombs that missed did not hit the 'enemy' but innocent civilians. In the Second World War there were few qualms about causing collateral because ultimately it was still the enemy that suffered. But when bombs missed their targets in Belgrade or Baghdad or in Afghanistan, it was the innocent and the vulnerable that suffered.⁸¹ Afghan case points out that the civilians even go to the extent of supporting the forces waging war against alien powers. Furthermore, 'War on terror' has widened the gap between international law and legitimacy. Legitimacy provides the necessary flexibility to law when the latter is relatively fixed and rigid. In this context, legitimacy can be understood not as deviation from existing law rather making law more relevant to the changing conditions. But preemptive use of force against groups of people (terrorists) put international legitimacy in jeopardy.⁸² First, international law is based on the logic of self-defence and secondly, states are the sole units of action. Preemptive attacks can be self-serving and actions against groups undermine territorial integrity of states within which such groups operate. Military operation against such groups forecloses the policing and extradition options on which the international law is based. There is even no one to decide that there is sufficient evidence of state complicity in harbouring terrorists.

The US has resorted to the provisions of 'self defence' in order to defend its action against states like Iraq and Afghanistan. And UN resolution 1373 supports such action and can be interpreted to have given an unlimited mandate to use of force. UN Charter article 51 requirement that self-defence measures be reported to the Security Council is not sufficient protection against incautious or opportunistic behaviour of states especially in the context of the five permanent members most able to engage in such measures have the capacity to veto any resolution directed against them.⁸³ These issues become only more difficult in the context of an extension of the right of self-defence to include preemptive actions.

To gain quick victory in the war against Al Qaeda, the US along with violating international law, took the support of warlords who had no less violent objectives than the Al Qaeda or the Taliban. It is reported that the US still maintains relationship with different warlords to make its counter-insurgency strategy effective. The strengthening of warlords would lead to a more conflict-prone Afghanistan than a peaceful one. Even the problems of poppy cultivation and Drug Trafficking have been overlooked by the US to achieve its geopolitical objectives.⁸⁴

The US's increasing importance on military perspective on security is reflected in its highly technocratic view on war, scorn for nation-building and prioritisation of ends over means. All these factors will erode the soft-power resources of the US in the long-term.

In the post-Cold War period, it is being increasingly acknowledged that wars cannot be won militarily. The Cold War politics was refrained from direct use of force and coercion due to parity of power of the two superpowers. With the end of the Cold War and after the dismantlement of the Warsaw pact, American foreign policy makers assumed that coercion and use of force if necessary could serve the US foreign policy objectives. However, the post-war situations in Iraq and Afghanistan are difficult to be managed by America alone. And more importantly, they require long-term and socio-economic engagement rather than military operations alone.

The US officials contrary to their beliefs and actions admit that wars cannot be won militarily. For example, the US former secretary of defence Robert Gates observed that "one of the important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to

win: economic development, institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services...along with security, are essential ingredients for success.”⁸⁵ In the absence of these basic requirements, non-state actors like terrorists, warlords and civil war groups move from strength to strength. Realising that there is no military endgame to Afghan problem, the US has looked for political solutions like talking to the Taliban to stop attacks on the US and NATO forces in return for their reconciliation into Afghan political mainstream. However, many analysts believe that it is a hasty decision on the part of the US. The American plan for withdrawal of its forces by the end of 2014 is considered premature as the Afghan security forces are still not strong enough to protect the Afghan nation from the future security threats. The Taliban has not completely abjured violence and accepted the Afghan constitution in principle. It is still a strong force and put the release of the Taliban prisoners in Guantanamo Bay as the first condition to open talks with the US.

Military and strategic perspective on security is based on zero-sum game. Gain is ensured by defeating the enemy. The states which fight the enemy have different military-strategic objectives. Where the end objective is military-strategic in nature, the immediate objective of member-states is bound to be military-strategic with the same logic of zero-sum game. For example, the US call for ‘War on Terror’ has been conjoined by many states but their military strategic objectives substantially differ as they belong to different geopolitical realities. While Pakistan is more inclined to defend its interests against India, Russia wants to maintain its interests in Central Asia by not allowing Islamic forces into it and ‘War on Terror’ would help Russia to fight in Chechnya but is worried about NATO’s presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan, Iran wants to defend its geopolitical interests in Central Asia and maintain its traditional sphere of influence in western Afghanistan, and Central Asian states apprehend the spread of Islamic fundamentalism to their territory and to get rid of Russian monopoly over the energy politics in the region they invite the US presence in the region. According to Farkhod Tolipov, the operation in Afghanistan is essentially leading to the juxtaposition of two realities: the international and unifying fight against terrorism, on the one hand, and the conflict prone, disuniting geopolitical rivalry in the Central-South Asian macro-region, on the other.⁸⁶ To defend their interests, states even maintain secret alliances with the terror groups. Situation in Afghanistan can only improve if states see their benefits in the reconstruction and continuous

engagement with it after reconstruction.

Interdependent World and Growing Independence of Regional Powers

The states have entered into deep economic and cultural relationship which is mutually beneficial and any conflict on military and strategic front would cost them more as the states involved in the conflict may have to bear the accumulated cost of disrupting the chain.⁸⁷ As economic security has begun to play more important or as important role as military security perspective, some scholars defined the world as militarily unipolar but economically multipolar. The global financial crisis points to the extent to which financial market has been integrated. And to tone down the crisis required joint efforts on the part of major economic players and members of G-20 and on which both developed and developing countries debated to evolve common strategy to deal with the crisis. Containment of Iran, which has been one of the primary objectives of the American strategy in Afghanistan, may find difficulty in an ever-increasing inter-dependent world. Even after Bush included Iran in his description of “Axis of evil” in his State of the Union address of 29 January 2002, the European Union foreign ministers reached an agreement to open talks with Iran on a trade and cooperation pact in the month of June of the same year. When the Sheer Energy Company of Canada agreed to an US\$80 million development project with the National Iranian Oil Company, the US objected to it categorically. Similarly, Moscow has a major investment in Iran's nuclear programme. The Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy was closely involved in building Iran's \$1 billion Bushehr nuclear power plant, and the Russian nuclear industry was looking for more such projects.⁸⁸

Neither has the world emerged completely unipolar, nor has any world society become firmly established. In between the two perspectives on the post-Cold War era, there remains a large grey area where states move from the pro-US foreign policy or clear anti-US or restricted foreign policy to a more independent foreign policy. For example, Iran pursued a cautious foreign policy in the Cold War period due to the presence of the Soviet Union near its border and America's policy of sanctions after the hostage crisis. After the disintegration of the USSR, Iran has on several occasions expressed its will to play role of a regional power. It is developing nuclear plants with Russian assistance despite American sanctions. The coercive diplomacy of the US against Iran is ineffective so long as Russia does not agree to it. Growing interdependence and

availability of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction to large number of state actors have granted such independence to them. In the aftermath of 9/11, though the Iranian President Syed Mohammad Khatami condemned the attacks and sympathised with American people, he favoured a UN led 'anti-terror coalition' to take on the terrorists in which Iran was willing to participate. But the unilateral American attack on Afghanistan has led to Iran's accusation that they were part of a long-term US plan to dominate different regions of the world. Similarly, while India and the US have developed strategic partnership in the form of civil nuclear deal in the post-Cold War period, Pakistan and Russia tried to improve their relations as the Summit in Sochi indicated.⁸⁹ In case of Afghanistan, regional powers like Iran, Pakistan, India and many Central Asian states are trying to pursue their strategic interests more independently. Central Asia, which till the disintegration of the Soviet Union, came in relation to other countries through Soviet Union's foreign policy making with clear anti-US thrust, tried to move away from Russian orbit but never liked to replace Russian hegemony with any other power's hegemony. They preferred independence to any other kind of regional security arrangements centering around a hegemon. Therefore, they played one power against other to secure independence.

Though there is no militarily powerful state or a combination of such states existing to challenge the US's power position globally, various regional powers can pool their strength to effectively challenge the extra-regional ambitions of the US. The formation of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in which both Russia and China cooperate and provide all the Central Asian states including themselves the required leverage against the US points to this. Though both the countries welcomed the US to operate against the terrorists and cooperated with it, they were insistent that the US should exit from the region as soon as the War on Terror was over.

According to Bhadrakumar, growing consultations between Russian-Indian and Iranian-Indian diplomats testify that the regional powers may be slowly waking up and becoming wiser about the US's geo-strategy in Afghanistan. The time may not far off before they begin to sense that the "War on Terror" is providing a convenient rubric under which the US is gradually securing for itself a permanent abode in Hindu Kush and the Pamirs, Central Asian steppes and the Caucasus that form the strategic hub overlooking Russia, China, India and Iran.⁹⁰ Recently, Russia has proposed to Afghanistan a key role for SCO in the peace process. President of Russia and Iran

had telephonic conversations regarding the issues of common concern like Afghanistan.⁹¹

Growth of non-state actors with asymmetric warfare tactics

There are likely to be less conventional warfares among the integrated members of the Europe, less capability of the US to engage militarily without co-operation of other powers and economic engagements among the states raising the cost of military engagement mitigate the chances of symmetrical warfare among nation-states. On the other hand, the rise of international terrorism and civil war situations in the post-Cold War era has increased the cases of asymmetric conflicts. In the era of globalisation, “democratisation of technology”, the “privatisation of war” and the “miniaturization of weaponry” emboldens the radical groups vis-a-vis state actors.⁹² Asymmetric wars cannot be won. Nuclear missile defence technology developed by the US will not be able to detect such operations if planes and buses are used for terrorist operations and people sneak in through fake passports and visas. Like conventional regular army of the opponent, there is no identifiable enemy in such kind of asymmetric warfare. They mingle with civilians and they can even enter into the territory of some other states from where they can wage war. The difficulties in the counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan revealed that the US Army embraces a big-war paradigm. Difficult terrains, porous boundaries, difficulty in understanding native peoples’ language and cultural dissimilarity impede American fight against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

It is an issue of recurring debate in Washington as to how to combine counterinsurgency operations effectively with nation-building efforts. It is because of America's military thrust in its foreign policy, the counterinsurgency operations have gone more military impeding nation-building process. According to Michael J. Mazarr “the tremendously insightful Hammes and policymakers such as the thoughtful and dedicated Gates have fully recognized the importance of nonmilitary instruments of power in dealing with these new threats and have called for improvements in those instruments. In practice, however, actual U.S. operations in these contingencies have retained an overwhelmingly military flavor.”⁹³

Shifting and Secret alliance system

In the context of post-Cold War era when alliances and partnership are always shifting, effective policy of coercion cannot be applied. With the growth of non-state actors like the radical religious groups, states do not form alliances on a formal basis and can operate in a surreptitious way as the other group is not a state. Pakistan provides a cogent example to illustrate this. On the one hand it fights the 'war on terror' and other side provides sanctuary and logistical help to different terrorist groups. While the US has strong reservations regarding Pakistan being a strong ally to fight terrorism as the secret defence documents disclosed by Wikileaks⁹⁴ point out, it gives more and more aid to Pakistan to reduce anti-Americanism and support-base for terrorists in Pakistan. In the beginning of 2011, at a time when the US was contemplating the ways and means to withdraw from Afghanistan, the Washington Post reported that the Obama administration would give Pakistan more military, intelligence and economic support after assessing that the US could not afford to alienate Pakistan.⁹⁵ The White House rejected proposals made by military commanders who, after losing patience with Pakistan's refusal to go after the Afghan Taliban, recommended that the US deploy ground forces to raid the insurgents' safe havens inside Pakistan.⁹⁶ After Osama bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan and Headly's interrogation, the US relationship with Pakistan touched a new low. However, analysts argue that still the US and Pakistan have tacit understanding as Pakistan has not put down a single US drone so far though it complained about frequent American drone attacks. Iran, on the other hand has put down the single US drone that crossed into its territory. Iran and China being deeply suspicious of American motives in the Central Asian region are reported to have provided military support to the Afghan Taliban. For example, there have been reports of Iran providing military hardware to the extremist Sunni Afghan Taliban and Chinese-made military equipment has reportedly also been found on Taliban fighters.⁹⁷ Thus, shifting of alliances, the increasing capability of states to pursue independent foreign policy objectives and secret and informal alliances jeopardize coercive diplomacy and use of force ineffective. International politics relating to Afghanistan can be situated in the grey area defined by no clear alliances and asymmetric warfare.

Afghanistan's fierce sense of independence and preference for Non-Alignment

Afghanistan had fought three wars with British imperial force and spawn Basmachi movement to preempt Russia's aggressive and strategic movement towards its south to maintain its independence. It showed its interest to maintain neutrality in the world wars and joined Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). However, the US long-term geopolitical interests in Afghanistan militate against these two principles. While the Afghan president Hamid Karzai was interested in an intra-Afghan dialogue to build the Afghan nation, the US opposed it. The reason for this is while US expected Karzai to work as a US surrogate, he preferred to act as an Afghan nationalist.⁹⁸ The US sought a new status of forces agreement to maintain permanent bases in Afghanistan but Karzai opposed this. Karzai in order to minimise his dependence on the US increased consultations and ties with Russia and Iran including military cooperation. Karzai also increased consultations with Pakistan to reach some understanding on Afghan peace settlement.⁹⁹ Afghanistan's fierce sense of independence and desire for neutrality has the possibility to add complexity to an already complex new great game.

To sum up, Afghanistan being a Rimland state was considered vital to contain the continental power to move towards the ocean. While Mackinder laid down the importance of Eurasian Heartland in terms of the continental expanse that it provides to develop continental strategies and in terms of the natural resources, Spykman foregrounded the importance of surrounding Rimland states. Spykman rather than challenging Mackinder's thesis strengthened it by adding containment theory to the existing Heartland thesis. The American foreign policy making has been influenced by these geopolitical theories. During the Cold War, the US tried to contain the Soviet Union's geopolitical ambitions in the Indian Ocean and South Asia by forming regional security blocs like SEATO and investing more in the socio-economic development of a non-aligned state like Afghanistan. However, during Daoud's regime, the American influence in Afghanistan reduced substantially. After the Vietnam War, there was a downturn in the American will to get militarily involved in distant places of Asia and Africa. However, that did not mean American withdrawal from these regions. The US revived its old relationship with Pakistan which got soured after the Carter Administration took a strong stand against Pakistan's nuclear development, cutting off economic and military assistance. With the help of Pakistan, relationship with China was strengthened despite détente with the USSR. American allies in the

West Asia like Egypt and Saudi Arabia proved to be useful in spite of the growing dissatisfaction of the Arab countries over the American pro-Israel stance on the Palestine and Israel conflict. Fortunately for the US, despite the fall of Shah in Iran, it did not slide towards a pro-Soviet position.

During the period of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the American policy took a shift from containment strategy to one of forward policy. The US provided huge amount of aid and arms to Pakistan to sustain the insurgency and bog down the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The arms that reached first in Pakistan were .303 Enfield rifles just fourteen days after the Soviet intervention. Both Carter and Ronald Reagan increased the level of aid to the insurgents though it expanded considerably during the Reagan's period. The 1985 National Security Decision Directive authorized further escalation of conflict. It is noteworthy that the US brought the first ground-to-air missiles in the form of American Stinger to Afghan territory in the latter part of 1986 to fight the Russian forces. To strengthen the insurgency, the US benefited from its relationship with China which was established with the help of Pakistan and later took the shape of America-China-Pakistan axis against the Soviet intervention. Saudi Arabia, the American ally in the Gulf played a major role in financing and arming the insurgents. The US also benefited from the growing discontent against the Soviet role in Afghanistan among the Non-Aligned and Islamic countries. In order to weaken and fragment the Eurasian Heartland, the US took diplomatic measures like excluding the Eastern Europe from the purview of economic sanctions meant for the Soviet Union. During the civil war in Afghanistan, the American attention was more focused on the Gulf than Afghanistan.

American interest in Afghanistan and former Soviet Republics deepened after the disintegration of the USSR. Emergence of independent states in the Eurasian Heartland led to the American belief that it could manipulate situations there to develop continental strategies. American attention was also on the volume of natural resources hidden in the Central Asian region which was much advertised in the 1990s. In the post-Cold War period, the leadership in the US developed the doctrine of enlargement in place of the containment strategy to reach out to the former Soviet Republics. The doctrine of enlargement which was based on the principles of democracy, human rights and market economy was not successful in the authoritarian Central

Asian states. The US could not also resort to coercive diplomacy as it needed Russia's support to deal with new conventional threats like Iran and Iraq. In this context, terrorism appeared to be a global-scale overriding threat around which it could organise its geopolitical interests immediately after 9/11. Afghanistan was not only the centre of terrorism, it was also vital for the US to transfer Central Asian energy resources to the world market bypassing Russia and Iran. Moreover, Afghanistan was central to the American 'Greater Central Asia' project to move the Central Asian states away from Russian and Iranian orbit of influence towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. The War on Terror in Afghanistan provided the US an entry to the Central Asian states and helped in establishing military bases and securing transit rights in Central Asia for the military and non-military supplies to the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The US's militarily driven policy in Afghanistan points to the geopolitical character of its interests. In the first place, the US resorted to pre-emptive strikes against Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime bypassing all the legitimate methods to capture the individuals who masterminded 9/11. Secondly, it took the help of warlords of Afghanistan to fight Al Qaeda and Taliban forces and instituted them to power knowing that they were not less violent in their approach and objectives. Thirdly, it invested many times more on military than on the socio-economic development of Afghanistan. Fourthly, it applied a top-down approach to security and development without taking rural and tribal peoples' interests into account. The Lisbon Summit of November 2010 between NATO and Afghanistan and the Strategic Partnership Agreement of May 2012 between US and Afghanistan foreground the long-term American interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

In the post-Cold War era, the US faces a number of problems to pursue its geopolitical interests in the Central Asian region and Afghanistan. There has been growth of non-state actors like radical religious groups with asymmetric war tactics. Regional powers tried to defend their geopolitical interests by forming secret alliances with these groups which, in turn, undermined the interests of the US in the region. Pakistan, Iran and China are reported to have provided arms and aid to Taliban to thwart the American role in Afghanistan. Growing interdependence between the nation-states in the era of globalisation and availability of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction to many states have provided state actors with required leverage to pursue their geopolitical interests independent of the US. The US's policy of containment towards Iran and

Russia would certainly be difficult in this era of interdependence. The US has also eroded its soft powers resources by flouting international norms, fighting with warlords, not trying to address the problem of drug-trafficking adequately and by unilaterally determining the Afghan war strategies and peace plan. In the post-Cold War era, it has become a matter of common realisation that wars cannot be won militarily and long-term engagement is required and socio-economic issues must be addressed.

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CHAPTER IV

Pakistan and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: From Frontline state to 'Failed state'

After the departure of British from India and the latter's division into two parts, a new state, named Pakistan, emerged in the region. Pakistan was created as a homeland for Indian Muslims. As an Islamic state, Pakistan was privileged to spread its influence towards its west. Moreover, Pakistan removed the geographical bridge between India and West Asia. However, given all the leverages, Pakistan ran into problems with Afghanistan just after its emergence. Pakistan's strategic concerns were defined by its expressed apprehensions on the issue of Pashtunistan and non-recognition of the Durand Line as an international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan by various Afghan rulers. As already discussed in the introductory chapter, for Pakistan, controlling the border areas with Afghanistan has been a means to control Afghanistan, making the latter dependent on the former for trade.¹ Nevertheless, the porous and close tribal and cultural linkages between the Pushtuns across the Durand Line are some of the factors that concern the security interests of Pakistan. However, Pashtunistan, more than an ethnic issue has been a geopolitical issue. Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan has been to install a pro-Pakistani religious regime so that the Pashtunistan issue is subsumed under the larger banner of Islamic identity.

Pakistan joined American military pacts like Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in September 1954 and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in September 1955 and became a recipient of substantial military and economic aid from America. Pakistan considered American military and economic aid vital to offset its power imbalance with India in order to get over its sense of insecurity, to strengthen its position on Kashmir and to enhance its influence in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan's relationship with the US took a downturn after America decided to cut off most of its aid when Pakistan initiated the 1965 war with India over Kashmir.² The aid was resumed after a few years but at much lower levels. Pakistan withdrew from SEATO and CENTO in 1972 and 1979 respectively. The relationship between the two countries deteriorated further after the attack on US Embassy in Islamabad. Moreover, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government in Pakistan initiated nuclear development programme which invited American sanctions in 1979. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in the same year paved the way for the Pakistani establishment to take Pakistan's relationship with the US again to the strategic level and acquire substantial military and

economic aid.

Pakistan and Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, the Director-General of the Pakistani intelligence, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Akhtar Abdur Rehman Khan advised Pakistan's military dictator Zia-ul-Haq that there would be a convergence of religious, political and strategic gains if Pakistan were to assume the role of champion of Islam against communist aggression. Zia also had ready-made instruments to play this covertly without provoking retaliation under the Afghan-Soviet treaty of 1978. These were the various Afghan political parties that had set up their headquarters in Peshawar after their failed uprisings against Daoud. Pakistan had provided funding to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Rabbani Khalis, Ahmad Shah Masood, and others who led “uprisings” in various parts of Afghanistan in 1974 against the Daoud regime. However, the uprisings failed, and were followed by a brutal government crackdown, forcing many of the groups to flee to Pakistan. Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto allowed them to open up offices in Pakistan, and some were also provided military training by the ISI. Later, Zia used them against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Since the Afghan refugees in Pakistan had to be recommended by one of the parties in order to be eligible for food rations, the small, unrepresentative Peshawar-based parties became mass organisations. However, all the parties were not strictly Islamist. Among them, two leaders had family ties to the former royal establishment and professional classes. They were usually described as ‘moderates’ as opposed to the ‘radicals’ leading the other Islamic parties.³

The then US President Jimmy Carter sought Pakistan's assistance by defining Soviet invasion as a threat to its territorial integrity with the Soviet troops on its frontiers. He described the invasion as one of the most serious threats to international peace after the Second World War. Zia ul-Haq, the Pakistani President offered assistance despite opposition from some cabinet members warning not to anger Soviet Union. In fact, Pakistan perceived serious threat in the Soviet Union's southward move. According to Parvez Iqbal Cheema, “the country most significantly and directly affected by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was Pakistan. The invasion introduced many disturbing elements into Pakistan's strategic environment. Not only did it generate fears and apprehensions among many Pakistanis that their country would be the next target, it also rapidly increased the activities of the resistance groups and vastly multiplied the refugee flow into Pakistan”.⁴ It was also fresh in Pakistan's memory that the

Soviet Union supported India's active role in the Bangladesh independence movement which led to the dismemberment of Pakistan. However, Pakistan's interest to militarily and economically strengthen itself against India by capitalising on the Soviet Union's Afghan intervention is evident in Zia's refusal of Carter Administration's offer of \$4 million. Reagan government provided Pakistan with an aid package worth more than \$3.2 billion.⁵ Pakistan, flush with the US aid provided thousands of bases to so-called Mujahedeen in the tribal areas. The tribal belt, extending from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) till northern Balochistan in Pakistan, acted as a natural destination for refugees and Mujahedeen from Afghanistan. The socio-political engineering engendered by the US in liaison with Pakistani intelligence during 1980s led to mushrooming of madrassas, which provided recruits for filling the ranks of the Islamist Mujahedeen fighting the communist forces in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns of Pakistan from this terrain also joined the Mujahedeen ranks. There were, of course, recruits from other provinces of Pakistan, who had transited through the Deobandi madrasas, dotting the border areas. Pakistani intelligence ISI channeled the funds and arms provided by the US and Saudi Arabia to the insurgents.⁶ There were also small scale providers of funds and arms such as the UK, China, the Gulf states, Egypt, and Israel.⁷

The strategic objectives of Pakistan in Afghanistan after the Soviet intervention were to offset the Indian predominance in the region by securing funds and arms, increase its influence in Kashmir, exercise enough influence in Kabul to overcome bilateral problem like conflict over Durand Line, to spread influence into the Islamic countries of Central Asia which were then part of the Soviet Union, and wield more influence among the Islamic countries of the world in general by opposing an atheist communist power invading an Islamic country.

It was believed in the Pakistani strategic community that India tried to cultivate Afghanistan to the disadvantage of Pakistan. It was alleged in the Pakistani press that India was behind the reported crossing of the Afghan tribesmen into Pakistan, the charges were refuted by the government of India.⁸ In this light, Soviet Union's predominance in Afghanistan could be construed as India's increasing influence there. Pakistan saw an alliance with the US as an opportunity to offset the power imbalance with India, scuttle the Indian effort to cultivate Afghanistan and increase its influence in Kashmir. It is roughly calculated that seventy per cent of the weapons supplied to continue jihad in Afghanistan never reached there. It became a part of either Pakistani military asset, for example, more sophisticated weapons were pilfered by it – or it was sold for profit by the Pakistani military or its various entrepreneurial

middlemen. The mujahideen were the first non-NATO recipients of the sophisticated weapons.⁹ Pakistan wanted to increase its influence vis-a-vis India particularly in relation to Kashmir. It was after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan that Pakistan tried to internationalise the Kashmir issue. Its active anti-Soviet role paid it rich dividends in terms of securing diplomatic support from the West and Islamic states apart from the huge amount of aid and arms received from the US, Saudi Arabia and Britain. In this context, Pakistan hoped to reverse the agreement reached between itself and India in Shimla. After the successful independence of Bangladesh, India signed the Shimla Agreement from a position of strength. In this agreement, it was agreed that Kashmir was a bilateral issue to be resolved bilaterally. Benefits accruing from the active anti-Soviet role created hopes among the Pakistani leadership that they could now effectively internationalise the issue. Furthermore, Pakistan was involved in clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons to create a strategic environment to pursue its interests in Kashmir with relative asymmetry. It was during this time that Pakistan hoped that its activities were likely to be ignored as the attention of the West was focused on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.¹⁰

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan provided Pakistan with the required security environment to pursue for a friendly and amenable regime in Afghanistan so that Pashtunistan issue was never raised and got subsumed within the larger banner of Islamic identity. Pakistan directed Pashtun hostility to fighting against the Soviet Army under the rubric of political Islam. Because of the cultural affinities of the Sunni Muslim Pashtuns on the either side of the border, and through the influence of Pashtuns in the upper echelons of Pakistan's army and bureaucracy, Pakistan's Afghan policy tilted in favour of mujahedeen parties. To defuse Pashtun nationalism and exercise control over Pashtun mujahedeen, Zia discouraged the Afghan nationalists in exile to convene a loya jirga in Pakistan and form a unified command through which weapons could be channeled to fight the jihad.

While the Soviet forces were bogged down in Afghanistan, Pakistan thought it to be the right time to spread its influence further towards its north and west where the Islamic states of Central Asia are situated. Pakistan, to spread its influence into the Soviet Republics of the Central Asian region trained Afghan groups and sent copies of the Koran across the border through them. Moreover, an organisation was created in 1988 to launch subversive activities in areas of Central Asia contiguous with Afghanistan, with the goal of liberating Soviet Muslims.¹¹

Pakistan provided covert and carefully calibrated support to the Mujahedeen in order to control the outcome of the war and avoid a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. Pakistan channeled funds and arms to specific groups. For example, it funneled assistance to Peshwar based alliance of seven Islamic parties and the lion share of which was provided to Hekmetyar's Hizb-e-Islami. The Islamic dimension of the resistance was encouraged by Pakistan to keep the resistance dependent on it. Fighters from all over the Muslim world were encouraged to join the jihad in Afghanistan. To avoid confrontation with the USSR, Pakistan denied the Soviet Union's charges that it had a role in encouraging, arming, and directing insurgency in Afghanistan. It maintained the fiction that the Afghan resistance was a spontaneous affair and did not depend on external moral and material support. The second plea was that the material support so far provided by Pakistan to the mujahedeen through the Peshawar-based parties was modest, consisting mainly of outdated equipments from its own armouries that were replenished with more modern Chinese weapons. To strengthen the insurgency the ISI cajoled the Peshawar-based parties to agree to form a Seven Party Alliance and established the principle that every mujahedeen commander in the field belonged to one of the seven parties. If he failed to do so, the commander obtained nothing from the ISI – no arms, no ammunition, no training for his troops.¹²

However, there were also growing differences between the seven Peshawar-based parties during the civil war period in Afghanistan. Different commanders from the same area joined different parties and thereby widened the existing differences characterising the Afghan society. Some commanders reacted violently to others entering, passing through, or 'poaching' on their territory. Secondly, the only possible issue that could unify the Pashtun mujahedeen was the Pashtunistan issue. Pakistan, well aware of its stakes in Afghanistan, dispersed arms and aid to mujahedeen groups separately.¹³

Pakistan's policy of grooming mujahideen to raise jihad in Afghanistan has resulted in the huge loss of human lives in Afghanistan and it has also promoted illegal economy in the mujahideen controlled areas of Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan. Pakistan, in retaliation to its activities in Afghanistan, had been subject to bombings engineered by Afghan intelligence and the Soviet intelligence agency, Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosty (KGB). Still the strategy to raise jihad was adopted by Pakistan to change the balance of power in the region in its favour by amassing arms and funds from the US and

hoping to install a puppet government in Afghanistan. The US also along with arms and funds rendered moral support to the resistance. Zbigniew Brzezinski at the Khyber Pass rallying the mujahideen's religious fervour urged them to victory with the words "your cause is right. God is on your side".¹⁴

Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989 more as a result of Pakistan's high-cost covert operations and the endless foreign supply of cash and armaments, including sophisticated weapons such as shoulder-fired anti-aircraft Stinger Missiles than anything else. It was only through these weapons and increased aid that the dangerous Soviet scorched earth tactics were defeated.

Pakistan and the Afghan civil war after the Soviet withdrawal

The Geneva Accords were signed by the foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States at the European headquarters of the United Nations on 14 April 1988 to ensure Soviet withdrawal and bring peace in Afghanistan. They stipulated that Pakistan and Afghanistan should not interfere in each other's internal affairs.¹⁵ However, Yaqub Khan, the foreign minister re-instated by Zia-ul-Haq after the civil administration was sacked in May 1988 said "Geneva Accords were just an inconvenient episode which interrupted play".¹⁶ In November 1988, Benazir Bhutto came to power in Pakistan being democratically elected. But, she retained the services of Zia's appointee as head of the ISI, General Hamid Gul, who favoured a more interventionist role for Pakistan in Afghan affairs.

Infighting between the various resistance forces allowed the communists to remain in power till 1992. Mohammad Najibullah was the last communist to step down in favour of a mujahideen coalition led by Sibgatullah Mujadedi. But the mujahideen coalition could not remain in power for long time and was soon ripped apart by brutal factional struggles. An uncertain phase of civil war ensued characterized by fight for personal power bringing most part of Afghanistan under local commanders and warlords. Kabul was seized by the Tajik dominated Jamiat-e-Islami of Barhuddin Rabbani and his commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud. During the civil war, Pakistan rendered all kinds of support to Hekmetyar but he failed to capture power despite repeated attempts and the disastrous toll on the people that he exacted by indiscriminate rocket and artillery barrages. Heavy fighting ensued between different ethnic factions like Tajik dominated Jamiat-e-Islami, Pushtun dominated Hizb-e-Islami, the Hazara dominated Hiz-e-Wahdat and Uzbek dominated Jowzjan militia in the

absence of superpower role in the region. With the Cold War ending after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US lost interest in Afghanistan.¹⁷ It was more interested in the Gulf War to set the tone of a New World Order than the crisis ridden Afghanistan for which the superpowers were largely responsible. In this set up, regional powers like Iran, Pakistan and Uzbekistan began to pursue their interests without being client to any bigger power. Pakistan, in this period, was deserted by the US with aid being withdrawn and sanctions being imposed for undertaking nuclear programme.¹⁸

Emergence of the Taliban and Pakistan

The Jamiat-e-Islami (JUI), an Islamic organisation in Pakistan which turned into a political party later, organised the rural madrassahs in the Pashtun tribal areas in Afghanistan and the network of madrassahs in Pakistan, where millions of Afghans took refuge after the communist coup in Afghanistan in 1978. After becoming a political party the JUI remained in political opposition to the governments elected after President Zia's death in 1988. After the 1993 elections, however, it became a part of coalition government of Benazir Bhutto, and its leader, Fazlur Rehman, played a pivotal role in his advocacy of the Taliban.

Taliban's emergence needs to be put within the larger context of changed geopolitics in the Eurasian landmass. Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s and gave way to the emergence of six Central Asian states which were landlocked but rich with natural resources. With the perceived loosening of Indian ties and influence in the region after the dismantlement of its closest partner, Pakistan was eager to extend both trade and political ties to the region. This required stability in Afghanistan torn apart by civil war and local rule and influence of warlords. After repeated attempts by Pakistan's favourite Hekmetyar to subdue other ethnic forces in Afghanistan, the second democratically elected government of Benazir Bhutto, under its Interior Minister General Naseerullah Babur prepared the ground work to utilise the Taliban to bring stability to southern and eastern Afghanistan. He saw high stakes involved in Afghanistan for Pakistan through which trade routes could be opened and linked to different resource rich Central Asian states.¹⁹

The Taliban had sociological and ideological links to institutional elements within Pakistani society that provided much material support during their rise to power. But, they also had sources of support in Pakistan that lay outside the official structures of the government and the military. The Taliban developed access to influential lobbies and vested interests that

made them less amenable to the official Pakistani pressures.²⁰

While Pakistan wanted connectivity with Central Asia through Afghanistan, the Taliban had also the vested interests in securing the trade routes from Afghan warlords. Important sources of support for the Taliban movement were the private commercial truckers and transporters who developed a thriving business moving food and other commodities to needy Afghans on a regular basis. However, the transportation routes became very dangerous due to the role of warlords during the civil war in Afghanistan.²¹ Therefore, the Taliban saw their interests in ensuring safety of these routes.

The Taliban were successful in liberating a trade convoy en route to Turkmenistan and went on to capture Kandahar city. The Taliban were welcomed by the Afghani people initially because they claimed no power for themselves and promised to break the hold of warlords and transfer power to an Islamic government. War weary people saw a ray of hope for themselves in the rise of Taliban. The ISI and Pakistani military rendered all kinds of support to Taliban to capture power retaking control of the Pakistan's Afghan policy. The US which withheld aid from Pakistan on nuclear issue and saw no benefits in allying with Pakistan after the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, suddenly realised the importance of Taliban as a force of stability in an energy rich region. It even officially supported Taliban until terrorist attacks on the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. Even then, the US maintained contacts with the Taliban till the 9/11 attack in 2001 despite the refusal of Taliban to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the culprit of the attacks. After occupying Kandahar and Helmand, the Taliban marched towards Kabul and occupied it.

The Taliban were projected to be an instrument to ensure “strategic depth” against India by the strategic community of Pakistan. They were considered a safeguard against the Pashtunistan issue being pushed by any Afghan government because of its emphasis on Islamic religion than ethnic appeal. One of the most important functions that the Taliban were intended to perform for Pakistan was to ensure connectivity to the newly emerged landlocked Central Asian region and spread radical Islamic values into the region. In response to Pakistan's sustained assistance to the Taliban, Iran, which had been fundamental in bringing together the Northern Alliance, also armed the Shia Hazara. Russia and Uzbekistan supplied weapons to their clients and co-ethnics in the Northern Alliance. Tajikistan provided logistical support to Massoud. India which was previously supporting the communists in power now

began supporting former mujahideen of the Northern Alliance.

Because of gross violation of human rights and their intransigence to hand over Osama Bin Laden after the perpetration of 9/11 attack, the Taliban were shunned by the international community. Henceforth, Taliban became an underground transnational community supplied with resources and fighters from Pakistani madrassahs, Arab fighters under the umbrella of al-Qaeda and Islamic jihad. The Taliban's main strike force Brigade 55 was entirely composed of non-Afghans. There were leaders and fighters from Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan who joined the Taliban. Thus, the Taliban did not form a monolithic structure comprising only Afghan Pashtuns. Pakistan played a major role in shaping its contours according to its geopolitical interests. However, majority of the Taliban consisted of Afghan Pashtuns. The Taliban were not a natural development rather they emerged in response to the civil war, displacement and dislocation brought about by the Soviet invasion and the Western response to bleed Soviet Union in order not to allow it further progress towards south. They grew in refugee camps and therefore they were shaped by the harsh conditions prevailing over there.²² Consequently, the Taliban committed acts while they ruled that would have been unthinkable in the Afghan village or towns. The Taliban's lack of interest in governance beyond law and order and war-making had turned Afghanistan into the world's largest humanitarian disaster. But it was the Taliban's turning away from the US's orbit of influence by refusing to extradite Osama bin Laden that made the Taliban subject to the latter's wrath.

The War on Terror and Pakistan

Pakistan joined the American-led War on Terror in order not to be isolated internationally, secondly, as India quickly declared support for Washington, Pakistan did not want India to move closer to the US, which would disturb regional balance of power and more importantly, it was thought that the geo-strategic situation of Pakistan sharing border with Afghanistan would pay rich dividends to it as the US would have to depend on it for military operations. However, the decision to support the US in its War on Terror did not come easily as Pakistan had to make a volt face to take such a stance. Supporting the Taliban was so important to Pakistan's security and regional calculations that Musharraf even at times thought of estranging relationship with the United States rather than abandon his allies in Afghanistan. Earlier, before the 9/11 attack on the US, Musharraf had openly admitted Pakistan's ongoing support for Taliban, declaring, "This is our national interest...the Taliban cannot be alienated by Pakistan. We have a national security interest there."²³ However, Pakistan assisted the US

with facilities and bases as well as the required intelligence necessary to win the war in Afghanistan. Its assistance was contingent upon the US preventing the Northern Alliance from assuming power in Kabul. Despite the US assurances the Northern Alliance forces moved into Kabul in November 2001. India's growing relationship with the Northern Alliance after the fall of Taliban was a constant irritant for Pakistan and the Northern Alliance's control of Kabul became a strategic loss to Pakistan as it spelled a complete failure of its long term investment on grooming the Taliban. An interim Afghan government was chosen at the conference in Bonn, Germany. The Northern Alliance received portfolios of most of the important ministries including defence and the US showed little interest in evicting them even though a Durrani Pashtun in the form of Hamid Karzai was elected interim president in December 2001. The Pashtuns felt underrepresented in the government. Furthermore, the defeated Taliban were left out of any negotiations on the future of Afghanistan after a constitution was adopted following a Loya Jirga in 2004 hampering Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan.²⁴

Adding insult to injury that Pakistan had already incurred, Karzai raised the unsavoury Pushtunistan issue expressing that he did not accept Durand Line as an international border as “it raised a wall between the two brothers”.²⁵ After Karzai took office, there were frequent incidents of anti-Pakistan protests and clashes across the border centering around the issue of Pashtunistan. On July 8, 2003, protesters in Kabul even ransacked the Pakistani Embassy which contained the potential of escalating into a wider conflict. Pakistan, in the meanwhile, also faced increased pressures from the US to seal the border with Afghanistan and deny the Taliban sanctuary on its soil. The first reported clash between the US and Pakistani troops took place in South Waziristan in the time between 2002 and 2003. Consequently, a Tripartite Commission involving senior military and diplomatic officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US was set up in 2003 in an effort to facilitate communication and information to avoid further incidents. Pakistan did not abandon its policy of strengthening the Taliban though it had to undertake military operations against the militants being pressured by the US. It tried to handle the issue carefully by showing seriousness in controlling militancy on its soil while simultaneously being in touch with the Taliban leadership. Karzai provided a list of names and addresses of alleged Taliban leaders living in Pakistan while Pakistan vehemently denied the charges. It is no gainsaying the fact that Pakistan fished in troubled waters by supporting the US operations in Afghanistan and Af-Pak border areas on the one hand and maintaining clandestine support to the Afghan Taliban on the other. The

parliamentary and provincial elections held in Pakistan in 2002 by President Musharraf brought Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a coalition of six Islamic parties, into power in the provinces of North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. The MMA was also the third largest party in the Pakistani Parliament after the elections. The President encouraged defections from secular opposition parties until MMA became the official opposition. Besides, two largest and secular parties of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) were not allowed to contest elections on the charges of corruption or lack of educational credentials. On the contrary, religious parties were allowed to campaign openly in contrast to the secular parties which faced severe restrictions on several accounts²⁶. While on the one hand Musharraf was fighting the War on Terror, he was strengthening Islamism in Pakistan on the other. The Mullahs were allowed numerous concessions in exchange for their support to Musharraf, his constitutional changes and his government. The Islamist provincial governments being supported by the military gave a fillip to the insurgency level by sheltering militants in the border areas.

There are many reasons that have been attributed to the failure of Pakistan government to subdue terrorism on its soil. It is argued in some quarters that Pakistan does not have enough military capability to fight terrorism though it has shown seriousness in launching military operations in the border areas at the cost of lives of many civilians and military personnel. The military has to be alert in the eastern border with India while operations are to be carried out along the western border thus thinning the existing military capability.²⁷ Secondly, it is difficult for an army to fight its own people. It is imprudent to repeat the Lal Masjid like incident anywhere in Pakistan. There have been apologists in Pakistan who argue that insurgency in Afghanistan has little to do with Pakistan rather it has everything to do with the bad governance of Hamid Karzai. It is even argued that it is practically impossible for the Pakistani military to shun its religious baggage as the lower rung of the military is composed of tribal people having strong connections with the jihadi groups. Many of Pakistan's frontier paramilitary forces share not only ethnic but also blood ties with the Pashtun Taliban fighters. There are scholars who argue that the growth of transnational militants groups in Pakistan has a lot to do with its own ideology. Pakistan is an ideological state with a confused national identity tied to Islam. It has emerged on the basis of the doctrine of two nations theory. It has for long time promoted and idealised the struggle for a puritan Islamic state in Afghanistan.

On the other hand there are arguments to the contrary pointing to the laxity in Pakistan's military operations because of several reasons. Exporting militancy has been an instrument of Pakistan's foreign policy since its inception. To raise jihad in Kashmir, it has groomed militants by providing them aid and arms. Intrusion and proxy wars form the part of an accepted policy of weakening India through other means without engaging in direct confrontation. Secondly, Pakistan's policy of strengthening radical religious groups is part of its strategy to tone down Pashtun nationalism. Thirdly, the government of Benazir Bhutto found in Taliban the best means to stabilize Afghanistan and exploit the geopolitical situation arising out of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and emergence of landlocked independent Central Asian Republics. It was thought that the Taliban could provide the necessary safeguards and not merely routes to Pakistan in the establishment of relationship with the Central Asian states. Taliban were considered vital in undercutting other regional powers like Iran and India's influence in the region.

Pakistani army's tactical military operations against the militant groups in Waziristan dividing them on the basis of their utility for Pakistan's national interests point to its long-term official policy of using these groups as strategic assets. There have been peace agreements between the central government of Pakistan and tribal leaders and Taliban commanders based in North and South Waziristan, which have led to the withdrawal of government forces into their traditional fronts. From the Pakistani standpoint, the deal was meant to separate the Taliban from al Qaeda and foreign fighters located in Waziristan. On the contrary, there have been attacks against the Uzbeks and their Ahmedzai supporters in the region as they were more interested in jihad against the "hypocrites" (the Pakistani government) than against the "infidels" (the United States and its NATO allies in Afghanistan).²⁸ The Pakistani government's campaign to stop the Pakistani soil being utilized by foreign nationalists has been cast as a success story in some quarters.²⁹ But the consequence of the agreements has been the de facto Talibanisation of the region. Furthermore, though the US has put pressure on Pakistan to act against the Afghan Taliban which protects al Qaeda operatives in the Af-Pak border region, Pakistan has considered it as an asset in securing strategic depth in Afghanistan. Instead, Pakistan has led a war against the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-e-Taliban) as part of the War on Terror because this group proved to be dangerous for the Pakistani state.³⁰

According to Indian strategists and diplomats, Pakistan has overlooked the fact that terror groups form an undifferentiated syndicate. Laskar-e-Taiba, a terrorist organisation, has always received patronage from the Pakistani government as it has never posed a threat to the Pakistani state and promoted jihad in Kashmir. After the 26/11 attack on India, it has been banned in Pakistan and blacklisted by the UN. Ironically, the group is operating with a changed name, Jamat-ud. Dawa, and engaged in charitable functions with the knowledge and patronage of the Pakistani government.³¹ David Headley's account provides ample testimony to the fact that Laskar-e-Taiba and al Qaeda have strong links and the line dividing international terrorism and terrorism growing within Pakistan is non-existent.³² Headley was an American official and working for Drug Enforcement Administration. But he had strong links with the Al Qaeda and Pakistani terrorist groups like Laskar-e-Taiba. After he was arrested, he revealed the connections between ISI, Laskar-e-Taiba and Al Qaeda.

Pakistan's continued interest in Afghanistan

Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan have been multifarious. First, it was argued that Pakistan could acquire military depth against India by expanding its influence into Afghanistan. Secondly, it was believed that growing influence in Afghanistan would allow Pakistan to strengthen insurgency in Kashmir. Thirdly, one of the most important Pakistani interests in Afghanistan has been to defuse the Pashtun nationalism by forging a pan-Islamic identity. Fourthly, it has pure economic interests in reaching out to the natural resources and big market of Central Asia and controlling Afghanistan was vital to spread its influence beyond it into the Central Asian steppes. Fifth and last, emergence of independent Islamic states in resource-rich Central Asia created an opportunity for Pakistan to spread radical Islamic values not only to gain an upperhand in oil diplomacy but also to raise its international standing and gain support on international issues.

1. Military Depth against India

Some experts argue that Pakistan wanted to have military depth against India by expanding its influence into Afghanistan. They argue that military planners in Pakistan had long struggled with overcoming the deficiencies of Pakistan's geographic narrowness and the presence of important cities such as Lahore and Karachi and communication networks within short striking distance of India. The earliest appreciation of this strategic concern was made in February 1946 by General Arthur F. Smith, then Chief of General Staff in India. A pliable government in Kabul meant to give Pakistan this much required strategic depth to launch a

counter-offensive from Afghan territory.³³ It is reported that the Pakistan military had also planned to place secret nuclear weapons in Soviet era bunkers at Bagram and other military bases in Afghanistan so as to give it second strike capability.³⁴

However, General Mirza Aslam Beg argues that “the strategic depth concept was developed to gain territorial space in case of war with India has no military logic, nor does it conform to the operational policy of Pakistan, which is to defend its borders and defeat the enemy if it attempts to violate Pakistan's territory.”³⁵ Pakistan's definition of strategic depth is more comprehensive. It is related to Pakistan's spread of influence towards Afghanistan and Central Asia rather than ensuring military depth only. The influence is exercised through maintaining links with the radical Islamic groups and spreading the ideology of Islam, containing the influence of other regional powers, ensuring aid and arms by facilitating the presence and operation of great powers in the War on Terror, blocking its territory for the transfer of goods from Afghanistan and Central Asia towards India and vice versa and invigorating its policy of linking itself with Central Asia through communication networks and ensuring pro-Pakistani establishment in Afghanistan undercutting India's influence.

2. Assisting Insurgency in Kashmir

During the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan tried to create a corridor of radical Islamists and illegal arms spanning Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. It trained Islamists in Deobandi tradition and created common infrastructure for their training. It received huge amount of aid from Saudi Arabia to promote Sunni variant of Islamism. The US also in order to strengthen the insurgency against the Soviet Union pumped arms and money into Pakistan. Pakistan believed that by strengthening insurgency against the Soviet Union, it could also strengthen insurgency in Kashmir. Pakistan also internationalized the Kashmir issue being emboldened by the support it received from the West and Islamic countries for its active anti-Soviet role. During the Kargil War, many non-Pakistani terrorists were found across the Line of Control pointing to the fact that radical groups from different countries undergoing common training in Pakistan could be used in Kashmir.

Though the presence of non-Pakistani terrorists across the Line of Control during the Kargil war corroborated the belief that all the religious radical groups undergoing same kind of training in Deobandi tradition in Pakistan could be used by Pakistan to strengthen the insurgency in Kashmir, Pakistan's role and interests in Afghanistan were to a large extent

independent of its concerns in Kashmir. It is argued that though surreptitious infiltration was consistent with Pakistan's old ambitions in Kashmir, there might not have been non-Pakistani volunteers across the Line of Control in Kargil in 1999 without India's ambiguous stance on Soviet Union's interference in Afghanistan. Both India and Pakistan wanted to exercise influence in Afghanistan independent of the Kashmir issue. When Indo-Pak relations held promise of firm improvement, both sacrificed the imperative of permanent good relations with the people of Afghanistan.³⁶

According to Smruti S. Pattanaik, it is doubtful that Pakistan will stop nurturing the Taliban and work for a stable Afghanistan once its problems with India are resolved. Pakistan's Afghan policy has several dimensions and its pursuit of strategic depth vis-a-vis India is just one of these. The most significant among Pakistan's strategic objectives in Afghanistan is the recognition of the Durand Line. In addition, opening a trade route and establishing oil and gas pipelines between Pakistan and Central Asia have been important factors in influencing Islamabad to nurture the Taliban.³⁷ Moreover, Pakistan's current support to, or at least its reluctance to cut off links with, the Taliban has also arisen out of the policies of the United States and NATO countries rather than being an offshoot of India-Pakistan relations. The United States before the initiation of Operation Enduring Freedom was negotiating with the Taliban to convince the latter to surrender bin Laden. Had that objective been achieved, Afghanistan would have seen a different present. The short term agenda of the United States and Western countries is not lost on the Pakistani establishment. In fact, Pakistan has been preparing for a future role in the event of the inevitable American exit from Afghanistan.³⁸

3. Defuse the demand for Pashtunistan

Pakistan's Afghan policy has largely been shaped to defuse Pashtun nationalism. It is more a geopolitical issue than an expression of ethnic solidarity. The fact that Pashtunistan dominated Afghan foreign policy in the early 1960s despite the little support it enjoyed among the Pashtuns of Pakistan points to its geopolitical character. The demand for Pashtunistan, if conceded, would grant Afghanistan the most desired route to the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan for long has been in the look out of routes to reach out to the world market. However, Pakistan's policy is to make Afghanistan overly dependent on it for market so that its influence there does not get diluted. Pakistan has lent support to various radical religious groups to create an overarching Islamic identity displacing ethnic nationalism. Pakistan tried to create such an identity by raising jihad against Soviet Union and propping

up the Taliban during the civil war period in Afghanistan. Afghan governments tried to undercut Pashtun nationalism even before the jihad in the 1980s. For example, it was in 1973 that the then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulifikar Ali Bhutto provided sanctuary to Islamist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar with a view to undermining the established government in Kabul.³⁹

4. Afghanistan as a bridge to Central Asia

Central Asia emerged not only as a hub of natural resources but its market of 200 million people was big enough to attract regional players like Pakistan. According to Boris Rumer this 'new great game' in the heart of Asia is unfolding not so much among the old colonial powers as among their former minions, many of whom are themselves just emerging from colonial domination and seeking to define their roles in their regions and the world".⁴⁰ During the Cold War, Pakistan's objectives in Central Asia were inhibited by the fact that the whole Central Asia was part of Soviet Union and Pakistan had a pro-US tilt and participated in the US-sponsored military pacts. Moreover, it had close ties with China, which had a strained relation with Soviet Union. End of the Cold War and independence of Central Asia has removed such handicaps in the relation between Pakistan and Central Asia. Hafeez Malik in this new post-Cold War environment says that Central Asia presents Pakistan with a new security environment "...freed from the nutcracker squeeze the Soviet Union had created through an alliance between Afghanistan and India."⁴¹ However, Pakistan's current strategies in Afghanistan need to be understood within the larger context of Pakistan's interest in Central Asia before these countries' independence. Pakistan always considered Central Asia as an area of its natural expansion and aspired to form an Islamic bloc expanding towards its west.

Before the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the military regime under President Zia-ul-Haq encouraged the Afghan mujahedeen to spread out to the erstwhile Central Asian republics within the then Soviet Union and the CIA supplied arms to the mujahedeen through the ISI to conduct these forays. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 turned Pakistan into a frontline state for the US to counter Soviet Union's role there. Pakistan most ably sold the idea to the US that after consolidating its position in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union would try to access the 'warm waters' of the Arabian Sea through Pakistan.⁴² Afghanistan, a Rimland state, according to the geopoliticians like Spykman, was considered central to contain the heartland power (Soviet Union) extending its influence towards the blue waters. It implies

that the continental power was to be restrained from increasing its naval strength whereby its possibility to grow as a global power is curtailed. Such geopolitical ideas even hold good today in the era of transcontinental ballistic missiles. So, Pakistan was able to sell this idea to the US. It ensured military and economic aid to Pakistan from Washington, the relationship with which was all-time low since the military takeover in 1977. Apart from the aid received from the US, Pakistan wanted to play an independent role in Afghanistan and in Central Asia by strengthening the insurgent groups during the Soviet intervention. Afghan groups trained by Pakistani intelligence sent five thousand copies of the Koran across the border. The groups consisted of people of Northern Afghanistan-mainly Uzbeks. According to General A. A. Liaskhovskii, a participant in the Afghan war, the organisation “Islamic Union of the Northern Peoples of Afghanistan”, which was created in 1988 launched subversive activities in areas of Central Asia contiguous with Afghanistan, with the goal of liberating Soviet Muslims and creating a “free Turkestan”.⁴³ According to him the field commanders of this organisation shipped narcotics, weapons, and subversive literature to the USSR.⁴⁴

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and its eventual disintegration, Pakistan lost its strategic relevance for the US as the containment strategy was not required for a power which had lost the ability to look for a global role. The US was more interested in the Persian Gulf crisis. However, Pakistan's support for the Taliban and Afghanistan's possible role of a transit corridor to transfer natural resources from energy-rich, independent and landlocked Central Asian Republics to world markets brought America and Pakistan again into close axis. Since the Taliban's military campaign took off in 1994, the US had been giving green light to that campaign. By declaring 'neutrality' in the Afghan civil war, the US in effect withdrew its recognition of the national unity government of President Rabbani thereby implicitly supporting the Taliban.⁴⁵ The US assistant secretary of state Robin Raphael went so far as to claim in an interview with BBC that Taliban had “no Pan-Islamic agenda outside Afghanistan”.⁴⁶ The Taliban was considered instrumental for Afghanistan's stability and therefore helpful for the pipeline project that joined Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to realise the American objective of Greater Central Asia excluding Russia and Iran from a major role in Central Asia.

Apart from the pipeline politics, the newly emerged Islamic states of Central Asia along with Afghanistan were considered important by Pakistan in the formation of regional grouping along the common Islamic identity to support it on a number of international issues and raise

its international standing. Pakistan's geo-strategic location and its ties with extremist groups place Pakistan in a favourable position to shape events in Central Asia and Afghanistan to its liking. Beginning since Bhutto's democratic regime, Pakistan's push north to Afghanistan, and support for the Taliban, was largely directed at establishing landlines of communication and trade with Central Asia and bringing Islamabad closer to the Central Asian capitals. This policy was subsequently pursued by all parties in Pakistan. By achieving 'hegemony over the southern approaches' to (resource rich) Central Asia, it was argued that Islamabad could seriously enhance its international standing.⁴⁷

Pakistan's Afghan Strategy after the War on Terror

Pakistan's objectives in Central Asia and Afghanistan received a dent after excessive violation of human rights especially women's rights by the Taliban which put pressure on the American government to sever its links with the Taliban. After the 9/11 attack on the US's twin towers and the Taliban's refusal to hand over Al Qaeda operatives to Washington brought the US and the Taliban to opposite camps. However, even after Pakistan joined the US led War on Terror, it has not left its support for the Taliban. A report written by Harvard security analyst Matt Waldman claimed that the level of Pakistan's support for the Taliban has been very extensive and on a much larger scale than was previously assumed. The ISI has been accused of supporting the Afghan Taliban as part of its "official policy".⁴⁸ The report also alleged that Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari personally assured some captured Taliban leaders that they had his government's full support. A whistle blower's website, Wikileaks, put out 92,000 documents on the conduct of Afghan war from 2004 till December 2009. The documents confirm that the ISI has paid, trained, supported and sent Taliban to fight against US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ It also reveals that it was the ISI that ordered the Haqqani network to kill Indian road workers, doctors and engineers building the Zaranj-Delaram road. It is also complicit in the attack of the Indian consulates in Afghanistan.

Pakistan managed to salvage its policy on Kashmir and Central Asia even after joining War on Terror by maintaining an ambiguous stance. General Musharraf highlighted as one of the most important reasons to join the War on Terror was to 'safeguard the cause of Kashmir'.⁵⁰ He linked Pakistan's decision to join War on Terror to India's attempt to get violence in Kashmir recognised as terrorism at an international level. After Pakistan joined the War on Terror, terror incidents in India increased manifold. According to Kanti Bajpai, terrorist violence since 9/11 has been continuous and audacious. Terrorist attack on Kashmir

Assembly on October 1, 2001, attack on Indian Parliament two months later on December 13, 2001, attack on army camp in May 2002, killing of Abdul Ghani Lone, a moderate leader in the separatist All Party Hurriyat Conference and attack on Hindu pilgrims on their way to sacred Amarnath temple in Kashmir and the Akshardham temple in Gujarat bear ample testimony to the fact of increasing terrorist violence in the aftermath of 9/11 attack.⁵¹ In the War on Terror, while Pakistan is battling against terrorists in the AfPak region in its western frontier, violence in the east is characterised as a freedom struggle. Pakistan's ploy to join the War on Terror has reaped rich dividends in terms of showing it as being serious about getting rid of terrorists on its land. This made the US view terrorism in Kashmir as a secondary affair to be dealt with after the War on Terror.

Pakistan provided recurring support to the Afghan Taliban surreptitiously. The Patterson cables state that Pakistan supports at least four terror/insurgent groups: the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Hekmetyar network and Lashker-e-Teiba to strengthen its position in Afghanistan.⁵² Pakistan led a selective military operation against the radical groups who have turned against the Pakistani state. It harped on the issue of violation of its sovereignty to curtail the American operation on its territory so as to shape the operation suitable to its own needs. Despite the odds, America kept supplying a huge amount of economic and military aid to Pakistan because it is vital to Washington's grand designs in Central Asia whereas India's role for America is vital in the Asia Pacific region to contain China. The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen who came alongside Mr. Holbrooke to New Delhi in July 2010, wanted India to focus on its military-to-military cooperation with America and, of course, to work hard with the US to counter China's "assertive ... territorial claims and aggressive approach to the near-sea area recently."⁵³ At the same time Mr. Holbrooke advised India not to worry about the future of Afghanistan, where New Delhi would have a role to play.⁵⁴

Pakistan's complaint that it faced a dual threat coming from its eastern and western frontier during the War on Terror led Obama Administration to develop AfPak strategy which envisaged that territorial integrity of Pakistan had to be maintained for success in Afghanistan. According to an Indian scholar, "The US to stabilise Afghanistan, is unlikely to favour a genuine Pashtun nationalist movement given the obvious adverse consequences it would imply for Pakistan's territorial integrity."⁵⁵

Pakistan has received substantial aid from the US in order to combat terrorism on its soil as part of the War on Terror. After the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan got more “war aid” than “developmental aid” from the US. According to Akbar Zaidi, “The war aid disbursed to Pakistan’s military, the ISI, and the Afghan mujahideen - although intended to serve America’s purposes more than Pakistan’s – ironically nurtured the very entities that were to cause serious problems three decades later”.⁵⁶ The War on Terror reinforced substantial amount of American “war aid” to Pakistan. From 2002 to 2010, the US provided almost \$19 billion to Pakistan which did not include commitments such as the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan act of 2009. Over the period of 2002-2008, only 10 per cent of this money had been explicitly for development purpose and 75 per cent had been explicitly for military purposes.⁵⁷ However, Pakistan used the military aid for purposes other than combating terrorism. According to Azeem Ibrahim, “The Pakistani military did not use most of the funds for the agreed objective of fighting terror. Pakistan bought much conventional military equipment. Examples include F-16s, aircraft-mounted armaments, anti-ship and anti-missile defence systems, and an air defence radar system costing \$200 million, despite the fact that the terrorists in FATA have no air attack capability. Over half of the total funds-54.9 per cent-were spent on fighter aircraft and weapons, over a quarter-26.62 per cent on support and other aircraft, and 10 per cent on advanced weapons systems.”⁵⁸

Pakistan, in order to control the outcome of the War on Terror has at times denied its territory to NATO convoys to undertake civilian supplies. It has condemned American drone strikes in the Pakistani side of the Durand Line and complained that they violate Pakistan’s sovereignty. Moreover, it maintains links with Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network to shape the War on Terror according to its objectives.

While Pakistan desperately needed the US arms and aid to strengthen itself against India and to play a greater role in Afghanistan, it has had to contain the regional ambitions of Iran, Russia and India and extra-regional ambitions of the US to secure its influence in Afghanistan and through it in Central Asia.

Countering Iranian role in Afghanistan

Pakistan's drive for a transport corridor for the Central Asian resources to the world market was considered important to assign it an important geopolitical role. Pakistan was involved with the US to find an alternative to Russia's existing northern routes to supply natural

resources to world markets and undercut Iran's influence to reach out to the Central Asian energy resources. According to Adam Tarock, "The roots of animosity between Iran and the Taliban's Afghanistan go much deeper than the killings of Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan and the reported massacre of Afghan Shiites by the Taliban. ...at the heart of the conflict is the question of whether Iran or Afghanistan should be the route for the export of oil and gas from landlocked to world markets, as well as Pakistan's plan to use Afghanistan as a corridor to Central Asia."⁵⁹ During the Afghan civil war, in order to resuscitate the Rabbani-Hekmatyar alliance, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Alaaddin Boroujerdi, visited Pakistan in August 1996, with a proposal for a regional conference to be held in Teheran to discuss all aspects of the Afghan crisis. Under the proposal, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and China were to be invited to the conference. Boroujerdi's statement to the press after the discussions with Pakistani officials indicated that Pakistan showed no interest in the regional initiative. He said, 'Iran will continue to work for the improvement of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan'.⁶⁰ This statement implies Pakistan did not recognise the Rabbani government as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and wished to go it alone in Afghanistan continuing its support for the Taliban. After 9/11, while Iran was insistent on regional cooperation to seek out solutions to Afghan problem and installation of a government representing various Afghan groups, Pakistan only gave lip-service to regional cooperation and wanted a Taliban-led Afghan government. Huntington's clash of civilisation thesis while postulated convergence of cultures and interests within the same civilisation, geopolitical interests overshadowed their cultural sameness in the Central Asian region and brought intra-civilisational conflict into focus.⁶¹

Curtailling Indian influence in Afghanistan

Pakistan does not want Indian influence in Afghanistan. It has therefore scuttled the Indian effort at the reconstruction activities by attacking its embassy in Kabul and consulates in various places like Jalalabad. Afghanistan's membership in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has provided India with the opportunity to reach out to Central Asia. But such prospects have been doomed by Pakistan as it was reluctant to allow its territory being used as a conduit for Indo-Afghan or Indo-Central Asian trade. Pakistan opposed Afghanistan's membership in SAARC and has always taken advantage of its geo-strategic position in blocking the transfer of goods to its south-east. To reduce Afghanistan's dependence on a single entry point into the world through the port of Karachi and having been denied trade and transit rights to Afghanistan through Pakistan, India was involved in

building a 218 km Zaranj-Delaram road link with Iran, which will give Afghanistan access to sea-ports like Chabahar and facilitate its trade with India and the Gulf countries. India's interest lies in the North-South corridor linking India with Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia.⁶² Pakistan tried to sabotage Indian strategy to reach out to Central Asia. Shanthie Mariet D'souza notes that "The killing of Kasula Suryanarayana, an Indian telecommunications engineer in the Zabul Province in April 2006, the abduction and subsequent killing of Maniappan Kutty, a driver working with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) project of building the Zaranj-Delaram highway in 2005 by the Taliban are examples of Pakistan's hidden hand in thwarting India's objective of making Afghanistan a land bridge connecting South Asia with Central Asia."⁶³

Growing differences between Pakistan and the US

The US has found Pakistan necessary in its fight against terror groups and for its Greater Central Asian project. The development of Kandahar road connecting the new Pakistan port of Gwadar and Afghanistan and, beyond that, all Central Asia, Europe, and much West Asia is definitely in the interest of Pakistan and the US ⁶⁴. Pakistan receives military and economic aid for its substantial support for the War on Terror. However, the US and Pakistan have divergences of interests in Afghanistan. The US developed relationship with those specific religious extremist groups which became vital for realisation of its geopolitical interests, for example, the US lent support to the Taliban throughout the 1990s. On the other hand Pakistan has political interests in promoting jihad in Kashmir, promoting Islamic links and radical Islamic groups for its influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia and relies on fostering illegal trade for funding. Therefore, Pakistanis were willing to tolerate the influx of foreign fighters, even at the risk of attracting strict action from the Americans and others. Al Qaeda's presence in its territory implicitly offered the Pakistanis the leeway to subsume the ethnic issue of Pashtunistan under the banner of Islamic jihad. It also raised the prospect of spreading jihad into the Central Asian states and that of enhancing the capability of Kashmiri insurgents. The ISI believed that it could effectively manage this new actor on the Afghan scene and maintain its dominant influence over the Taliban.

Osama bin Laden's presence and his eventual death in an American attack in Pakistan confirmed this. Later, the detention of the US intelligence operative and former army soldier, Raymond Davis has brought the differences in strategic perception between the countries to limelight.⁶⁵ The broad expanse of US-Pakistan engagement shows that both countries hold a

fundamentally different hierarchy of goals that each seeks to secure through engagement. It is argued that until very recently, Washington has not tried to persuade Islamabad to reorder its goals or at least to be more engaged in helping Washington achieve its goals in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the wider region in exchange for U.S. financial assistance. Yet, until U.S. and Pakistani goals are brought into greater alignment and unless meaningful progress is made in securing critical U.S. interests, Washington may grow increasingly disinclined to lavish Islamabad with financial inducements and may even conclude that Pakistan is an unsuitable partner for some or all forms of U.S. allurements.⁶⁶

Pakistan is well aware of its abandonment by America just after the Cold War when its lost strategic relevance for the latter. It knows that once the US gets a geo-strategically suitable partner for its Central Asian strategy, it will be shunned by the US. After having decapitated Kazakhstan's military potentials, the US began to see Uzbekistan as the only candidate for regional anchor which was likely to outpace Pakistan as the key strategic partner for the US. From the American point of view, it followed a consistent pro-US policy, played up anti-Russian rhetoric, supported NATO's enlargement and opposed Russian troop's presence.⁶⁷ However, Andijan massacre, where the leadership in Uzbekistan opened fire against the protesters of democracy, compelled the US to follow a cautious policy in Central Asia and retrieved Pakistan's importance for the American Central Asian strategy. Therefore, Pakistan thinks it cannot put all the eggs in one basket and rely on the US for its own Central Asian strategy.

While the US is trying to defend its Central Asian strategy through its plan of reconciliation with the Taliban in order to include them in the Afghanistan's governance structure, Pakistan has been trying to use its age-old linkages with the Taliban to induct its preferred men to the Afghan ruling structure. Therefore, though there are convergences between the interests of Washington and those of Islamabad in the Greater Central Asian strategy of America in which Pakistan becomes the conduit for transfer of Central Asian energy resources to the world market, there are significant divergences of interests too.

It is evident that the use of the concept of strategic depth in Afghanistan does not signify military depth against India rather it is related to expansion of Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and beyond it into the Central Asian steppes. Secondly, strategic depth may be an Indo-centric term but the Pakistani role confirms that the use of the concept is beyond

India pointing to the Pakistani strive for influence in Central Asia outbidding other regional powers like Iran and Russia and its politics of both taking military and financial aid from the US on the one hand and hindering its Central Asian strategies on the other. It is argued that confronted for a decade by Afghan/Soviet challenge, Pakistan managed to emerge from this period of confrontation stronger than before. And the disintegration of Soviet Union has led the policy planners to think that Central Asia provided not only strategic depth but an ultimate direction of Pakistan's chief foreign policy aspirations.⁶⁸

Factors facilitating Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Pakistan has relied on common cultural links, radical Islamic groups, multilateral bodies and favourable geo-strategic location to expand its influence through Afghanistan to Central Asia.

Firstly, Pakistan has overemphasised its cultural links with the Central Asian region in its bid to reach out to the region while overlooking the South Asian continental ethos. Instead of adopting peaceful Sufi tradition, it promoted radical teachings in madrasas in the Saudi Arabic deobandi tradition. This implies the role of culture as subservient to the geopolitical necessities. A Pakistani scholar opined in this context, "Pakistan's political existence and emergence on the world map would not have materialised but for the primordial relationship that glues us together. The roots of our faith, undoubtedly, lie in the Arabian soil but our cultural linkages are with Central Asian civilisation, which in itself is an amalgam of diverse influence and cross-cultural fertilisation."⁶⁹

Secondly, Pakistan developed links with radical Islamic groups in Central Asia to foster its interests. Many radical religious groups were trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan to destabilise Central Asian States. In the Tajik civil war, Pakistan tried to strengthen the opposition groups. Pakistan supplied assistance to 60,000-80,000 Tajik refugees stranded in northern Afghanistan. The opposition leader Himatzadeh visited Pakistan in 1993. His associates were given access to the Foreign Office of Pakistan and the ex-Director General of the ISI, General Hameed Gul issued a statement in favour of the Tajik opposition. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, Pakistan has provided consistent support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). It reportedly gave refuge to IMU leader Yuldeshev in 1990s. The IMU not only operated in Uzbekistan, it had a larger operation base in Central Asia and Pakistan wished to use the IMU as leverage with Central Asia.⁷⁰ However, the War on Terror seems to have destroyed the bases and cadres of IMU putting Pakistan in a disadvantaged position.

Nevertheless, Pakistan preserves its links with various radical Islamic groups to foster its interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. It has strong connections with the Afghan Taliban and hopes to play an important role in future reconciliation strategy to include the Taliban into Afghan political system.

Thirdly, apart from using Islamic opposition and extremist groups to gain influence in Central Asia, it has taken help of various multilateral bodies like Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to realise the same. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and the Central Asian states are the members of the ECO. The competing interests of Iran and Pakistan in Afghanistan and in Central Asia limit the role of ECO to develop closer economic cooperation leave alone creation of Free Trade Area. Besides, Pakistan sponsored the membership of the Central Asian states in the OIC in order to bring them into the Ummah. In the similar vein, Pakistan showed keen interest to be part of SCO, though so far it has to be satisfied with an observer status.⁷¹

Fourthly and finally, Pakistan's favourable geo-strategic situation in relation to Afghanistan and Central Asia has offered it immense opportunities to expand its influence there. Pervez Musharraf said “Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia...We offer the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and inter-regionally”.⁷² The Central Asian states cannot ignore Pakistan's geo-strategic location, though it is separated from Central Asia by the Afghan territory unlike Iran which has contiguous border with Central Asia. For Turkmenistan and southern Uzbekistan, the shortest route to the sea lies through Iran whereas for all other states the shortest route lies through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Karachi is the nearest port city for Central Asia and by air Islamabad is closer to Tashkent than it is to Karachi. Building on this geo-strategic location Pakistan and China are engaged in the development of Gwadar port and the US is engaged in building the Kandahar route to join Afghanistan and the Central Asia with the Pakistani port.

The US in a bid to end the war in Afghanistan, which has become burdensome in terms of declining public support and casualties of the US military personnel has relied on Pakistan to help in the process of negotiation. Pakistan is considered as the “gatekeepers” to the Taliban and it is expected to play a crucial role in delivering the Taliban to the table, either

through coercion or persuasion. But as the history of relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban suggests Pakistan has every chance of muscling in to impose its own agenda in Afghanistan. Realising the importance of Pakistan, Hamid Karzai described India as a close friend while Pakistan as a twin brother of Afghanistan. To play a military role, the Pakistan army has offered military equipments and expressed its interest to train the Afghan army. However, Karzai while accepted the offer of the equipments, the decision on the proposal of training the Afghan army was deferred.

According to Shaun Gregory, the US has a strong reason not to stop aid to Pakistan and take effective action against it. He says that the United States fears Pakistan's coercive options: that it might enhance its support for terrorism and insurgency still further and become a greater challenge to the US and the west, and that Pakistan might even be incentivised to transfer nuclear weapons know-how to terrorist or insurgent groups.⁷³ In fact, in the beginning of 2011, the White House had increased the amount of aid to Pakistan though later the US planned to cut aid to Pakistan after differences arose between the two countries after bin Laden was found and killed in Pakistan.

Divergent geopolitical interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia have contributed to the strength of the Taliban which weakened the War on Terror and increased the US's reliance on Pakistan. For example, Iran and China being deeply suspicious of American motives in the Central Asian region are reported to have provided military support to the Afghan Taliban. There have been reports of Iran providing military hardware to the extremist Sunni Afghan Taliban and Chinese-made military equipment has reportedly also been found on Taliban fighters.

Given the present circumstances, Pakistan's age-old strategy is paying off Pakistan well due to its influence over radical Islamist groups. For example, the “frontline” Central Asian states, Russia and Iran are under compulsion to seek out Pakistan not so much as the “epicentre of terrorism” but as an interlocutor in seeking a practical solution the issues affecting their national security.⁷⁴ At the regional conference hosted by Turkey on January 26, 2010, India was pointedly excluded at Islamabad's instance. Afghanistan, Russia, China, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), the US and Britain were the participants of the regional conference.⁷⁵ So far Pakistan has only paid lip-service to regional cooperation in working out Afghanistan's problems whereas countries like Iran and India

were insisting on it. Of late, due to the geo-strategic positioning of Pakistan and its continued influence over radical groups, Pakistan's importance has grown in the eyes of both regional and extra-regional powers. An example is the quadripartite summit of Russia, Pakistan and Tajikistan hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev at the Black Sea resort, Sochi where Moscow decisively moved to de-hyphenate its relationship with Islamabad and New Delhi. Sochi was a turning point in that Mr. Medvedev's bilateral meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit was marked by uncharacteristic warmth and both the leaders decided to have "very regular and frequent contacts" and engage in "good political dialogue" unlike in the past.⁷⁶ Iran and Pakistan have come together to strengthen their role in the region vis-a-vis outside powers. Pakistan's interest in the Iran's pipeline project has strengthened their bilateral relationship. According to Wikileaks documents, at a time when nuclear deal was being negotiated, the US had tried to pressurise India over its ties with Iran and even objected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to Delhi, saying it would give "platform for an enemy of the US".⁷⁷

Limitations to Pakistan's strategies and ambitions

Though Pakistan has used the Taliban, Tajik opposition group and the IMU for its objectives in Central Asia and in Afghanistan, it has suffered from a number of limitations to expand its influence. The Taliban has certain interests independent of Pakistan. It had committed excessive human rights violation in Afghanistan during its rule in Afghanistan though Pakistan directed it to maintain caution. It did not accept the Durand Line like all the previous regimes which runs against Pakistan's interest. The Taliban have destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha statue contrary to the Pakistan's directive.⁷⁸ Many jihadi groups have run against the Pakistani state after the latter joined the War on Terror. For example, the Pakistan government's action against the Pakistani Taliban has put the policy of using the Afghan Taliban as strategic asset in jeopardy given the nexus between both the Taliban groups. Similarly, Pakistan's support for the opposition and Islamic radical groups in Central Asia has strengthened the resolve of the rulers not to allow their territory fall under the grand designs of the Islamic radicals.

Pakistan as a state actor could not afford to neglect the world public opinion and the domestic democratic forces increasingly turning against it. It has been a weak state both militarily and economically and has relied on non-state actors like radical Islamic groups for its geopolitical interests. Both for its strategy in Central Asia and Kashmir, it has used Afghan Taliban and

various mujahideen groups based in Punjab respectively. But the problem for Pakistan is that it is a state actor with a constitution. It cannot avoid international and national scrutiny of its actions. In fact, to avoid international isolation on a number of issues and get both economic and military aid from the US, Pakistan joined the War on Terror. To join the War on Terror, it had to make a volt-face on its long term policy of using jihadi groups for its national interests, which angered many groups who took to violence against the Pakistani state. However, Pakistan has tried to maintain its age-old strategy in Central Asia and in Kashmir by clandestinely supporting the Afghan Taliban in the case of the former and publicising the latter as a case of freedom struggle.

Pakistan's role in multilateral bodies to expand its influence in Central Asia has been hampered by the competing roles between their members. For example, competing interests of Pakistan with Iran in Afghanistan has held the ECO hostage to economic integration. In the SCO, the interests of great powers like China and Russia overshadow Pakistan's interests and it has to be satisfied with an observer's status in the body. Afghanistan has been the centre of conflict between the Shiite and Sunni groups sponsored by Iran and Pakistan respectively within the larger framework of Islamic civilisation. Furthermore, there are independent scholars who argue that India has been giving clandestine support to Balochistan secessionist forces and running many consulates in Afghanistan to carry on secret intelligence activity hindering Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has the fear that the US might also develop an alternative strategy to fight terrorism in Afghanistan relying on India. India has influence over the Northern Alliance warlords and the warlords can play a useful role in stabilising Afghanistan. At times, the US has also asked for an increased role for India in Afghanistan to contain Pakistan's double game.

Growing anti-Americanism in Pakistan also compels it to play an ambiguous role in Afghanistan and pulls Pakistan in different the directions. For example, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi implicitly justified the Times Square bombing as retaliation against the drone strikes of America to flush out terrorists from the Pakistani border areas.⁷⁹ Besides, anti-Americanism in Pakistan plays squarely into the hands of Islamist militants. The surveys of public opinion in Pakistan conducted by Gallup Pakistan and by the Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Project point to the overwhelming anti-Americanism prevailing there. In both the surveys American policy in Afghanistan receives very little

support.⁸⁰ More importantly, both the surveys suggest that there is a strong public desire for better relations with India even among those sections which consider their eastern neighbour as a major threat.⁸¹

One of the factors that may seriously affect Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan is the danger of losing control over radical religious groups. While Pakistan has considered links with radical religious groups valuable for its strategic objectives, it has failed to gain full control over them. The recent case of attack on Malala Yousafzai points to that. Malala is a teenage Pakistani girl who sought education for girls in Pakistan. She had to bear the wrath of the Pakistani Taliban which attacked her. Pakistani government, in contrast, has argued that it was a western conspiracy to pressure Pakistan into conducting a military operation in Northern Waziristan.⁸² The continuing power game between the government and military in Pakistan keeps the state weak in relation to radical religious groups. Pakistani military and intelligence agency, ISI maintain strong links with various radical groups and play a major role in formulation of Pakistan's foreign policy. This has led to growing radicalisation of Pakistani society and an unstable state.

To sum up, immediately after its emergence, Pakistan's role and interests in Afghanistan were shaped by its interests to spread its influence towards its north and west and offset its power imbalance with India in the east. However, the historical problem of dispute over Durand Line potentially hindered its objective. The demand for Pashtunistan was against Pakistan's interest as it wanted Afghanistan to be dependent on it for trade and transportation of resources. Pan-Islamic ideas became helpful for Pakistan in defusing territorial nationalism. Therefore, Pakistan raised the insurgency against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. But to see that the Peshawar-based parties do not get united on the issue of Pashtunistan, it distributed arms and aid to them separately. The fact that not all the Peshawar-based parties were religious and anti-communist in the same way points to Pakistan's use of them for its geopolitical interests. During the Afghan civil war, it provided arms and aid to the Taliban to forge an overarching Islamic identity. The Taliban consisted of many members drawn from the Central Asian states rather than representing the Pashtun Afghans in the refugee camps in Pakistan. Their structure was fabricated to suit Pakistan's geopolitical interests. Nevertheless, the Taliban had its own bases of support and autonomy.

Pakistan consistently pursued a policy of influencing situations in Central Asia since the time of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. However, in the aftermath of Soviet Union's disintegration, Pakistan has tried to enable itself to play a bigger role in Central Asia and considered the Taliban as the key to it. Pakistan adopted a multi-pronged strategy to secure influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia. It tried to fend off not only India's but also Iran's, Russia's and the US's strategies there. Pakistan has various objectives in Afghanistan and Central Asia. First, it wants to weaken the demand for Pashtunistan among the Pashtuns by subsuming the ethnic appeal under the umbrella of radical Islam. Secondly, it tries to create an Islamic bloc spanning Afghanistan and Central Asia to discuss and garner support on a number of international issues and to increase its international standing. Thirdly, Pakistan has interests in Central Asian energy resources as it is a country endowed with less indigenous energy resources. Fourthly, it has also interests in the growing market in Central Asia looking for investment and trade. Pakistan's strategy in Central Asia, if successfully pursued, will definitely put India in a disadvantaged position as the game played there is a zero-sum game wherein every gain for Pakistan is a loss for India. However, Pakistan's role in Central Asia cannot be reduced to an anti-Indian agenda.

Although Pakistan, being a state actor, has been hard-pressed to fight terror in Afghanistan contrary to its strategic objectives, it tries to shape the Afghan war in its favour by keeping close contacts with the Afghan Taliban, not allowing its territory to be used by the American military personnel for ground operations, stopping the NATO convoys to pass through its territory in the event of any arial strike on its territory and by secretly helping the Taliban to attack NATO forces. Differing geopolitical interests of regional powers in Afghanistan has also ensured the strength of the Taliban. For example, on different occasions, Iran and China to thwart US's Central Asian strategies have been reported to have lent support to the Taliban hindering a common front against terrorism.

The US is dependent on Pakistan for supplies of military and non-military goods to the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan whereas Pakistan is dependent on the US for aid. Pakistan provides shortest routes for these supplies. The US fears Pakistan's ability to multiply its support for the radical groups and disrupt the supplies. The American containment strategy towards Iran further pushes the US towards Pakistan. The US considers Pakistan's links with different radical groups vital to end the war through reconciliation. By bringing its preferred men into the Afghan government, the US hopes that it can revive the

relationship with the Taliban that it had once during the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan. However, divergences of interests between those of the US and of Pakistan would make reconciliation a difficult affair. Given long term nexus between the ISI and the Taliban, continuing insurgency by the Taliban in Afghanistan and their refusal to the start of reconciliation process without the withdrawal of foreign forces seem to have been propped up by Pakistan. The US is also looking for opportunity to talk to the Taliban independent of Pakistan. Instead of allying itself with the US completely, Pakistan has also been in the look out of regional allies to promote its interests in Central Asia. It has tried to improve relationship with Iran and Russia and has developed friendship with Turkey to support its Central Asian strategies. However, Pakistan runs the risk of losing control over radical religious groups. Growing anti-Americanism, radicalisation of Pakistani society and civil-military power game, hinder Pakistan's policy and objectives in Afghanistan.

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CHAPTER V

Iran and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: Ambition for a Regional Role

Iran's attitude and policies towards Afghanistan under the Shah till the Islamic Revolution in 1979 were influenced by his pro-US foreign policy and Iran being part of the anti-communist western alliance under Baghdad pact, later renamed Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) which included Pakistan and Turkey. During this period, Shah maintained close political and security relationship with Pakistan and was generally supportive of US objectives in Afghanistan.

However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 changed the geopolitics in the region dramatically as Iran tried to assume an independent role for itself in the region. Iran became a challenger to the prevailing *status quo* in the Persian Gulf which the US along with its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia tried to maintain in the region.¹ The relationship between the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan grew further after the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan. The Soviet move was cast as a threat to security of the Persian Gulf. Besides, the three states promoted Sunni variant of Islam in Afghanistan which posed a threat to Iran, which is Shia dominated.

Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran, for trade purposes, wanted to connect Afghanistan to its port to transfer its own goods to Afghanistan and Afghan goods to its own market. Iran also had an interest in the waters of the River Helmand that flows in the southwest of Afghanistan, draining in the border region in Siestan basin. However, after the Revolution, though these interests remained, Iran wanted to play a major role in Afghanistan by increasing its influence among its co-ethnics, Shias. Iran's economic, military and logistic support to the Shia community in Afghanistan and its aspiration to maintain a sphere of influence there has been driven by many considerations. First, Iran's historic link with Herat made it an area of Iranian influence naturally. Secondly, there was revolutionary zeal in Iran to export its Islamic ideology after the Islamic revolution. Thirdly, growing influence of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and their role in promoting Sunni sect of Islam in Afghanistan also concerned Iran. Furthermore, there was a need to manage the problem of the Afghan refugees in Iran by strengthening the Shia community to find for them a political space in Afghanistan.

Iran and the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

When the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power in a military coup, Iran perceived it to be severe threat. In 1979 when the USSR intervened in Afghanistan, the same year also witnessed Islamic revolution in Iran. The revolution had an anti-US content. Emadi contends that "the revival of the Islamic movement was fundamentally a response to the political domination of Iran by the US and the tyranny of the US-backed political system".² In the same year, US hostage crisis in Tehran ended the strategic cooperation between the US and Iran and turned them into bitter enemies.

Though Iran perceived a threat to its Islamic and revolutionary character with the invasion of an Islamic state by atheists, it did not want to alienate Soviet Union in its calculations for future help in the event of international isolation and sanctions imposed by the US. Ayatollah Khomeini in a conversation asked the Soviet Ambassador to Iran, Vladimir Vinogradov: "these days the US would request the United Nations Security Council to impose economic sanctions against Iran over the question of the US diplomats held hostages in Tehran. Would the Soviet Union support Iran on that issue?"³ Therefore, Iran's response to the Soviet invasion was measured. It could neither ally with the US nor could completely ignore the Soviet Union.

It was expected that being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Soviet Union could veto any resolutions authorizing sanctions. Apart from the help that Iran was expecting from the Soviet Union, there were other distracting factors that compelled Iran to play a measured role in Afghanistan. For example, Iranian Kurds were seeking autonomy from the central government and there were border skirmishes taking place between Iran and Iraq along their shared border which eventually turned out to be a war between the two states. Iran faced a conundrum as to how the role of Islam and the national interests could be suitably combined. Iran is a Persian state in the Arab dominated region and Shia dominated state in the Sunni dominated region. After the fall of Shah, it lost American support and arms and Saudi Arabia emerged as the key American ally in the region. Therefore, Iran relied on providing all kinds of support to Shiites of the neighbouring countries to increase its influence in the region. Iran's economic, military and logistic support to the Afghan Shiites included sending Iranian nationals to Afghanistan not only to participate in the armed struggle against the Soviet occupation forces but also to propagate Khomeini's politics and ideology.⁴ However, Iran while covertly supported various resistance groups, refrained from being a

“frontline” state and participating in the “Washington-Islamabad-Riyadh” axis which openly supported Pakistani-based resistance against the Soviet occupation.

Later, realizing the existence of factions within the Shiite community, Iran shifted its assistance to only the Shiite groups following the ideology of Islamic revolution. The Shiite movement was divided into three ideological groups: Islamist, Hazara nationalist and Socialist. The third group was pro-Soviet. Tehran confined its assistance to Shiite parties close to Iran and the revolutionary establishment from 1982 onward. Thus, the Sazman-i Nasr (Organization of the Victory) that had been founded among young Shiite Afghans in 1978 was now patronized by the Iranian government. Later, the Sepah-i Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) were founded according to the Iranian model and became Iran’s second protégé in Afghanistan.⁵

It is pertinent that Iran’s support for the Shiite resistance groups was not only due to the presence of an atheist great power near its border, it was also used to check the growing influence of Pushtuns supported by the Washington-Islamabad-Riyadh axis. But the widening division within Shiite groups, the enmity with the US, the war with Iraq and Kurdish subnationalism compelled Iran to maintain a low profile in Afghanistan till 1988. However, its low profile and ambiguous foreign policy helped it in several ways. For example, Iran could play its “Afghan card” as an effective means to gain concessions from Moscow, to limit the Soviet supply of arms to Iraq during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, to counter the looming US threat, and to tame the activities of the pro-Moscow Tudeh party as Khomeinists consolidated power in Iran. Secondly, the Soviet occupying forces did not dominate the Hazarjat region in Central Afghanistan, which was controlled by pro-Iranian groups. Thirdly, Iran’s ambiguous role also enabled Iran to maintain friendly relationship with the Soviet Union during and after its withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁶

The flipside of Iran’s low profile was the defeat of the purpose of Iranian Islamic revolution, which ordained Iran to play a role of an independent regional power. To realize its independent status, Iran abandoned the CENTO just after the Islamic revolution and joined Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It also cancelled many weapon orders from the West. The assumption of revolutionary leaders was that non-alignment would meet the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic as a third world state, whereas the alliance with either the East or the West would not fit the Iranian religious, cultural or historical context.⁷

The presence of a great power near its border and growing estrangement with another great power put Iran in a complicated situation. Iran had to be content with covert operations, ambiguous stance and low profile in Afghanistan. A senior Iranian diplomat in an interview with Fred Halliday said that Iran had made a big mistake by not working with the communist regime, one of the three 'big mistakes' of the Islamic Republic (the other two being the detention of the American hostages in 1979-81, and the rejection of Iraqi peace offers in 1982). Probably, he meant to say that joining with the communist regime would not have led to the present strength of Pashtun groups and emergence of Taliban.⁸

Iran's foreign policy and its role in Afghanistan till the Soviet withdrawal, if carefully analysed, is reflective of its claim to play an independent role in the region after the Islamic Revolution. Shah was a regional player but with US support. After the Revolution, Iran had to play this role without US support. Iran's role to shape Afghani situation according to its national interests, however modest, can be understood as an interplay between these claims and its capabilities to unite various Shiite groups to curb the growing role of the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Iran's approach to Afghanistan after the Soviet Withdrawal

In the Geneva conference, which provided breakthrough for negotiations for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, both the US and USSR pledged not to interfere in Afghanistan. The doctrine of "non-interference" and "benign neglect" led to an unprecedented power vacuum allowing various regional players such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to play an important role in the domestic issues of Afghanistan.⁹

The disengagement of the both the superpowers from Afghanistan provided ample leverage to Iran to fulfill its aspiration as a powerful regional power, which was Iran's objective after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The ambiguous policy of not antagonizing Soviet Union, while still supporting resistance groups paid rich dividends in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal. The two states formed "strategic alliance", which enabled Iran to counter US policy of sanctions and international alienation towards it. The post-Cold War also witnessed the end of eight-year long Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). Although Iran did not win the war, the fact that it successfully withstood Iraq's overwhelming military power supported by the US was considered a remarkable achievement in the Iran's foreign policy circles and enhanced its

confidence to play a major role in regional politics. Furthermore, with the disintegration of the USSR, there emerged six newly independent resource-rich states in the Central Asia and Caucasus as neighbours of Iran. These states' geographical proximity with some of the major powers like Russia, China and Turkey and important role played by states like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan, which are geographically contiguous with some of the Central Asian states, compelled Iran to pursue a proactive politics in the region.

With the lessened role of the US in Afghanistan, Iran wished to see Tehran-friendly government in Kabul to reduce the influence of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan. Iran pursued a pragmatic foreign policy to diversify its aid to various Persian and Dari speaking non-Pashtun groups. Previously during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, due to revolutionary zeal, it was only providing both military and economic assistance to Shiite groups. But Shiite population only being 20 per cent of the whole population, increased factionalism within Shiite groups and the end of the ambiguous policy of not antagonizing the USSR compelled Iran to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy to see a friendly government in Kabul. Moreover, after Ayatollah Montazeri, so far in charge of formulating strategies regarding the Afghan resistance, was ruled out as Khomeini's successor, the foreign ministry and the later president Rafsanjani played a decisive role in adjusting its future policy towards Afghanistan.¹⁰ Greater pragmatism under Rafsanjani led to diversification of Iranian support to the Afghan partners and improved relationship with the Soviet Union.

Tehran pursued two-pronged policy in the Afghanistan. First, it encouraged various Shiite groups to form the Hezb-e Wahdat in 1990. Secondly, it signed an important agreement with Tajikistan and Afghanistan's Jamait-e Islami, a large organisation under the leadership of Berhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massod. Later, Masood along with Rashid Dostam, an Uzbek warlord, formed a loose alliance with the Hezb-e Wahdat and smaller Shiite groups. Massod toppled the Najibollah government in a preemptive strike before the UN played a role in establishing new Afghan government. This coup was seen by both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as an Iranian move to establish pro-Iran government. They sought the help of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar for destabilisation of the incumbent government.¹¹

Masood received enormous economic support from both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and distanced himself from Iran and complained about the Iranian intervention in Afghanistan. Iran's aspiration to play a role of major regional power was marred by the lack of required

resources drained during the Iran-Iraq war and erratic policies by the Afghan government. Eventually, the Afghan government primarily consisting of Persian and Dari speaking groups were unwilling to share power with either Pashtuns or Shiite groups, which led to long-drawn civil war in Afghanistan. During the battle for Kabul from 1992 to 1996, every major group had both allied with and fought against every other major group at one time or another. In many parts of Afghanistan, warlords ruled. In the midst of Persian and Dari speaking groups resisting to share power with both the Pashtun and Shiite groups, Iran and Pakistan were involved in a proxy war to see government friendly to them in Afghanistan.¹²

The Emergence of Taliban and Iran

Viewed from perspectives on geopolitics, Iran is better positioned than Pakistan vis-à-vis Central Asian states as the former does not necessarily need Afghanistan as a corridor to connect itself to the Central Asian energy resources. It borders on Turkmenistan and is a direct neighbour of the Central Asian states whereas Pakistan is separated from the Central Asian region by Afghanistan. However, Tehran pursued the strategy of establishing a non-Pashtun corridor in northern Afghanistan connecting Iran with Central Asia after the fall of Najibullah's regime in 1992. Therefore, Iran and Pakistan vied for influence in Afghanistan.¹³

Though both the US and Russia obligated themselves not to interfere in Afghanistan under the international negotiations, they continued to evolve new strategies to control the main routes for the transfer of energy resources from the Central Asian region to the world market. The US developed "Greater Central Asia" strategy to link the Central Asian oil and gas fields with Pakistan by pipelines running through Afghanistan. The strategy is to provide South Asian markets to the Central Asian energy resources.

In the civil war period, "the more the mujahidins leaned towards Iran, the more Islamabad and Washington became suspicious of Tehran's policy and therefore persisted in assisting the Taliban".¹⁴ The US influenced Afghan situation indirectly working through Pakistan. To contain Iran, the shortest and most secure routes from the former USSR's energy resources to the Gulf Sea passing through it had been kept under sanctions by the US since the American Embassy takeover in Iran.¹⁵ Now, the US developed the strategy of providing an alternative route for transfer of Central Asian resources to the South Asian markets.

While Iran's policy of uniting the various Persian and Dari speaking groups during the civil war failed, Pakistan saw in it an opportunity to create a belligerent group outside Afghan soil to take over Afghan government. Before Iran could realize and be aware of the difficulty in ending the civil war, Pakistan seized the opportunity in its favour. The growth of Taliban outside Afghan soil could ensure enormous aid from Saudi Arabia and US. The US also did not have to break the treaty obligation of not interfering in Afghan domestic affairs. Milani contends that “neither the Afghan government nor Iran appear to have been fully aware of the substantial aid being covertly given to the Taliban”.¹⁶

Iran continued with its failed policies of supporting Shiite groups, while the Taliban was winning one area after another in Afghanistan. To protect its historical area of influence, Herat, Iran provided token support to Ismail Khan who was defeated by Taliban and Herat came under Taliban rule. In summer 1996, when Taliban troops approached Kabul, Iranian mediators played a significant role in building a new interim government. However, this initiative proved abortive because strong military groups like Dostum's Uzbeks and the Shiites of the Hazarajat were not part of this government, which led to the final conquest of Kabul by the Taliban in September 1996. In November 1996, Afghan president Rabbani made a visit to Iran and by that time he had lost Kabul to Taliban but was still recognised by many governments as the *de jure* ruler.¹⁷ There he had talks with many Iranian officials and the president Hashemi Rafsanjani on the issue of bringing peace in Afghanistan.

Despite all the Iranian attempts to unify non-Pushtuns and strengthen anti-Taliban forces, the objective of providing credible challenge to Taliban remained far from being achieved. Even the Hizb-i Wahdat split up into two wings such as the faction behind Karim Khalili on the one hand, and the Akbari group on the other. This significant split resembled more a collapse of the Hizb-i Wahdat and reflected the old division into Sepah and Nasr in the 1980s. The animosity between Iran and Taliban reached its zenith in Summer 1998 when Taliban attacked and conquered the northern town of Mazar-i Sharif. Taliban killed eight Iranian diplomats and journalists accusing them of supplying arms to the opposition. This issue led to the movement of Iranian troops along the western border of Afghanistan and created a situation of war. But pragmatism prevailed over Iranian foreign policy makers and they refrained from fighting the Taliban. A war against Afghanistan was considered involving incalculable risk and even air strikes against Taliban positions were regarded as ineffective and useless among Iranian generals and military strategists.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that apart from Iran's immediate concerns over spread of drugs by the militants to procure arms, the hostility between Iran and the Taliban had led to generation of refugees with the ethnic onslaughts on Shiite community by the Taliban. According to a Middle East report, the conflict between Iran and the Taliban led to over 2 million Afghan refugees entering into Iranian territory and because of its concerns about intelligence operatives using refugee assistance as a cover, Iran did not seek assistance for the Afghans from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). It also faced a daily low-level conflict on its Afghan frontier because of attempts to export drugs into Iran¹⁹

Iran's means and opportunities to shape situations in Afghanistan to give effect to its national interests were always limited. Pakistan played a more dominant role in Afghanistan than Iran. Iran wanted to combine its ideological influence with its national interests by supporting Shiite groups both financially and through providing arms. It created distrust on the Afghan side, where some actors and politicians believed that Iran had political goals other than its usual announcements would suggest. During the civil war, though Iran diversified its support to Persian and Dari speaking groups to strengthen its role, these groups fought with each other in opposing alliances. In comparison with Iran, Pakistan's success in Afghanistan can be ascribed to its consistent support for one faction, for example, in the 1980s and in early 1990s it supported Hekmatyar's Hizb-i Islami and afterwards Taliban. Furthermore, Pakistan had active forward policy since Soviet intervention in Afghanistan while Iran followed an ambiguous foreign policy until the civil war. More importantly, the Sunni card that Pakistan played could ensure enormous aid from countries like Saudi Arabia. Pakistan was the conduit to US economic and arm assistance to Afghan resistance. Multiple supports for the various Afghan actors in the civil war period neither contributed to strengthen Iran's influence in Afghanistan nor could it contribute to pacification of the country.

Geopolitics and Iran's role in Afghanistan

There was more to the strategic thinking in Iran's foreign policy making than the immediate concerns for the spread of drugs and ethnic cleansing by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Iran's opposition to the Taliban and Pakistani role in Afghanistan was also an indirect opposition to greater American role in the region. While till the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iran's interest was confined to the Gulf and to enhance its influence in Afghanistan where large number of Shia Muslims lived. The disintegration of the Soviet Union expanded Iran's

interests and role considerably which included its growing interest in Central Asia and its intention of using Afghanistan as a corridor to Central Asia. Iran also had a growing interest in South Asia as it was emerging as a new market for Central Asian resources.

Iran's aspiration to play a major role in the region of West Asia, Central Asia and in Afghanistan was more of a geopolitical necessity than anything else. Iran's interests were shaped by the military and economic opportunities that the region provided to other major powers. The US, an extra-regional power wanted to control the region's resources and their supply for geopolitical reasons than satisfying its own consumption needs. The importance of energy resources lies in running the military for more expansionist purposes, sustaining alliance system by providing natural resources to the allies, for example, the US always wanted to secure the supply of energy to its West European allies and Japan and controlling the foreign policies of different states by denying such energy resources by exercising control over their production and supply.²⁰ In the first Gulf War, the US did not intervene to secure oil supply from West Asia for its own consumption. The US imports little of it. It intervened rather to keep it in friendly hands and maintain its strategy of "divide and conquer" by dividing the control of the Gulf's oil among several rulers to prevent the emergence of strong regional powers in the region. The US depends on geographically closer and more reliable sources located in the traditional American "backyard" and it imports almost fifty per cent of oil from Canada and Latin American countries.

Similarly, Iran is a resource rich country. Its interest in providing pipelines for the supply of Central Asian energy resources has the long term objective of enabling it to become a regional power rather than merely profiting from the transit fees. According to Oystein Noreng, besides transit fees, by facilitating oil and gas transit, Iran would be in a better position to develop trade with the Central Asian region. Central Asia could eventually become an important market for Iranian manufactured goods. In turn, the combination of oil and gas transit and trade could establish Iran as regional power in Central Asia. With oil transiting from Central Asia to Iranian Gulf ports, Iran would strengthen its position in the Gulf, essentially in relation to Saudi-Arabia, potentially also in relation to Iraq.²¹ Thus increase of Iran's influence in Central Asia would also reinforce its position in relation to the Gulf neighbours.

The disintegration of the USSR and emergence of independent Central Asian states brought forth long term considerations for major powers to chalk out plans to lay down trade routes and pipelines to transfer energy resources from these states outbidding other contending powers. The fact that the three countries which share the majority of the region's energy and resources, namely Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, are landlocked makes them depend on their immediate neighbours for access to the Western markets. In the aftermath of the collapse of communism, the ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, especially Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, have been trying to exploit their natural resources as they consider oil to be the prime means of securing their economic and political independence. According to the estimates of geologists, the oil deposits of the Caspian Sea may not be quantitatively comparable to the deposits of the Persian Gulf, but they are still considered of excellent quality and able to provide a significant alternative source of energy in the 21st century. In particular, it is estimated that the entire Caspian Sea is a basin full of oil and natural gas, starting from Azerbaijan and continuing to the opposite shore in the territory of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. These deposits carry enormous importance because of the expected exhaustion of the deposits of Alaska and the North Sea by the year 2015. According to a Congressional Research Service report "in the Caspian region, the prospective increase in natural gas proven reserves appears to be much smaller in relative terms than for oil, but still very large. It is estimated that there are nearly 300tcf in additional natural gas reserves in the region. Should this be the case, total Caspian region proven reserves in near future would put the region's proven gas reserve total at more than twice its present level and far exceed present Saudi Arabian natural gas reserves."²²

Iran, apart from the export of its own oil, strives to provide routes for the transfer Central Asian energy resources. The concern for the investors, oil producing countries and oil consuming countries is finding out the shortest, cheapest and the safest exit route for the transfer of energy resources from the landlocked Central Asian states. But these are the principles of market economy. Powerful states also play a geopolitical role by excluding certain other states from the leverage of providing supply routes though the routes are thought to be the most convenient ones on the basis of market principles.

Russia controls most of the pipeline system built during the Soviet days to supply the Central Asian energy resources to the European market.²³ The Central Asian states in the look out of their independent identity do not appreciate Russian monopoly over the supply routes and

therefore want to diversify their supplies to different markets through various supply routes. According to most of the independent energy experts as well as the Western oil companies, Iran provides the shortest and cheapest route to the Gulf and to the South Asian markets. From a purely practical point of view this is the most sensible option as within the shortest distance possible, the Central Asian states are able to plug into the already existing Iranian pipeline system. Therefore, the countries of the Caspian Sea region turned their attention towards Iran as a future exit route. However, from a geopolitical perspective, the US role in the Central Asian states has been to limit the influence of Russia and in the north and Iran in the south by providing alternative pipeline system. The US granted official invitation to the presidents of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. And all visited Washington to hear about US preferred route: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) route in Turkey and the other one from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan. Both routes were planned to bypass Iran and Russia. The US administration had exerted pressure on oil companies to accept the project. The pipeline through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route was estimated to cost nearly four billion dollars. This project, the financial companies found unjustifiable if the US and Turkish government did not pay part of it.²⁴

Similarly, though the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia apparently shared a common economic objective in the construction of the pipeline joining Turkmenistan and Pakistan through Afghanistan as the US oil company, Union Oil Company of California (UNOCAL) and Saudi Arabian company Delta Oil were to be the main financiers of the project, this was also a commercially non-viable project. This project involved the risk of insecurity as that was to pass through unstable Afghanistan and Pakistan and UNOCAL Vice President Marty Miller said that the project at that moment was not financeable. Despite the commercial non-viability of the pipeline projects like the TAP (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) and the pipeline through Turkey, they were given utmost importance by the governments of the US and Saudi Arabia in case of TAP and the US and Turkey in case of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. Some scholars argue that the US went to the extent of invading and destroying Iraqi oil resources to shoot up the price of oil to give effect to its financially nonviable projects. According to Paul A. Williams, Tekin and Ali, “the prolonged damage to Iraq’s oil infrastructure under the occupation and the effects of disrepair and sabotage helped skyrocket the price of oil and made the projects viable. The projects aimed at the containment of Iran more than breaking Russian control over the Caucasus transport corridor.”²⁵

They argue that “these accomplishments seem remarkable in light of the fact that the seminal BTC pipeline was nearly shelved after the price collapse in 1998 and the downgrading of Azerbaijan’s offshore oil-reserve estimates. Initial US support for BTC was primarily political rather than financial. Despite favorable rhetoric from members of the Clinton Administration, the American government remained largely noncommittal towards funding the BTC, even as a means of breaking Russian control over the Caucasus transport corridor. Rather, Washington did more to back the project by maintaining its ban on the building of new pipelines from and through Iran. The occupation of Iraq inadvertently imparted a new momentum to Caspian projects like the BTC and BTE by helping to ratchet up world energy prices. The aforementioned conditions also fed Turkey’s interest in completing these projects.”²⁶ The plan for the TAP pipeline project was, however, shelved after the Taliban turned away from the US orbit of influence.

Iran not only wants to transit the Central Asian energy resources to the Gulf, it has also plan to reach out to the South Asian market. The TAP project unlike other pipeline projects can be seen as a strategy of the US to deny Iran the South Asian market. If TAP pipeline system is successfully laid down, it will deprive Iran of transit fees from the supply of energy resources to the South Asian market, Iran will lose the South Asian markets for the sale of its own energy resources as it is also an exporter of oil and gas, and finally it will be bereft of potential political and trade influence in South Asia. Iran has shown interest in the idea of Asian Common Market and thus developed healthy relationship with China which, in turn, treats Iran as a regional power and as a counterweight to Russian’s control over the energy resources in Central Asia. Iran’s increased interests in forging new links with China can be interpreted as its attempt to break the US’s containment policy in the region. The US has divergences with Iran from nuclear issue to allowing the latter playing a dominant role in the region. The US’s pipeline project of laying down the western route - Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route and the south eastern route – Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan route as alternative to southern route provided by Iran is a move to deprive Iran of playing a role of a regional power. Iran views the policy of the US in the region as one of encirclement through the allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Pakistan. Some analysts argue that Tehran’s support of Afghan renegade warlord Ismail Khan in Herat is part of its plan to prevent the Afghan pipeline project and protect Iran’s influence in the global oil market.²⁷ Iran’s opposition to the Taliban can be viewed from this angle.

Since the Taliban started its military campaign in 1994, the US had shown all positive indications to the campaign. The US officials on different occasions had opined that “they saw nothing objectionable about the version of Islamic law the Taliban have imposed in the areas under their control. The Taliban should be ‘acknowledged’ as an ‘indigenous’ movement which has ‘demonstrated staying power’, and that when ‘you get to know them you find they really have a great sense of humour’.”²⁸

Before Taliban captured Herat, Islamabad welcomed Iran to participate in a pipeline project. In order to accommodate the Iranian interest in Afghanistan, Pakistan declared that it would facilitate the Iranian pipeline to pass through its territory to India. Taliban’s capture of Herat prompted UNOCAL and Delta oil to finalise a deal with Turkmenistan for a pipeline to Pakistan through Afghanistan. Tehran’s limited influence in Afghanistan through Herat ended with the Taliban’s capture of that area. Herat is situated at the crossroad of competing Turkic and Persian empires. It is cradle of Afghanistan’s history and civilization and has had historic ties to Persia and the Silk Road trade routes. Iran shares 400-mile border with Western Afghanistan and it has always felt a sense of possession towards Herat. The project for an alternative route through Afghanistan to Pakistan could be seen as a strategy developed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to deprive Iran of playing a role of a regional power after the latter lost its influence in western Afghanistan.

Apart from the oil politics, the US-Iran relationship and their respective role in the region was also shaped by pure strategic considerations. The Rimland countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan provide opportunities to develop multidimensional military strategies to states to become powerful and establish hegemony in the region. These are the regions which join Eurasian Heartland with the Indian Ocean. Controlling these regions would mean development of both continental and maritime strategies at the same time. Davutoglu argues “therefore the undeclared cooperation of the US and the USSR against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and the declared coalition against Iraq in the Gulf War is not surprising. Both the superpowers militarily supported Iraq to prevent Iran from consolidating the Rimland by a wave of revolutions. Then they co-operatively destroyed Iraqi military capacity which had provided Iraq with a superior strategic position from the geopolitical perspective in the core of the Rimland.”²⁹

Iran's long-term interests in Herat

Iran seeks permanent influence in Herat in the western Afghanistan region from where it could spread its influence over other regions of Afghanistan through building highways and railroads and more importantly building of infrastructure could ensure political and economic cooperation with the Central Asian states setting up larger network with more Iranian influence in the region. For example, Iran and Turkmenistan guarantee supply of electricity to Herat and parts of the northwestern provinces and Iran and Tajikistan plan a joint dam project for the production of hydroelectric power which could free Afghanistan from its notorious energy crisis.³⁰

Iran has had historical links with Herat and through that region Iranian support for Shiite groups and later for Northern Alliance was channelised. With the occupation of Afghanistan by the US forces, Iran wanted to use Herat as a buffer to ensure that its border remained safe. To that end Iran even provided sporadic support to the Taliban as some reports suggest. The west and northwest Afghanistan became incorporated into Iran's economy during the civil war. For years Iranian companies have found a market there for their industrial products. In 2006 Iran's exports to Afghanistan amounted to \$500 million per year.³¹

It has invested a lot for the reconstruction projects in the western Afghanistan. It is one of the most generous donors in Afghanistan and contributed more than 650 million dollars to the reconstruction process. Iranian road building companies rebuilt the highway connecting Herat with the border town of Taybad covering a distance of 120 kilometers. The highway was inaugurated in 2005. In addition, a new transit route between Afghanistan and the Iranian harbor of Bandar-i Abbas was established, and in summer 2006 the construction of a railway connecting Herat with Mashhad and Tehran started on both sides of the border.³² Iran has the strategic aim is to establish a land corridor that would link it with the Persian speaking populations of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Much of the Iranian aid to Afghanistan has been spent on infrastructure projects, mainly transportation links between Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics, creating mechanisms of greater integration and dependence on Iran. A hundred and twenty three kilometres long road linking Herat in western Afghanistan to the Dogharoun region in Iran has already been completed and work is underway to link Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman, which would alleviate Afghan dependence on the Pakistani port of Karachi.

Iran and Afghanistan after 9/11

Before 9/11, there was occasional cooperation between Iran and the US during the Afghan civil war. Iran, along with the United States, Russia, and the countries bordering Afghanistan, attended UN sponsored meetings in New York (the Six plus Two group) to try to end the internal conflict in Afghanistan. Iran and the United States also participated in a U.N.-sponsored group in Geneva, which included Italy and Germany.³³

Post-9/11 period also witnessed a short term cooperative relationship between the US and Iran in addressing the problem of Afghanistan. As per the Iranian diplomatic sources, members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps cooperated with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and the US Special Operations Forces in supplying and funding the commanders of the Northern Alliance. The Cyprus Group favored by the Iranian government participated in the negotiations in Bonn, Germany, to initiate a peace process in the war-torn country.³⁴

Since the United States partly depended on Tehran's good will for stabilising and establishing a new order in Afghanistan, both sides entered into a tacit agreement on limited cooperation, first and foremost because of similar interests. Both Washington and Tehran had an interest in peace and stability after decades of war in Afghanistan, though motivated by different factors. It is argued that while for the US, the major priority was quick success in the war against terrorism; the Iranian government was driven by the prospect of pursuing its plans for regional cooperation facilitated by more stability on its eastern border and a new Afghan government favorably disposed to Iran.

In Afghanistan, the US and Iranian interests converged on the issue of stemming the trade in narcotics. Afghanistan is one of the world's largest producers of illegal drugs, including over 90% of the world's opium, 80% of which will flow either through Iran or Pakistan. According to the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2006 Strategy Report, "There is overwhelming evidence of Iran's strong commitment to keep drugs leaving Afghanistan from reaching its citizens." Reportedly, thousands of Iran's law enforcement personnel have been killed policing the Afghan border in an attempt to stem the flow of narcotics from that country. According to Robert Finn, the US ambassador to Afghanistan, this problem common to both the countries provided the basis for long-term cooperation between the US and Iran.³⁵

The terrorist attack on the twin towers in the US suspended American containment policy towards Iran for a while. The US and Iran jointly insisted that the Bonn agreement contain a timetable for national elections and require the Afghan administration to cooperate in the fight against terrorism and drugs.³⁶

Besides the common interests between the US and Iran, change of regime also played an important role in moderating the stance of both the powers. In 1997, Mohammed Khatami came to power with his reform programme. He granted freedom to the press, eased social restrictions, and brought limited degree of accountability to government. Khatami told in a 1998 interview on CNN that he wanted to start breaking down “the wall of mistrust”³⁷ that separated Iran from the United States. Corresponding to it the US policy makers began to moderate their views towards the Islamic Republic.

Iran’s influence was instrumental in the establishment of the Karzai government. The Northern Alliance, dominated by Tajik commanders with close ties to Iran, was reluctant to share power with Hamid Karzai, a prominent Pashtun tribal leader. Iranian political pressure on Northern Alliance leaders during negotiations in Bonn, persuaded them to reach a compromise and agree to the formation of the new government. Iran also played an active role in Afghanistan’s reconstruction since 2001. Iran initially pledged \$570 million in 2002. At the Conference on Afghan Reconstruction held in February 2006, Iran pledged an additional \$100 million in aid, making it one of the largest donor states since 2001.

The cooperation between the US and Iran initially seen after 9/11 could not sustain longer. This sabotaged peace and political developments in Afghanistan. The basis of growing difference of interests between Iran and the US has to be found in geopolitics.

The US policy of containment and Iran's bid for regional role

Neither 9/11 nor regime change in Iran, however, completely changed the US policy towards Iran and Iran's perspective on the American role in its neighbourhood. Mutual suspicions were deep in terms of their pursuance of geopolitical interests in the region. While Iran always aspired to become a regional power, the US wanted its hegemony being established in the region to serve its long term geopolitical interests. Even the moderate political leader Khatami of Iran had “always taken extreme care to portray his reforms as consistent with the

ideals of the revolution and Iran's constitutional order".³⁸ According to Geoffrey Kemp, while prior to 9/11 Iran was extremely concerned over the political situation in Afghanistan and drug smuggling from Afghanistan to Iran, in the post-9/11 era, its priorities have changed. Iran now grapples with the issues as to how to deal with US operations in Afghanistan and changing geopolitical dynamics throughout Eurasia.³⁹

Before the 9/11, Iran was worried about the American geopolitical objectives in Central Asia that the US was pursuing through the Taliban, the 9/11, however, brought America to its doorstep. In the aftermath of 9/11, the US has entered into the Eurasian Heartland by establishing military bases in the Central Asian states like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This has facilitated America not only to develop continental strategies but it has also placed US near the Iranian border. The US military bases in Rimland states like Pakistan and Afghanistan and in the Heartland led to Iranian fear of encirclement as the former could operate both from the sea and from the Eurasian continent. Iran feared the US troop presence near its borders when a 300-hectare airbase was being built by the US in the desert area of Holang in Ghorian district of Herat province only 45 kilometres away from the Iranian frontier. According to the US military and Afghan government, the base was built for the Afghan National Army. However, some experts argue that the base would put Iran's entire air space under American domination. Moreover, since 2004, the Shindand airbase in the same Herat province was renovated and grown triple in size to become second largest military airbase in Afghanistan next to that of Bagram. Iran wants to play an important role in the region by controlling the economically and militarily sensitive areas while the role of the US in the West Asia, Central Asia and Southwest Asia and that of Russia in the Central Asian region in the aftermath of the disintegration of the USSR has been to deny such role to Iran.

To contain Iran, the American President George Bush included Iran in the "Axis of Evil" in his January 2002 State of the Union speech.⁴⁰ He also named Pakistan as the US's closest non-NATO ally. This happened when Iran was cooperating with the US in the aftermath 9/11. Later, President Barack Obama said that "his Administration shares the goals of previous Administrations to contain Iran's strategic capabilities and regional influence. The new Administration has not changed the previous Administration's characterization of Iran as a "profound threat to U.S. national security interests," a perception generated not only by Iran's nuclear program but also by its military assistance to armed groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Palestinian group Hamas, and to Lebanese Hezbollah".⁴¹

The Atlantic Council of the US report titled 'Needed: A comprehensive US Policy Towards Pakistan' released in February 2009 recommended to the Obama administration to include Saudi Arabia in its fight against terrorism within Pakistan.⁴² While Saudi Arabia has the dubious record of funding most radical *madrassas* in Pakistan, engaging Iran, given its geographical proximity with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, would have been a better choice. Later, the blueprint of Af-Pak strategy included Iran with its emphasis on regional cooperation but in London Conference, regional approach was discarded in favour of Islamic Nations Coalition Approach. This coalition included Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and a handful of Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan. Inclusion of Saudi Arabia seems to be intended to minimise the influence of Iran in seeking solution to the Afghan problem. Furthermore, the plan to include moderate Taliban in the governance process is yet another attempt to contain Iran in the region. The US seeks to isolate Iran by increasing sanctions against Iran on the nuclear issue and providing support for regime change as part of democratisation initiatives. Instead of promoting and strengthening current democratic trends within Iran, the U.S. favours enforcement strategies which support the opposition to the regime. In the US budget 2010, \$67 million was appropriated for Iran democracy promotion (\$19.6 million through DRL and \$48.6 million through the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs/USAID).⁴³ The US currently lends support to the democratic movements in the Arabic states under the rubric of "Arab Spring" to promote its geopolitical interests which threatens Iran's national interests. For example, it is argued that the US would welcome any movement claiming to be democratic to topple the Assad regime in Syria to break the Iran-Syria alliance even if the end result might be a fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood government.⁴⁴

Moreover, the arms sales to the Gulf States like Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia within the framework of Gulf Security Dialogue is part of the containment strategy of the US.⁴⁵ For example, under President Obama, the Department of Defense has announced arms sales to these states totaling more than \$4 billion.⁴⁶ Though Obama sought pragmatic engagement with Iran on the regional issues like Iraq and Afghanistan, the policies of containment contradict such initiatives.

At the 46th Munich Security Conference in the month of February 2010, "both the US National Security Adviser and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Secretary-General advocated for the extension of NATO's field of action. The integration of members of the Gulf Cooperation Council in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and arms sale by the US to the Gulf states within the framework of Gulf Security Dialogue on the West and the Afghanistan-Pakistan conflict on the East place NATO in a position to encircle Iran".⁴⁷ There is an intensification of military contacts, visits and joint activities between NATO and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which parallel the intensification of the U.S. buildup in the region and is conducted within the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) launched in 2004.

The US policy of containing Iran in the Gulf region in the west and relying more on Pakistan in the east define their respective roles in Afghanistan. So far the US continues with its policy of containment towards Iran limiting their cooperation in Afghanistan. The differences on the host of issues like nuclear issue and regional issues including Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine revolve around the core issue of Iran's aspiration to be a regional power and the US seeking hegemony in the region.

The US-Iran bilateral relationship with regard to Afghanistan has not seen any improvements in recent years. In May 2010, Gen Stanley A. McChrystal, then the NATO commander in Afghanistan, warned that Iran was training Afghan fighters inside Iran. In March 2011, Adm. Mullen told Congress that these sizable weapons shipments from Iran had been intercepted. Tehran has refuted these charges. On 28 July 2011, David S. Cohen, the Treasury Under-Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, announced that Iran had entered a secret deal with an al-Qaeda offshoot that provided money and recruits for attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴⁸ Senior NATO commanders have warned repeatedly that Iran is supplying the insurgency with weapons, money and even training at camps on the Iranian side of the border.

The Iranian government on the other hand charges the US to be aiding the Balochi Sunni insurgent group Jundullah, which has been responsible for killing several senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officers. Iran has tried to substantiate its accusations with statements from the Jundullah leaders. In 2010, Iranian state television broadcast a statement by a captured Jundullah leader, Abdolmalek Rigi, in which he said that he received support from the US. Although the US denies any such support and claims such statements to have been extracted under duress, the continuation of the Balochi insurgency with an impact on

Iran's territorial integrity will most likely result in furthering Iranian actions that undermine US goals in Afghanistan. Iran's aid to Afghan insurgents can be viewed as countering the perceived U.S. support of Jundullah, and increasing evidence of Iran's support to various Afghan insurgent groups could be directly tied to the ongoing insurgency in Iran's Baluchistan territory. Indeed, heightened Iranian concern over the Baluchi insurgency could result in even more-sophisticated Iranian aid to Afghan insurgent groups fighting U.S. forces. This aid could come despite Iran's traditional enmity with the Taliban. It is argued that potential U.S. or Israeli military actions against Iran's nuclear facilities could result in more-significant Iranian aid to the Taliban.⁴⁹

The New York Times reported that, in August 2010, Iran's ambassador to Afghanistan, Feda Hussein Maliki, gave a bag filled with euros to Karzai's chief of staff, Umar Daudzai, on Karzai's personal aircraft. The payment reportedly was intended to promote Iran's interests and to counter US and other western influence in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ It is argued that in the 2010 parliamentary elections, Iran apparently provided monetary support to the Hazaras who have gained considerable prominence and clout in the Afghan political scene. Of the 249 seats in the lower house, 50 went to the Hazaras. They won disproportionately far more seats in relation to their population. As many as 11 Hazara candidates swept the elections in Ghazni, winning all the seats in the Pashtun majority province. All these happenings have made the US more suspicious of Iran's role in Afghanistan.

Iran's Strategies as a Regional Power

Iran developed close ties with Russia, India and China to promote its interests in the militarily and economically sensitive region spanning Afghanistan, West Asia and Central Asia. The Iranian project of Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline does not hamper the Russian interests of maintaining its monopoly over the northern routes to supply energy resources from Central Asia to the West European markets. Moreover, the complementariness in the interests of both the countries to deny opportunities to the US to establish hegemony over the region and to open the North-South Corridor aimed at connecting Russian and Indian ports via Iran, have brought them closer.⁵¹ Cooperating at the military and strategic level, Russia planned to transfer the S-300 missile defence system to Iran and used Belarus as a conduit for selling the SA-20 missile system to it.⁵² Iran and India cooperated on some important issues. They cooperated in laying down an alternative route to Central Asia through Afghanistan. There were also increased instances of consultations between India and Iran on the Taliban's

reconciliation issue. However, India's opposition to Iran's nuclear programme in the UN and its inability to push the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline project being pressured by the US has hampered Iran-India bilateral relationship. The bilateral relationship also depends on the India's role in the West sponsored democratic movements in West Asia. China's dependence on Iran for energy resources and its interest in not allowing the US military presence in its neighbourhood in the Central Asian region has brought Iran and China closer. They also shared the views regarding the proposal of inclusion of moderate Taliban in the governance structure of Afghanistan in the London conference, January 2010. They maintain that such distinction would not decrease the menace of the Taliban rather that would be institutionlised. Apart from the religious reasons, Iran fears that the US might revive its plan for the TAP pipeline project by reconciling with the Taliban.

However, Iran has also its independent strategies to contain the influence of major powers in Afghanistan and Central Asian region. While Russia, in the post-Cold War era, wants to see European Economic Community (EEC) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) as the basis of regional order, China looks at the Sanghai Regional Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as the basis of regional order and Iran is interested to see other forms of regional grouping to lessen the role of China and Russia in Central Asia. The treaty on Persian Speaking Union between Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan exemplifies the Iranian interests to play a role of a major regional power by linking itself and Central Asia with alternative regional grouping.

Iran despite severe international sanctions and the US attempt to contain it, aspires to be a major player in the region and develop different strategies to fulfill its aspiration. This geopolitical battle is fought in Afghanistan in view of its geographical proximity with the Central Asian states to its north and Iran to its west, its potential to provide a pipeline route to link South Asian states and justification for long term military presence of the US in and around it.

To prevent a strong US military presence in Afghanistan, Iran has urged the UN to take a prominent role in shaping the country's political system. But the US to make Iran's plea less effective has accused Iran of sabotaging the peace process by supplying sophisticated arms to the Taliban in western Afghanistan and shepherding fleeing members of the defeated Taliban and Al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan through Iran. There are arguments that though some

evidence of Iranian weapons in Afghanistan has been discovered, it is unclear if the Iranian government is formally involved or if the weapons are being smuggled in by third parties and rogue elements within Iran. Some analysts put forth the argument that Iran pursues a policy of “managed instability” in Afghanistan to bog down the US forces there though it does not want Taliban to capture power once again. According to Michael Rubin, “for Iran, influence in Afghanistan appears to be a zero-sum game. While the Iranian government welcomed the Taliban’s fall, they were less than sanguine about the actions of Washington to precipitate it. While Iranian and American diplomats cooperated to form a post-Taliban political order, many Iranian actions run counter to their own commitments and declarations of cooperation. Iranian security services did not adhere to the promises of Iranian diplomats engaging their Western counterparts.”⁵³

It is argued that Iran supports its proxies like Hezbollah, a militant organisation, in Afghanistan while seeking to monopolise the social service net. For example, after the fall of the Taliban, Iran dispatched Hasan Kazemi Qomi, a Revolutionary Guard commander who served as the Iranian regime’s chief liaison to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as its chief diplomat to Herat. Barnett argues “while the Iranian government contributed personnel to the construction effort, they used the dispatch of such volunteers to provide cover for Revolutionary Guardsmen and intelligence operatives. On March 8, 2002, Afghan commanders intercepted 12 Iranian agents and proxies who were organizing armed resistance among Afghan commanders.”⁵⁴

Iran’s aspiration to become a regional power is reflected in its attempt to become a nuclear power despite international sanctions, in its massive support for non-state militant groups like Hamas and Hezbollah in terms of finance and arms, seeking support of the Islamic countries against the occupation of Palestine by Israel and in its continued role of strengthening Shiite groups in the neighbouring countries where they are a minority. Supporting Sunni groups like Hamas has compensated for its policy of promoting the interests of only Shiite groups. In Lebanon, the Sunni group of Hamas was granted shelter and protection by the Shiites of Hezbollah in accordance with the Muslim code of *milmastia* (hospitality). The exiled Sunnis responded to this gesture of goodwill by assisting the efforts of their Shiite hosts to gain a foothold within Israel. It was something that Hezbollah had been unable to achieve, since the Islamic population of Israel remained almost entirely Sunni and actively antagonistic to the presence of a Shiite party within the waaf (“the land of Palestine”).⁵⁵

Though initially, after the Islamic revolution in 1979, the zeal to export Shiite ideology shaped Iran's foreign policy, geopolitical considerations played a prominent role in the formulation of foreign policies later. Unlike the early phase, Iran's support for coethnics near abroad is not based on emotions rather on geopolitical considerations. For example, Iran's relations with hard-line Shiite factions, such as al Sadr faction are occasional, tactical and short term and aimed at undermining the unilateral US policy of excluding Iran from Iraqi politics.⁵⁶ Iran was quite aware of the fact that any long term support for the Shiite factions in Iraq would disturb the power equations there and not serve interests of Iran in the long run by generating greater regional instability. Similarly, to prevent the US from excluding its influence in Afghanistan, Iran always played a role in the direction of making Herat a buffer zone between the US occupying forces and itself. Its multiple supports for different non-Pushtun groups to challenge the Taliban during the latter's rise to power and alleged support for the Taliban to bog down the US forces point to the fact that co-ethnic groups did not remain the permanent constituency for Iranian support.⁵⁷

Iranian governing elites perceive their country's security resting in the security of the whole region comprising the West Asia, Central Asia and Southwest Asia. Iran acknowledges the interests and role of the US in maintaining security in the region by being involved in talks with it to evolve various international mechanisms to ensure peace and security in Afghanistan and Iraq but it is against overwhelming and long-term presence of the US military force in the region. Iran perceives greater US role in future in the region, given its geopolitical importance, would affect Iranian interests in the long-term. Iran is vociferous in stating opposition to any arrangement that will allow the US to position itself firmly in Afghanistan which shares a 936-kilometre-long border with the Islamic republic. Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar was categorical in stating that a strategic treaty between the US and Afghanistan would pose a threat to the interests of Iran and other regional countries.⁵⁸ To counter the US role in the region, Iran has focused on "offensive defence" strategy. This strategy is a way to ensure defence through active military engagement. But the problem lies in the exaggeration of Iranian threat perception which might situate Iran in an irreconcilable position with the US in terms of respective geopolitical interests. According to Barzegar, "experience has shown that the more Iran feels threatened, the more likely it is likely to expand its regional presence. Though in the short terms, Iran's greater regional presence will promote its deterrent power to engage potential security threats,

in the long term it will bring unnecessary tension and strategic discord to Iran's relations with the region's key players such as Saudi Arabia and the United States".⁵⁹

Iran can destabilise the situations in Afghanistan if the US continues with its strategy of containment. For example, after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, President Bush warned Iran against meddling in Afghanistan. Partly to respond to the US's censure, in February 2002 Iran expelled Karzai opponent Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, but it did not arrest him. At other times, Afghanistan and Iran have had disputes over Iran's efforts to expel Afghan refugees. About 1.2 million remain, mostly integrated into Iranian society, and a crisis erupted in May 2007 when Iran expelled about 50,000 into Afghanistan.⁶⁰ The motive for expelling the Afghans follows the reasoning that while coalition forces announced the interception of Iranian-made weapons in southern Afghanistan and condemned the Iranians' attempt to make contact with the Taliban, Iran had pushed for the mass expulsion of refugees in an effort to show that it could indirectly put pressure on the United States. Iran knew that with the return of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan, the economic crisis there will increase; the side effects will affect the Afghan government and thus role of the US will also be affected. In September 2007, there were reports of Iran's indirect role in channeling Chinese weapons to militants in Afghanistan to fight the US force. Alex Vetanka⁶¹, the Washington-based Iranian analyst for Jane's Information Group, argues that the presence of Chinese weapons so close to Iranian border was the strongest evidence of Iran's indirect role in the supply of weapons. The disclosure of secret American defence documents by Wikileaks also points to Iranian involvement in assisting the Taliban.⁶² Iran also tried to destabilise Afghan situations by cutting down fuel supplies to Afghanistan in the cold months of 2010 on the ground that Kabul had siphoned the petrol and diesel to NATO forces. This move sparked an outcry in Kabul.

Iran has mounted criticisms on the US role in Afghanistan. The chairman of Iranian Expediency Council, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, at a meeting with the visiting former UN secretary General Kofi Annan, said that the "occupiers" who created "insecurity" in Afghanistan and Pakistan were now "unable to rein it in".⁶³ In October 2008, Tehran invited former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, who led the anti-Taliban coalition (Northern Alliance) in the 1990s. Bhadrakumar argues that the scheduling of Rabbani's visit was intended to signal that Iran still had reserves of influence with the Northern Alliance groups, despite the US estimation that these anti-Taliban groups have been scattered or bought over by Western intelligence.⁶⁴ Rabbani said that the solution to Afghan crisis lay in the national

reconciliation among all tribes without ethnic, tribal and religious prejudice.⁶⁵ By saying this he reiterated the Iranian perspective on the solution to the Afghan problem. Iran condemned the Bush administration's efforts to include Saudi Arabia to broker talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.⁶⁶ Obama in his AfPak strategy recognised Saudi Arabia's role as a part of the regional solution to Afghan problem. Iran criticised the US for only providing lip-service to regional cooperation while in reality it wanted to play a unilateral role in Afghanistan.

The US dependence on Pakistan and the limits of US-Iran cooperation on Afghanistan

Iran would have provided the shortest supply routes for the western troops in Afghanistan. Along with India, it could have strengthened the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban forces. However, as geopolitically containment of Iran was more important concern for the US than containing the radical Islamic groups, the US depended on Pakistan even though the AfPak strategy did not bring any results. Iran sought greater cooperation from Pakistan in its strategy to fight terrorism overlooking the latter's role in support of a revived Taliban and providing safe haven for Al Qaeda in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Bush administration had failed to monitor these activities. The revelation that Pakistan had been the main source of nuclear weapons proliferation to Iran, Libya and North Korea, has not significantly changed US's policy of cultivating Pakistan and alienating Iran. Iran's potential nuclear capacity seems to be more threatening to the US and international peace than Pakistan's actual nuclear weapons and proliferation activity.

At time, the US became more pronounced in its criticism of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, for example in the wake of Hilary Clinton's visit to Islamabad in the month of October 2009, she said that Pakistan had squandered opportunities over the years to kill or capture leaders of the al-Qaida terrorist network responsible for the Sept. 11 attacks. But this has neither changed the US's policy of providing huge amount of aid to Pakistan nor did it put in place any mechanism to monitor Pakistan's role in providing assistance to the Taliban.⁶⁷ There are severe constraints that the US faces to take Pakistan completely to its side to fight Taliban. A five-year, \$7.5-billion aid package to Pakistan signed into law by President Obama generated much controversy. There were measures in the legislation which aim at ensuring the money was not misspent. Pakistanis perceived it as the pretext Washington can use to exert control over their country. Pakistanis lamented the use of drone missile strikes to take out top Al Qaeda and Taliban commanders in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas along the border with

Afghanistan at the expense of the lives of civilians. Pakistan decried violation of its sovereignty by the US so that it could shape the Afghan war according to its own interests.⁶⁸

Barnet R. Rubin and Sara Batmanglich argue that using Afghanistan as a base for anti-Iranian policies handicaps the US in pressing for Pakistani cooperation. Both Pakistan and Iran are “rivals for influence in Afghanistan and sponsoring competing infrastructure projects for road transport and energy trade. Iran and India are building a combined rail and road link from the Iranian port of Chabahar to Afghanistan’s major highway. Pakistan, with Chinese aid, is building the port of Gwadar in Baluchistan, aiming at a north-south route to Central Asia”.⁶⁹

The Gwadar port has raised concerns for India and Iran over Sino-Pakistan maritime activities and has sparked a tacit competition over whether Pakistan’s Gwadar port or Iran’s Chabahar port, built with Indian assistance, will serve as Central Asia’s conduit to warm waters. The US objected to all the projects economically and politically beneficial to Iran including this.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Iran considered that Pakistan was not supportive of the idea of a broad-based government in Afghanistan. Its belief is rooted in historical experience. When Rabbani was contemplating the idea of including Pashtuns in his government to make it broad-based in 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul rendering the effort of Rabbani futile. Furthermore, Iran’s mistrust of Pakistan can be attributed to the fact that when on fourth of July 1998 both the Iranian and Pakistani diplomats travelled together to Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar to talk to the rival factions, the Taliban took over Mazar-e-Sharif and killed the Iranian diplomats accusing them of being intelligence agents.⁷¹ Thus, Iran’s mistrust of Pakistan made Iran more wary of the US’s support to the latter and rapprochement between the US and Iran more difficult which, in turn, made it almost impossible to find an amicable solution to Afghan problem. The US plan to include moderate Taliban in the governance of Afghanistan in the London Conference attests to the fact that the US still treats Iran as bigger problem than Pakistan or Taliban. Interestingly, the US accusations that Pakistan is not doing enough to curb terrorism on its soil and killing of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan has brought temporary rupture in the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and the US which, in turn, improved relationship between Iran and Pakistan. According to Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, the participation by Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari in the two-day conference on terrorism held in Tehran on 25 June 2011 was invested with political symbolism as a mark of displeasure towards the US.⁷²

However, containment of Iran in the region has been the long-term goal of the US and to curb terrorism in the Af-Pak area and to realise the plan of reconciliation with the Taliban, the US requires Pakistani support. America's accusations and threats to reduce aid to Pakistan can be interpreted as a way to put pressure on Pakistan and not to alienate Pakistan.

To sum up, Iran's role in Afghanistan before Islamic Revolution was to secure the trade routes there and ensure the Helmand river flow from Afghanistan to its territory. However, the Islamic Revolution, 1979 propelled Iran to play a greater role in order to maintain sphere of influence in Afghanistan. After the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in the same year, Iran's policy in Afghanistan was governed by the twin desires of protecting its border from the great powers and secretly providing arms and training to Shia resistance groups to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan so that its increasing influence among Shias would allow it a greater role and Sunni influence of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia would diminish in Afghanistan. However, the Iranian role in Afghanistan was measured. Its strained relationship with the US and concern about increasing Sunni influence in Afghanistan spread by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan prevented Iran from becoming a frontline state openly supporting resistance forces. It covertly supplied arms and aid to Shia resistance. However, increasing factions within the Shia groups impeded Iran from playing an effective role in Afghanistan.

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and during the Afghan civil war, inconsistent support for different factions had resulted in its weakened position vis-à-vis Pakistan which consistently supported only one faction, namely, Taliban. The Taliban also got important patrons like Saudi Arabia and the US which increased its strength. The US found its geopolitical interest served in the Taliban's resurgence to counter Iran. The Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan and conclusion of eight year long Iran-Iraq war without Iraq's victory despite the tacit support of both Russia and America assured Iran of a major power role in the region. The emergence of natural resource rich and landlocked Central Asian states privileged Iranian position vis-à-vis others as the latter provides the shortest route for the supply of the Central Asian energy resources. Along with the scramble among different states for Central Asian energy resources, the scope to develop multidimensional military strategies makes the region of West Asia, Central Asia and Southwest Asia quite sensitive to foreign intervention. The economic opportunities combined with military and strategic maneuverability gave rise to long term interests in the region in terms of controlling the production and supply of energy resources rather than making the resources available and sell

in the open market for profit. Iran's long-term interests lie in using both military and economic levers that the region provides in order to establish itself as a major power.

After the disintegration of the USSR and emergence of Central Asian states, Iran's conception of region expanded. It saw its interests not only in the Persian Gulf or in the Shia populated states, it had also an increasing interest in Central Asia and using Afghanistan as corridor to Central Asia. South Asia also emerged as one of the biggest markets for Central Asian resources and therefore destination for Iran's commercial interests. Iran in order to play a major role in the wider region shed its support for only the Shiite factions and enlarged its support to other groups in Afghanistan. Iran also became wary of the American role in the region. Though Iran provides the shortest and cheapest routes for the transfer of energy resources of Central Asia and therefore aspires to play a major role in oil politics, containment of Iran was so important for the US that the pipeline projects like the TAP and the pipeline through Turkey were given utmost importance by it despite their commercial non-viability.

Iran in order to enable itself to playing a major in the region has striven to develop nuclear power. Secondly, it has cultivated friendship with Syria and its support for militant factions like Hamas and Hezbollah to support Palestinian cause seeks to increase influence among the Muslim nations. Thus, the US containment strategy and Iran's role in the region have to be understood in the context of their geopolitical interests. To contain Iran and to meet its geopolitical interests, the US is driven more towards Pakistan which consequently limits the US-Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, the US has more overlapping interests with Iran than it does with its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. They have common interest in the stability and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. However, geopolitics has ordained different and confrontational role to be played by the US and Iran in Afghanistan. Iran to counter the US role and military presence in Afghanistan has given assistance to Ismail Khan of Herat and allegedly to Taliban in terms of finance and arms. It has even deployed members of Hezbollah militant group to take up intelligence and insurgence activities. Iran has argued for enhanced role of the UN to install a broad-based government in Afghanistan though the US has taken up a major role to sideline the participation of Iran in the resolution of Afghan problem.

Iran's aspiration to develop nuclear energy, to act as a bridge between Central Asia and Persian Gulf on the one hand and Central Asia and South Asia on the other for the energy supplies and its desire for leadership role in the West Asian and Central Asian region are some of the long term objectives that have been factored into Iran's foreign policy making. Iran's role in Afghanistan, therefore, needs to be viewed from the perspective of its long-term interest in its neighbourhood.

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CHAPTER VI

India and Afghanistan, 1979-2011: A Minor Player in the 'Great Game'

India and Afghanistan shared long historical, cultural and political contacts. Prior to the partition of the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan was a neighbour of undivided India and had a history of close contacts with Indian people and vice versa. The close relationship dates back to the days of Gandhara civilisation which flourished on the border regions of India and Afghanistan between 6 BC and 11 AD.¹ During the British rule, Afghanistan was made a buffer state between British India and Russian Empire. Conflicts with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan issue and preference for non-aligned foreign policy brought Afghanistan closer to India during the regimes of King Zahir Shah and Daoud.

However, Indo-Afghan friendship was marred by a number of factors. India maintained silence over the Pashtunistan issue in the international forums where the non-aligned Afghanistan needed its support on such a crucial issue. India's silence over the issue was driven by a number of reasons. After the staunch supporter of Pashtunistan cause, Gandhi died, other leaders of Indian national movement were not much enthusiastic about it. The issue was confused with the legality of the Durand Line which India had herself recognised till that time. Secondly, the newly born Indian government was too preoccupied with developments at home as also defining her role in international affairs. Thirdly, even though relations between India and Pakistan were strained, both had many common problems to solve which required better relationship between the two. Nehru-Liaquat pact was a step in that direction. Thus, India did not want to estrange Pakistan by supporting Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue. Fourthly, supporting Pakhtoonistan had an implication for Kashmir problem as both were issues on the question of self-determination. Fifthly, a part of Kashmir was included in the proposed Pashtunistan, which Indian leaders did not accept. For example, in the Lok Sabha, when a member drew the attention of the government towards the fact that Chitral had been included in the zone of Pashtunistan, Prime Minister Nehru declared that "the suzerainty of Kashmir continued over Chitral".²

Similarly, Afghanistan maintained silence during the Sino-Indian border war in 1962 and Indo-Pak war over Kashmir in 1965.³ However, on the other hand, they openly supported each other on the issues which did not involve directly or indirectly some matter in which their own interests or relations with another country were likely to be jeopardised.

India and Afghanistan after Soviet intervention

After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, India's response was shaped more by the need to continue good relationship with Soviet Union than to understand the problems and concerns of Afghanistan with which it shared historical and cultural ties. It is to be noted that during the decade-long stay in Afghanistan of Soviet Union, no serious attempt was made by policy makers in New Delhi to explain its policy or to establish contact with the mujahideen groups. It was believed that Afghanistan would be pacified by Soviet military forces. India's initial response to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan reflected domestic political confusion arising out of the transition from the first non-Congress regime to the re-emergence of Mrs. Gandhi.⁴

The then Prime Minister Charan Singh strongly opposed the Soviet intervention and therefore India's permanent representative at the United Nations was asked to regret the intervention and seek Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. On Indira Gandhi's assumption of power in January 1980, this stance was significantly revised. "Without being critical of the Soviet Union publicly, she supported the Afghan revolutionary leadership and urged them to appreciate the need for Soviet withdrawal over a period of time".⁵ However, such a measured policy was construed by western media and various analysts as pro-Soviet. Being a leader of the Non-Aligned movement, India was expected to oppose any intervention in another non-aligned country much more strongly.

India's perception on the issue and therefore its role was shaped by the axis developed between the US, Pakistan and China to raise the level of insurgency against the Soviet Union. The Soviet intervention and presence in Afghanistan had provided a legitimacy for the US and Pakistani interference in Afghanistan. Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haq was looking for substantial aid to build up Pakistan's defences to meet the Soviet threat in Afghanistan as also its "traditional adversary" India. Pakistan wanted the 1959 US-Pakistan Military Executive Agreement to be converted into a regular military treaty. This was in spite of the fact that Pakistan was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Soviet intervention had reinforced military alliance between the US and Pakistan resulting into a massive supply of economic and military support to Pakistan as a frontline state. Hi-tech military weapons, like the F-16 and AWACS, were supplied to Pakistan. Even China had joined the anti-Soviet front in Afghanistan, resulting into a reinforced Sino-US-Pak axis.

Another important threat to regional security in general and a security threat to India in particular was the emergence and rise of Islamic militant groups propped up by the American sponsored anti-Soviet operations. It is a well known fact that the rise of Islamic militancy subsequently vitiated peace in India, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir.⁶ By encouraging and directing Pashtun groups to fighting against the Soviet 40th Army in Afghanistan under the rubric of Political Islam, Pakistan not only tried to overcome the Pashtunistan problem and exert its influence in Afghanistan, it also tried to strengthen the insurgency in Kashmir. It is noteworthy that during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan tried to internationalise the Kashmir issue. Pakistan played an important role in anti-Soviet operations and received support from major international actors. This was a major factor behind Pakistan turning away from the Shimla pact which endorsed Kashmir as a bilateral issue. Speaking to the Press in October 1980 Mrs Gandhi described as “unfortunate” the Pakistan President's attempt at raising the Kashmir issue in international forums.⁷

It was during this time Pakistan tried to develop its nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan wanted the restrictions imposed under the Symington Amendment to be waived in its favour since it hampered its nuclear programme. Ronald Reagan, who was installed as the President of the US on January 20, 1981, made it clear that he would not be fastidious about nuclear proliferation or human rights. Dr. Abdul Qader Khan, who had since 1976, been heading the Atomic Plant at Kahuta said in 1984 that Pakistan had “achieved mastery on uranium enrichment by centrifuge method” and if the Pakistan government were to so decide, Pakistani scientists were in a position to make the bomb. President Zia told the Press on February 15, 1984, that Pakistan had acquired a very modest research and development capability in the enrichment of uranium.⁸

India's role in response to Soviet intervention was also shaped by the relationship between Soviet Union and India which had developed to a point of closeness and cooperation by the end of 1970s that few other major power-Third World relationships had achieved. For India, the USSR served as the crucial bulwark against Pakistan and as a counterweight to both China and the US and the USSR could hardly have had a better Third World ally than India to work with against an expansion of Chinese or American influence.⁹

However, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan came up as a challenge for India to maintain such a vital strategic relationship with the USSR without affecting its credentials as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. Though New Delhi opposed outside interference in the internal affairs of one country by another, it was also alarmed by the danger of arms race in the region. Despite US attempts to persuade India that any new arms for Pakistan would only be to contain the Soviet intervention along Pakistan's borders, India saw the move as a threat. The Indian Foreign Office stated that it was "the Government of India's earnest hope that no country or external power would take steps which might aggravate the situation."¹⁰

India, however, made its displeasure on Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan to the Soviet Union in clear and categorical terms through bilateral discussions. Mrs. Gandhi refused to accept any of the explanations forwarded by the Soviet side to justify their intervention and instead asked them to create conditions for early withdrawal. She herself told this to the Soviet leader Brezhnev in Moscow in December 1980 and September 1982. On the other hand, during the same Mrs. Gandhi's regime, Indian Ambassador B. C. Mishra remained silent at the United Nations when the issue came before the Security Council at the request of the US and 51 other states, including many of the nonaligned group. India's silence disappointed many, particularly the Western observers who had expected India's support against the Soviet action. That India was not completely with Moscow, however, became apparent in the vote on the resolution when India joined 17 other countries in abstaining while the resolution passed overwhelmingly, 104 to 18. Amin Saikal notes that during 1980s, New Delhi adopted a two-pronged approach to the Soviet policy towards Afghanistan. While India refused to condemn the Soviet action, in private New Delhi conveyed its concerns and exerted pressure informally to press for a Soviet withdrawal.¹¹ To some extent, the US side was aware of India's strong reservation on Soviet intervention and continuing presence in Afghanistan. President Carter publicly acknowledged that India's position on the Afghanistan issue was positive and that India was not endorsing the intervention.¹²

Soviet Union tried to shape India's perception regarding the role of anti-Soviet front in a desired direction. The Soviets were quick to point out to the new Indian government headed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi the direct threat the US and the PRC presented to India. "Washington is again providing Pakistan with sophisticated weapons which can be turned against India at any moment, building up its fleet in the Indian Ocean, and expanding its base on Diego Garcia. The United States' Chinese friends continue to train and arm saboteurs recruited from

among separatists in the northeastern states of India, seeking to use them to destabilise the political situation in the country and eventually gain control of some Indian regions. Peking has not yet returned the 36, 000 square kilometers of territory it seized from India.”¹³

Leonid Brezhnev brought with him a number of inducements in his four days visit to India in December 1980, to get India's support on the issue of Afghanistan. One was the agreement for Soviet assistance in the implementation of a broad range of projects totaling over 40 billion rupees in India's next five-year plan. There were also reports that Brezhnev's delegation had furthered the negotiations on the supply to India of the MiG-25, and the Indian Air Force would be getting the first lot shortly. The most important inducement that Soviet Union had to offer India was to raise the USSR's crude oil supplies by one million tons per year. For India, which had been scrambling for new sources of oil since the conflict had erupted between Iran and Iraq, who together supplied almost 70 per cent of India's oil imports, this was an agreement of tremendous importance.

The USSR defended India's stance in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), particularly its compromise position on Afghanistan by warning India of the hopes of American “imperialist” and Chinese “hegemonist” forces to split India and the USSR apart. The Soviet rhetoric supporting the Movement and India's stance on the Afghan issue in the meeting of the non-aligned foreign ministers in New Delhi in February 1981 was intended to allay Indian fears of drifting from the “mainstream” of the Non-Aligned Movement.

India's ambiguous response to the Afghan issue being pulled in different directions did not allow India playing a meaningful role in the settlement of the issue. It was seen closely identified with the Soviet Union and pro-Soviet Kabul regime though it made its displeasure clear regarding the Soviet intervention in the bilateral discussions. In the multilateral body like the UN, it either abstained or maintained silence. This distanced it from the dominant international anti-Soviet front that was more interested in pushing the Soviets out rather than ensuring a stable and politically independent Afghanistan. Pakistan, the principal member of the anti-Soviet front was extremely active in keeping India out of any important process of negotiations involving Afghanistan. India's role was further curtailed by the fact that it did not share border with Afghanistan. The formula that was generally worked out to select the countries to participate in the negotiations process included great powers and the neighbours. India did not fit in either of the categories in the negotiations carried out under the UN

auspices. However, it kept in touch with the negotiations through the Afghan regime in Kabul and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the real parties in the Afghan conflict were the two superpowers.

India and the Najibullah's regime

The UN sponsored proximity talks on Afghanistan initiated in late 1986 eventually led to Geneva accords. These accords were signed by the two superpowers along with the Afghan regime and Pakistan in 1988. Under these accords, the Soviet military forces were to complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan by February 1989. India kept in touch with the Kabul regime and the USSR on the question of Soviet withdrawal.

India supported the Soviet-backed government of Mohammad Najibullah in Afghanistan.¹⁴ Afghan President Najibullah visited India in December 1987 and again in May 1988, to keep Indian leaders informed about important developments. India began to prepare itself to deal with the post-Soviet developments with the beginning of negotiations on the Geneva accords. It established contacts with the leaders, not only of the Kabul regime, but also with all possible other Afghan groups, including anti-Soviet mujahideen guerrilla leaders. The then Minister of State for External Affairs, Natwar Singh went to Paris to talk to the former Afghan King Zahir Shah, hoping that he could have a role to play in uniting various factions in the interest of a stable and neutral Afghanistan.¹⁵ In their regular contacts with the Kabul regime, Indian leaders pleaded for the accommodation of some of the guerrilla leaders in the new power sharing arrangement. But the problems that subsequently emerged were not only lack of consensus on the issue of sharing power with the guerrilla leaders but also the issue of balanced ethnic representations and the stakes of external forces.

India worked with the Najibullah government to see if a political consensus among all the representative Afghan groups could be evolved to ensure a peaceful and stable transition from the Soviet period. India refused to back any of the warring factions. But due to its ambiguous stance during the Soviet intervention, its role was increasingly seen as pro-Najibullah regime. For example, Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, a leader of the Islamic Interim Council warned India against any intervening role when they were battling the government forces in Jalalabad, near Pakistan's border in March 1989. The new Indian government headed by V. P. Singh toed the same line as the previous governments to maintain neutrality on the Afghan issue and help in the reconciliation process to ensure a stable government in Afghanistan. India's interest in a

stable and politically neutral Afghanistan was always at stake as Pakistan consistently supported mujahideen group led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar. India was denied such a role because of its perceived pro-Soviet role during the Soviet occupation. Even after the Soviet withdrawal, India continued its support for the Najibullah government which was characterised by the visit of the latter to New Delhi in August 1990 and signing of an agreement on Prevention of Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs.¹⁶ The gradually intensifying conflict in Afghanistan made it difficult for India to keep its credibility as a friendly neighbour. After 1992, the conflict around Kabul and other major Afghan cities intensified forcing India to frequently close down its diplomatic mission and aid disbursing agencies. The humanitarian assistance and relief supplies that India provided to Afghanistan had to be routed through the UN Coordinating Agencies. India found it difficult and politically risky to provide any military assistance to the Kabul regime which came under increased pressure with the rise of the Taliban.¹⁷ After the Soviet troops had left Afghanistan with several mujahideen commanders competing to reach the centre-stage of Afghan politics, India, according to J. N. Dixit followed a three-pronged policy course: 1. to maintain contact with leaders of all groups including Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmetyar and Rashid Dostam so that eventually it could deal with whosoever came to power; 2. to continue to provide assistance in the economic and public health spheres to the extent feasible; and 3. to explore possibilities, in collaboration with states like Russia and Iran, of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁸

Emergence of the Taliban

The Taliban emerged as one of the powerful radical groups during the Afghan civil war to claim power in Afghanistan with Pakistan's patronage. New Delhi reached out to the new government formed by Burhanuddin Rabbani after the fall of Najibullah government in 1992 and continued to recognise and deal with it despite the fact that the Taliban were making significant advances in extending their sway in Afghanistan. India was asked by the Taliban to revise its Afghan policy and stop interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. However, India tried to establish direct contacts with the commanders of the Northern Alliance, Ahmed Shah Masood on the Panjshir Valley side and Rashid Dostum on the Mazar-e-Sharif side. India provided the Northern Alliance with humanitarian assistance. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs reports provided the details of humanitarian assistance given to the Northern Alliance and the problems related to their supply.¹⁹ However, New Delhi later revealed that it had supplied the Northern Alliance military hardware worth

around 8 million US dollars, and military advisors and helicopter technicians to maintain Soviet-made MI-17 and MI-35 attack helicopters.²⁰

While it is argued that India's policy moved in the right direction in Afghanistan in terms of recognising the Rabbani government and supporting the Northern Alliance but its response to the rise, expansion and consolidation of Taliban's hold over Afghanistan with direct Pakistani backing, was inadequate. In this context, an analyst advised the Indian policy makers to work with "Russia and the CIS states" in providing substantial material assistance to the forces resisting the Taliban. India, on the other hand, believed that there could be no military solution to the Afghan crisis. The seven point policy outline contained in the Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral's statement clearly said that "we fully support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary General...a cessation of arms supply to Afghanistan is required".²¹

India was handicapped by a number of factors to pursue an effective policy in Afghanistan. First, like Pakistan it does not have a contiguous border with Afghanistan. Therefore, it faced the logistic constraint of not having direct access to Afghanistan. Secondly, India believed in the resilience and staying power of Northern Alliance and supported it whereas the Taliban was occupying one major city after another. Thirdly, India was getting diplomatically marginalised both in the regional and international context. As the American and Pakistani interests converged in promoting the Taliban as factor of stability to find an outlet for the Central Asian energy resources to the world market through Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistan was assured of a better position in the future negotiations by the US. Pakistani diplomacy succeeded in keeping India out of the UN meetings by insisting on the "major powers and neighbours" formula for participation. This is how India was kept out of the 6+2 group on Afghanistan.²²

It was in the late 1990s that India showed her willingness to discuss the establishment of diplomatic ties between herself and the Taliban. Two reasons are primarily responsible for New Delhi's change of mind. First, the overwhelming success of the Taliban in capturing power in Afghanistan pushed India to rethink and revise its anti-Taliban stance. Secondly, the landing of the hijacked Indian plane (IC 814) in Kandahar in December 1999 created a situation for Indian authorities to establish direct contacts with the Taliban. To that effect, there were media reports that the then India's Minister of External Affairs; Jaswant Singh who

accompanied the Pakistani terrorists to be released for the safe return of the hijacked passengers, was willing to discuss the future of diplomatic ties with the Taliban.²³ However, India believed that successful diplomatic ties could only be established if the Taliban could distance itself from Pakistan. In New Delhi's perception, the Taliban never severed its links with the Pakistani establishment and the intelligence and therefore India stopped short of establishing diplomatic ties with the Taliban and took an anti-Taliban stance.²⁴

Former Indian diplomat M. K. Bhadrakumar argues that India by taking an anti-Taliban stance has hindered its interests in Afghanistan and instead pandered to the western interests. According to him “the Indian strategic thinkers should not have been such incorrigible fundamentalists to fail to appreciate the shades of political Islam or discern the western propaganda about the Taliban. Mixing up the Taliban completely with the adversarial mindset of the Pakistani security agencies was equally wrong. Overlooking the indigenous roots of a homegrown movement was always injudicious”.²⁵ It was 1997-98 that India probably began sliding into a strategic mistake by regarding Afghanistan as a theatre of India-Pakistan rivalry. This was a reversal of the Indian policy, which was best evident during the 1992-95 period when despite overtures from the mujahideen, the Narasimha Rao government stubbornly refused to get involved in any form in Afghanistan's fratricidal strife.²⁶

Furthermore, it is argued that the Taliban is not a monolithic group. Disparate groups with varied interests are part of this umbrella group. There are significant differences between the Quetta Shoora and Haqqani group. The Quetta Shoora, headed by Mullah Omar, includes most of the Taliban's senior leadership from the 1994-2001 period. Omar's personal philosophy stems from a powerful combination Islamic fundamentalism with nationalism. His overriding aim has always remained the eviction of foreign forces from Afghanistan and the establishment of an Islamic emirate with a full implementation of Islamic lifestyle and law. On the contrary, the Haqqani group has been cultivated, equipped and financed by the Intelligence agency of Pakistan, ISI as counterbalance to the Quetta Shoora. For the ISI, the Haqqani network has been a convenient instrument to be deployed against Indian assets in Afghanistan. The head of the Haqqani group, Jalaluddin Haqqani married to a United Arab Emirates Princess which rendered him ideologically receptive to Arab-style Salafi/Wahabbi groups. The group's West Asian linkages and its ties with Al Qaeda have created the culture of suicide attack.²⁷

Contrary to New Delhi's belief that the Taliban is an instrument in the hands of Islamabad, there is serious difference of interests between Pakistan and Afghan Taliban. Mullah Zaeef, the Taliban's former ambassador to Pakistan details in his autobiography numerous examples of Islamabad's egregious behaviour, where it has treated the sovereign Afghan nation as little more than a subordinate client state.²⁸ Pakistan's geopolitical and strategic aims, and its close linkages with Washington, contrast poorly in the Taliban's perspective with its own religious agenda. Pakistan's links with Al Qaeda and other Islamic radical groups which perpetrate violence in different countries in the name Islam do not go well with the nationalist Taliban.

India and the War on Terror

It was the new-found warmth in Indo-US relations in the post-Cold War era, especially during the George W. Bush (Jr) administration that propelled India to join the War on Terror and it expected intense engagement in post-Taliban Afghanistan. During the Clinton administration, Indo-US relationship deteriorated after the Pokhran nuclear tests. On the other hand, the US developed ties with Pakistan and the Taliban to give vent to its geopolitical interests in finding an outlet to the Central Asian energy resources through Afghanistan. Furthermore, there was American pressure on India on the Kashmir issue during this period. However, the real turning point in the Indo-US relations came in mid-1999 when Clinton forcefully intervened to get Pakistan to withdraw the forces it had sent across the Line of Control in Kashmir near the town of Kargil. India had assumed that the United States would reflexively support Pakistan and was thus much impressed by the president's action. Thus, Indo-US relations began to change in a positive direction in the final years of Clinton's presidency which continued and were intensified during the Bush regime. Even before assuming power, Bush made some favourable references to India during the election campaign while Condoleezza Rice, who became the national security adviser during the Bush's first term, noted in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in early 2000 that the US should pay closer attention to India's role in the regional balance of South Asia for it "is not a great power yet, but it has the potential to emerge as one".²⁹ During his trip to the US in 2000, the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee seemed to return the complement by depicting India and the US as 'natural allies'. He referred to the shared commitment of democracy between the largest democracy and the oldest democracy in the world. Bush administration de-hyphenated the relationship between India and Pakistan as it made it clear that while it was keen on having good relationship with Pakistan, India would be treated on its own right and not in reference

to US ties with Pakistan. India's response to the changing American gesture was very positive. India was perhaps the only country to have responded positively and enthusiastically to Bush's controversial National Missile Defence (NMD) programme.³⁰

The transformation of Indo-US relations has been most visible in security relations. This change became possible when the United States lifted nuclear sanctions in the wake of 9/11. With less publicity but perhaps equal significance, it also eased export controls on so-called dual-technologies, which can serve both civilian and military purposes.³¹ Nuclear nonproliferation supporters fought a stiff rear-guard action to limit the scope of this loosening but lost out to those in the Bush administration who wanted a broader security relationship with India. The two governments started discussing a variety of possible arms sales from the US to India including P-3 naval surveillance aircraft, sophisticated counterbattery radars, and General Electric engines for India's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), a fighter plane that has been under development for more than a decade. The US and Indian armies, navies, and air forces have also moved rapidly following 9/11 attack to agree on programmes for joint exercises, improved technical coordination, and expanding training.

This was the larger context of Indo-US relationship when the US declared the War on Terror. India hoped to play a greater role in the post-9/11 Afghanistan and, therefore, declared unstinted support to the war. Within two days, the government had offered all logistic help to Washington. The Foreign Minister disclosed that India had established contacts at all political, executive, and operational levels and that India had expressed its readiness not just to give logistic help but also provide the staging ground for the US military operations.³²

The possibility of the Northern Alliance coming back to power after the decimation of the Taliban's control over important cities in Afghanistan also made India very much interested in providing full-fledged support to the War on Terror. India had been providing humanitarian and military assistance to the Northern Alliance. New Delhi had stepped up cooperation with Russia and Iran in an effort to keep the Pakistani-backed Taliban regime somewhat under pressure before the War on Terror began. Though the efficacy of these steps are questionable in the light of the growing strength of the Taliban at that time in Afghanistan, it is reported in June 2001 that India along with Iran was to provide 'logistic support' to facilitate a 'limited military action' planned by the US and Russia against the Taliban in case of the failure of the economic sanctions to bend the fundamentalist regime.

During the War on Terror, India did play some role in the war strategy against the Taliban. Initially, the US tried to carry on its war without too much interaction with the Northern Alliance but soon discovered that it was getting nowhere, and it then, perhaps as India had advised, utilised the Northern Alliance to break the hold of the Taliban and its ally Al Qaeda. Moreover, India, through its special emissary for Afghanistan, Satindra Lambah, contributed significantly to the formation of a new government in Kabul as well as in strengthening ties between the new Afghan authorities and India.³³ Many of the new Afghan leaders, like the defence, foreign, and interior ministers paid their first visit abroad to India. President Hamid Karzai's Indian connections also seemed to play a positive role for India. He holds a postgraduate degree from the Himachal University and is a royalist belonging to a family which was a staunch supporter of king Zahir Shah, who courted India over Pakistan in 1947.

One of the most important factors that brought India and Afghanistan closer is the shared border problems with Pakistan and shared sense of victimisation of cross-border terrorism. President Hamid Karzai reportedly charged Pakistan of not doing enough to stop cross-border infiltration by the Taliban and other militants. He handed over to the Pakistani President and his aides a list of names, addresses and phone numbers of ranking Taliban figures more than implying that their presence and movements were within the knowledge and perhaps had the approval of the regime there. Earlier, Karzai also sought Indian aid to deal with the terrorist menace and Prime Minister of India during his visit to Kabul in 2005, expressed firm commitment to provide all assistance to Afghanistan in combating terrorism, a pledge he reiterated later as well. The Afghan government interpreted the peace agreement between tribal leaders of Waziristan and the Pakistani government as a compromise amounting to tolerating Taliban activity.³⁴

However, the weakened position of Karzai whose control was limited to Kabul and the growing insurgency in the southern provinces and the eastern borderlands and mounting terror strikes in Kabul and other urban centres posed the most immediate challenge to state stability. Furthermore, the Northern Alliance remained divided with its leaders controlling many important provinces and not allowing the central administration to reach out to these areas.

The US's sudden re-embrace of Pakistan after Musharraf joined the War on Terror raised deep

concerns in India reminding it of the close strategic relationship between the US and Pakistan in the Cold War period. India's growing relationship with the US received a setback when the Bush administration assured the Indian government that India's terrorist problems would not be ignored, but that it was first necessary to prosecute the war in Afghanistan.³⁵ India's concern that terrorists form an undifferentiated syndicate was diluted by the treatment of the issue in a phased manner.

The arguments that 9/11 brought the US and India together to fight a common cause are partly true. The arguments are based on the logic that the US can no longer turn a blind eye to terrorism in Kashmir and Pakistan's role in it as terrorists form an undifferentiated syndicate. Though India maintained that terrorism had to be dealt with in its totality, the US was interested in dealing with those terrorists who were against the interests of the West. The US concentrated on the Af-Pak area³⁶ whereas the base for terrorism against India is in Punjab in Pakistan.

Following the deadly attack on Indian parliament by terrorist groups, there was a strong reaction from India in terms of military response, which moved large number of military troops to the Indo-Pak border areas. And to avoid war between two countries with nuclear weapons, the US developed dual-track policy to satisfy both the states. The new strategy was most aptly summed up by David Sanger of the New York Times. According to him, President Bush and his foreign policy team scrambled to avoid war in South Asia with a simple formula: 'daily phone calls to both sides'. Furthermore, the Islamic extremists' groups accused of carrying out the assault were treated as stateless terrorists threatening the stability of both India and Pakistan. President Bush never said publicly that the terrorists groups he wanted to be crushed had often acted as a surrogate for Pakistan's intelligence service. Besides, this dual-track policy resulted in dual pressure on both India and Pakistan. On the one hand, though the Bush administration has privately put pressure on General Musharraf to discourage and cease the export of terrorism from Pakistan, it put pressure on India, on the other hand, to resist from taking any action in response to Pakistan-based terrorist activities in India and open a dialogue with Islamabad on Kashmir. India continuously faced the dilemma resided between the desire for involving US intercession for pressurising Pakistan with regard to cross-border terrorism and the fear of inviting US mediation in the Kashmir dispute.³⁷ Washington's problematic relationship with Tehran on the nuclear issue and absence of effective supply routes to Afghanistan from the Central Asian region has made US's

dependence on Pakistan all the more important. Pakistan's importance to the US is reflected in Colin Powell's statement that the onus was on India to de-escalate the tensions between India and Pakistan.

The US had both negative and positive reasons for re-establishing a strong strategic relationship with Pakistan. On the negative side, Pakistan was clearly part of the terror network that consisted of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistan's ISI and other official and unofficial groups had supported both organisations, ideologically and materially. Pakistan was therefore vital if Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were to be prevented from fleeing Afghanistan. Pakistan could serve as a safety valve for those trying to escape US forces once they were introduced. Furthermore, Pakistan could collapse as the war on terrorism proceeded in Afghanistan. This would pose a number of problems for the US including the possibility that extremists might grab Pakistani nuclear weapons in the chaos. Pakistan, therefore, had to be saved from itself. Obama administration's Af-Pak strategy clearly sought to protect the territorial integrity of Pakistan on both the western and eastern front. On the western front it tried to suppress the Pashtunistan issue and on the eastern front it wanted dialogue on the Kashmir issue.³⁸

Obama's AfPak strategy carried ominous implications for India. It is argued that Pakistan having recovered some of its "strategic depth" or at the very least averted a loss of substantial territory on its western flank, would be emboldened to resume its disruptive asymmetric proxy war on its eastern flank. Furthermore, the feudal-military compact that governs Pakistan would remain in tact.³⁹ The Taliban Pashtuns have been targeting US and Pakistani military forces on the western frontier of Pakistan and are less interested in insurgency in Kashmir. It is argued that the Taliban bogey is even being entertained shows the extent of strategic confusion within Indian security discourse.⁴⁰ To India's disadvantage, there has been no policy statement under the Obama administration that unambiguously calls for dismantling the terror infrastructure on Pakistan's eastern frontiers.

It is further argued that America's policy has not significantly changed with the change of administration from republican Bush to democratic Obama.⁴¹ While Bush clearly flouted international law and did not pay heed to criticisms of America's unilateral action in Afghanistan by its NATO allies like Britain, France and Germany, Obama appeared to be democratic taking the partners along as well as involving other nations in discussions.

However during both the administrations, there was surge in military troops, no plan was developed to carry out drone attacks inside Pakistan's non-tribal areas⁴², Pakistan was engaged with increasing military economic and military aid to take on the Taliban extremists and an Al-Qaeda centric approach was followed overlooking the ISI-military-terrorist nexus in Pakistan. Thus, both the administrations' policies had ominous implications for India.

However, while during the Bush's regime Afghanistan was the theatre of operation, Obama administration developed Af-Pak strategy where instead of dismantling the ISI-military-terrorist nexus, importance has been given to protect the territorial integrity of Pakistan and socio-economic development of the border areas of Pakistan through economic aid packages which have every chance of being misused. Therefore, Obama's strategy seems to be more dangerous for India than the Bush's action. The conditionalities attached to the civil nuclear deal and the cumbersome process involved to make the deal effective and beneficial to India and the problem of intelligence sharing between the US and India that has come to the limelight during Hedley's interrogation further highlight the complications in Indo-US strategic relationship.

Obama's visit to India in the month of November 2010 has strengthened Indo-US strategic partnership on many accounts. First, the US supported India's bid for the permanent membership in the Security Council of the United Nations. Secondly, Obama announced that his government would lift curbs on Indian defence labs that were on the Entity List. Four of Indian labs came under the list. Thirdly, there were business deals that would both benefit India and the US. However, the US remained reticent about the Pakistan's role in propping up terrorist infrastructure.⁴³ Nevertheless, the culprits of Mumbai attacks and the continuing insurgency in Afghanistan found frequent references and a reference was made to the fact that they were operating from the Pakistani soil. Critics point out that Obama's visit was the result of the American need of employment creation for its own citizens than allowing India a larger role in world politics. Washington's silence on Pakistan's role in abetting terrorism and ever increasing aid to it for fighting it and for socio-economic development points to the US's continued dependence on Pakistan for its Central Asian strategy. The US's policy of containment towards Iran has made its dependence on Pakistan even more acute. A study conducted by the Foundation for National Security Research to assess India's strategic partnerships with major powers described the US support for India on Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan as “insubstantial and inconsistent”.⁴⁴

India and the importance of Afghanistan

India's interest in Afghanistan is not confined only to neutralising Pakistani influence in Afghanistan and denying it strategic depth. India's concerns in Afghanistan are also, to a large extent, separate from its concerns in Kashmir. Both India and Pakistan wanted to exercise influence in Afghanistan independent of the Kashmir issue.⁴⁵

In an interview, the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Rahimullah Yusufzai "the Lashkar has no presence in Afghanistan and we have no links with it. Unlike the Lashker which is focussed on Jammu and Kashmir, the Afghan Taliban concentrates on Afghanistan. We have never taken part in any attack in India, nor do we attack anyone at Pakistan's behest."⁴⁶ He further said, "Whenever we attacked the Indian embassy in Kabul or its consulates, we claimed responsibility. Last month's attack was also carried out by the Taliban fighters after we got intelligence information that RAW agents were holding a meeting there. The Taliban are not in any direct conflict with India. Indian troops are not part of NATO forces, they have not occupied Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have had historic ties".⁴⁷ What Mujahid said, may not be completely true, yet it shows how India's concerns in Afghanistan are independent of its concerns in Kashmir. So far, no Afghan regime in Kabul including the Taliban had taken any particular posture of challenging India's position on the Kashmir issue.⁴⁸ India's Central Asian strategy was dependent on a number of factors. India is not only concerned with Pakistan's increasing role in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it is also wary of greater Chinese and American role there.⁴⁹

India has wide-ranging and long-term interests in Afghanistan. It has trade and energy interests in Afghanistan. It seeks a democratic and stable Afghanistan not only to neutralize Pakistan's influence but also to increase its own influence there. Besides, India has to use Afghanistan as a bridge to tap into Central Asian energy resources.

1. Trade and Energy

India has significant trade interests in Afghanistan. The success of Afghan fruit and nut exports to India and India's grant of 50-100 per cent tariff concessions for Afghan exports of dried fruits, fresh fruits, seeds, medicinal herbs and precious stones under a preferential trade agreement and Afghanistan's grant of a 100 per cent margin of preference on eight Indian products including black tea, certain categories of medicines, refined sugar, cement clinkers

and white cement bear testimony to the fact of mutual dependence between India and Afghanistan in terms of trade. Furthermore, Afghanistan has a rich resource base of unexplored minerals like iron, chrome, copper, silver, gold, barite, sulphur, talc, magnesium, mica, marble, lapis lazuli, asbestos, nickel, mercury, lead, zinc, bauxite, lithium and rubies. Exploitation of oil and natural gas reserves in and around Afghanistan also promises huge potential. In the 1970s, Afghanistan's natural gas reserves were estimated at about 150 billion cubic metres. In the early 1980s, natural gas exports were in the range of 2.5 – 2.8 bcm a year, and constituted its main source of export revenues. It is due to the outbreak of civil war and ensuing instability that the upstream development in this sector halted.⁵⁰ Recently, Indian government has shown its interest in the iron ore blocks in the Hajigak mines in Afghanistan and plans to sponsor the Steel Authority of India proposal to set up a steel plant in that country.⁵¹ Stability in Afghanistan is, therefore, necessary for the regional powers like India for investment in and trade with Afghanistan and to explore the natural resources.

2. Democratic and Stable Afghanistan

India thinks a democratic and stable Afghanistan can neutralize Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan and help to protect and promote its trade interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. New Delhi believed that a stable and democratic Afghanistan would dilute Pakistan's insurgency in Kashmir. It would also lessen the volume of illegal trade of arms and narcotics. It is noteworthy that to ensure peaceful and stable transition from the Soviet period India worked with the Najibullah government to evolve a political consensus among all the representative Afghan groups. However, to contain Pakistani influence in Afghanistan which grew with the growth of Taliban's influence, India provided support to Northern Alliance. To promote democratic institutions and stability, India has taken up the role as one of the largest bilateral donors to the post-War reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. By the end of 2008, India became the fifth largest bilateral donor country behind the US, Japan, UK and Germany having pledged US \$750 million, committed US\$701.67 million and disbursed US\$204.26 million in diverse areas, including infrastructure, communications, education, health care, social welfare, training of officials, including diplomats and policemen, economic development and institution-building. These are the sectors which have been identified by the Afghan government as priority areas of development. While aid-giving by other International donors in Afghanistan through contracts/sub-contracts, embassies, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) or alternate delivery mechanisms through NGOs and INGOs has been stymied by lack of aid prioritisation, corruption, delays and inadequate involvement of the Afghan

government, India's aid is channeled through the Afghan government or works in conjunction with International donor community.⁵² Through consultations with local communities, Indian aid projects have generated tremendous goodwill among the Afghans. It is argued that augmenting economic growth in Afghanistan is critical to India's overall objective of integrating Afghanistan in the South Asian cooperative framework and reviving its role as a 'land bridge' connecting South Asia with Central Asia.⁵³

3. Afghanistan as a Bridge to Central Asia

India's special relationship with the Soviet Union provided New Delhi with existing economic links and a lively trade with the Central Asian republics. India provided a large, urban, educated elite, fluent in English, a functional Anglo-Saxon judicial system, industry and management based on Western lines and established and vibrant stock market to the Central Asian states who were converting to a market economy. The fact that there exist no overland routes between India and Central Asia as between them lie the Afghan and Pakistani territory and air transit is cost prohibitive has hampered trade. India's efforts in Afghanistan to construct a road linking Iran and Afghanistan and Central Asia is to bypass Pakistan, which never allowed Indian goods to travel into Afghanistan and beyond through its territory.⁵⁴ Central Asia currently is not only a hub of natural resources but it also provides a market of 200 million people.

Very close relationship with the Soviet Union, provided India with privileged access to the region. An observer remarked that during the Soviet era, Central Asia was “the non-visible farther side of the moon”, and that India was “perhaps the only non-communist country which could gain glimpses of this hidden side of the Soviet Union at that time”.⁵⁵ However, the entire scenario changed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Pakistan, India, Iran, China and the US began to spread their influence in the region through strategies of cooperation and confrontation.

Since the emergence of Central Asian states, India and Pakistan followed a consistent policy of getting closer to Central Asia at the exclusion of each other. Both believed that they could benefit from the economic vacuum left by Russia. However, they differed in their strategic objectives. India viewed the transition of the Central Asian states towards democratic structures and market economies as a drain out process of confrontational power politics and shifting alliances that would be settled by themselves.

Contrary to this, Pakistan viewed this transitional phase as the most suitable period to expand its influence through the spread of Islam. The fact that Central Asian states are predominantly populated by Muslims bordering on Afghanistan makes them susceptible to radical Islamic ideas. India's fear stemmed from instability in Central Asia engendered by border realignment, ethnic disputes, resurgent Islam and civil war. In New Delhi's perception this would allow Pakistan to spread its influence via Afghanistan through Islamic radical groups. Moreover, it would create a network of illegal drug and arms trade which would in turn affect India's interests in Kashmir. Pakistan has also tried to spread its influence through multilateral bodies like Economic Cooperation Organisation and Organisation of Islamic States.⁵⁶ India in order to contain Pakistan's influence in Central Asia, tried to strengthen relationship with each of the Central Asian states and with Iran. And in Afghanistan, it supported the Northern Alliance as an antidote to the Taliban.

Energy resources available in Central Asia have attracted many regional and extra-regional powers to invest in production, transfer and consumption of the resources. Central Asia is an alternative destination for energy-seeking countries which depended on unstable Persian Gulf for energy resources. Many countries wanted to reduce their dependence on Persian Gulf because of growing instability and monopoly over production and supply of energy resources.⁵⁷ India is one among them. In Central Asia, some of the conservative estimates put the oil reserves at 7 per cent and gas at 8 per cent of global reserves. One of the Indian policy advisors at the Confederation of Indian Industry said, "energy is the most critical imperative, and the most critical link in the strategic linkages that India is trying to build with Central Asia".⁵⁸

According to the International Energy Outlook, India was the fifth largest oil consumer in 2007 and its demand grew to almost 3 million barrels per day in 2008. At present, 68 per cent of its oil is imported, and its dependency on oil imports is expected to increase to 92 per cent by 2020. Afghanistan provides access to the vast energy resources and attractive markets of the Central Asian region. India's Central Asian strategy not only aimed at containing Pakistan's growing influence in the region, it has also shown its intention to respond to the great power diplomacy. For example, Phunchok Stobdan, former director of the Indian Cultural Centre, once suggested that the US's growing presence in the region "forms a compelling reason for India's reclaiming its geopolitical rights and responsibilities in Central

Asia”. India's competition with China for Central Asian resources is echoed by the statement made by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who said: “China is ahead of us in planning for its energy security. India can no longer be complacent”.⁵⁹

India's energy needs and its security concerns in Kashmir were affected by the growth of terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal arms and crime syndicates in Afghanistan and Central Asian region. Pakistan tried to foster its geopolitical interests through radical Islamic groups raising funds from drug trafficking and illegal arms trade whereas these groups have their independent plans to spread their influences in the Central Asian heartland. To consolidate their position there is every possibility that they play on the grievances of their co-religionists in the surrounding regions. Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov stated that fundamentalist Islamic organisations were training up to 400 young Uzbek and Tajik guerrillas at camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Uzbekistan accused three Pakistani organisations – Mezb-e-Harkat-e-Jihad, Devas-Ul-Ershad and the Islamic Ulema Society of clandestinely training hundreds of Central Asians at various centres in Pakistan with the task of carrying out terrorist attacks and destabilising the countries by overthrowing the governments.⁶⁰ Thus, their training in Pakistan and patronage from the Pakistani military and ISI created leverage for Pakistan to use them in Kashmir as well. However, the primary motive of Pakistan behind training these groups was to get a foothold in Central Asia and promotion of the Taliban was to facilitate Pakistan's role in Central Asia.

Afghanistan and its northern Central Asian neighbours being landlocked and without access to the sea incur high transportation costs. Most of the Central Asian states have an extroverted trade, that is, their trade outside the region greatly exceeds trade within the region. Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours need access to markets and sea either through Pakistan or Iran. However, Afghanistan's troubled transit and border relations with Pakistan being governed by the Afghan Trade and Transit Agreement of 1965 hinders Afghan trade with countries having huge economy like India. This agreement provides passage to Afghan goods between Afghan borders and seaports of Pakistan. Pakistan as a goodwill measure has allowed Afghanistan to transport some of its exports through the India-Pakistan land borders, but does not permit Indian goods into Afghanistan. Therefore, Indo-Afghan trade potential has been scuttled by the regional geopolitics where Pakistan wants to develop its ties with Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours at the cost of India.⁶¹

However, being denied an overland route to Afghanistan by Pakistan, India involved itself in building a road in Afghanistan that connects Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. So far, India has been dependent on Iran for its entry into Afghanistan and Central Asia. The 218 Km long Zaranj-Delaram road constructed in the remote southwestern Afghanistan provides Afghanistan access to sea-ports like Chabahar and facilitates its trade with India. It reduces Afghanistan's dependence on the port of Karachi that provided a single entry point into the world. Construction of ports and roads perform dual functions in expanding influence commercial and military. For example, the Gwadar port being constructed by the Chinese and Pakistani collaboration, seeks to transfer Central Asia's vast energy resources to world markets. However, this port has been described by Pakistan's Navy Chief as the country's third naval base after Karachi and Ormara and as an improvement in Pakistan's deep-sea water defence.⁶² China's interests in the port are to diversify and secure its crude oil import routes and to extend its presence in the Indian Ocean. In response to Pakistani and Chinese strategies in the Indian Ocean, India and Iran signed "Road Map to Strategic Cooperation"⁶³ during President Mohammed Khatami's January 2003 visit to India. India agreed to assist Iran in constructing the Chabahar port and road links between Iran, Afghanistan, and northward to Tajikistan.

India's Strategies to be an Influential player in Afghanistan and Central Asia

In order to increase their influence in Afghanistan and get to the natural resources of Central Asia, major powers developed a continental strategy based on military power projection, use of ideology and shrewd diplomacy. Military power projection was required both for minimising the role of other powers and for secured production and supply of natural resources. Terrorism, ethnic conflicts, civil wars and illegal drug and arms trade required military strategies in the region to put these forces at bay. As part of its intention to increase its military role in Central Asia, India developed military cooperation with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. For example, in 2004, Uzbekistan was commissioned by the Indian Air Force Mid-Air-Refuelling Squadron to build three giant IL-78 MKI refuellers. Kazakhstan signed a military cooperation agreement with India in 2002 for joint production of military hardware such as torpedoes and heavy machine gun barrels.⁶⁴ In August 2002, New Delhi announced that it would help train the newly formed Afghan army and contribute to the maintenance of its Russian built military equipment. This prompted General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan to warn India to 'lay off' the region. In May 2001, India had offered Tajikistan a US \$ 5 million grant. One year later it established its first military base outside

Indian territory, in southern Tajikistan.⁶⁵ In October 2011, Afghan President Hamid Karzai forged a strategic partnership with India. This partnership was the first of its kind that the government in Kabul had signed with a foreign country. The agreement, among other matters envisaged that India might train units of the Afghan security forces as the US seeks to withdraw its forces from the country in 2014.⁶⁶

Apart from the Pakistani government, there are scholars who argue that India plays a surreptitious role in Afghanistan apart from its contribution to reconstruction efforts there. Pakistan's government officially expressed its deep concerns about the Indian government's activities along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Pakistan accused the Indian consulates of having "less to do with humanitarian aid and more to do with India's top-secret intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing".⁶⁷ Pakistan's allegations about India ranged from charges of printing false Pakistani currency to carrying out acts of sabotage and terrorism on Pakistani territory. Pakistan accused India of setting up networks of "terrorist training camps" located inside Afghanistan, including at the Afghan military base of Qushila Jadid, north of Kabul; near Gereshk, in southern Helmand province; in the Panjshir Valley, northeast of Kabul; and at Kahak and Hassan Killies in western Nirmuz province. On September 1, 2003, the Indian consulate in Jalalabad was attacked. Kabul's categorical assurances that it would not allow any anti-Pakistani activities on its soil failed to satisfy Pakistan.⁶⁸ The Chief Minister of Balochistan province, Jam Muhammad Yusuf, declared on August 13, 2004, that the Indian secret services were maintaining forty terrorist camps all over Baloch territory. In July 2006, Senator Mushahid Hussain, chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated that "RAW is training 600 Baluchis in Afghanistan".⁶⁹

Christine Fair, a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, spoke at a New York roundtable in March 2009: "I think it would be a mistake to completely disregard Pakistan's regional perceptions due to doubts about Indian competence in executing covert operations. That misses the point entirely. And I think it is unfair to dismiss the notion that Pakistan's apprehensions about Afghanistan stem in part from its security competition with India. Having visited the Indian mission in Zahedan, Iran, I can assure you they are not issuing visas as the main activity! Moreover, India has run operations from its mission in Mazar (through which it supported the Northern Alliances) and is likely doing so from the other consulates it has reopened in Jalalabad and Kandahar along the border. Indian officials have told me privately that they are pumping money into Balochistan. Kabul has encouraged India to

engage in provocative activities such as using the Border Roads Organisation to build sensitive parts of the Ring Road and use the Indo-Tibetan police force for security. It is also building schools on a sensitive part of the border in Kunar – across from Bajapur. Kabul's motivations for encouraging these activities are as obvious as India's interest in engaging in them".⁷⁰ Furthermore, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the American officer commanding the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), had also asked the US to scale down irrelevant Indian activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan which are actually hindering US and NATO efforts in Afghanistan.

However, there are scholars who argue that fomenting rebellion in Baluchistan would jeopardise India's strong economic and strategic relationship with Iran as the Iranian regime also fears a Baluch rebellion inside Iran's southeastern border. Alienating Iran would cost India its land route to Afghanistan without the guarantee of an alternative passageway.⁷¹

Ideology as a factor

Like the military and intelligence activities to secure influence in Afghanistan and expand it to Central Asia, ideology is important in the post-Cold War era. In this era, realist tenets have been challenged by the rise of norms and ideas that call for ideological justifications for interest-maximising behaviours. Pakistan has tried to use Islam as an ideology to gain influence in the Central Asian region which received setback with the inception of War on Terror. According to Simon Shen,⁷² the United States works from a platform of liberal democracy and “human rights above sovereignty”, Russia proffers its own idea of “sovereign democracy” to the Central Asians, and China portrays itself as a non-interventionist “responsible state” in the region. In his view, India lacks a unique ideology to increase its influence in Central Asia. He is of the opinion that democratic values in the Indian constitution are simply regarded as another manifestation of an American constitutional prototype. And the Central Asian states already inclining towards liberal and democratic ideals would naturally be attracted to the US orbit given the American military and economic power.

According to Kurlantzick, China's peaceful rise and its non-interference strategy is catching the attention of most of the world's countries and thus India's non-alignment norm is overshadowed by China's shining offensive charm.⁷³ It is because India has gradually moved away from its own original position as the Non-Aligned Movement leader. Simon believes

India's ancient Hindu thought and modern Gandhi-style non-violence movements are either overly complex or highly moral in practice and therefore cannot be applied as an ideology to secure influence in the Central Asian region.

India's enormous contribution to the reconstruction process in Afghanistan can be viewed as an attempt to create a different image of India in the absence any unique and effective ideology. However, in the absence of any unique ideology, India has the chance of losing out to other major powers expanding their influence in the region. India is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Afghanistan. Therefore, India has an advantage to share its experiences with Afghanistan, which is undergoing state and nation-building process.

India's Diplomatic Initiatives

India has so far shunned any kind of large military role in Afghanistan and confined itself to reconstruction activities. It is opposed to the inclusion of the Taliban and sees the distinction between the good Taliban and bad Taliban as a flawed exercise. It is argued that India in its declaration of unequivocal support for the US led War on Terror put all the eggs in American basket. The Indian government cooperated with the US to a surprising degree by dovetailing their Afghan policy with the US's AfPak objectives by breaking down walls and bureaucratic obstacles between the two countries' intelligence and investigating agencies. China with its ideology of non-interference has refrained itself from taking up any major anti-Taliban role on the plea that it would affect the Uigur insurgency in Xinxiang province. Iran and Russia with American withdrawal from the region as their priority would slowly tone down their opposition to the proposal of Taliban's inclusion. India has so far diplomatically failed to engage these two countries in serious discussions on this issue.

India's opposition to Iran's nuclear programme and support for sanctions against it and India's lack of interest in the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline issue has hampered the strategic relationship between Iran and India. India has backed three US – supported resolutions against Iran in the International Atomic Energy Agency and is enforcing UN Security Council sanctions against Tehran. On the other hand, Pakistan has shown keen interest in the proposed pipeline and has been witnessed taking some concrete measures regarding this. India fearing the US's reprisal on the issue is on the back foot. There is a growing closeness between Afghanistan's three immediate neighbours – Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. At two significant summits India was not invited for assisting in resolving the Afghan crisis, one the trilateral

summit held in Islamabad for discussing future roles of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, and two, the security conference on Afghanistan hosted by Turkey. India was left with no choice but to rethink its policies along with the shifting roles.⁷⁴

In the post-Cold War era, there are marked changes in the relationship between Pakistan and Russia. While India has moved away from the Cold War time strategic relationship with the USSR in the post-Cold War era, Pakistan and Russia came closer as the former is thought to be vital in stabilising the situation in Central Asia and other parts of the former USSR. The long-term relationship between Pakistan and the extremist Islamic groups has given the former the leverage to broker peace in various regions in Asian continent. Whether Pakistan exercises enough control over these groups is questionable, the synergy between the Pakistani military and ISI with the extremist groups has induced various countries to engage Pakistan to broker peace.⁷⁵ The quadripartite summit of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan in Sochi hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev points to redefining of relationship between the two countries in the post-Cold War era. According to Vladimir Radyuhin what has made the Moscow turnaround is the realisation that “seeing Islamabad as part of the region's problems does not help to advance the Russian goal of playing a bigger role in the region. The Kremlin finally decided that Pakistan must be part of the solution. The format of four-way cooperation with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan should help Moscow prepare for the eventual pullback of the U.S.-led forces from Afghanistan: engage Pakistan, return to Afghanistan and tighten Russian hold over the former Soviet Central Asia”.⁷⁶ He further argues that the the Sochi summit “dimmed India's hopes of gaining a strategic foothold in Tajikistan. India and Russia had planned to jointly use the Ayni airfield, which India helped to renovate, but Indian presence there looks very doubtful in the context of the emerging Russia-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan axis. India will, of course, remain Russia's close friend and strategic partner, but it will have to learn to live with the new Russian-Pakistani bonhomie, just as Russia has taken in its stride India's entanglement with the U.S”.⁷⁷

India has moved closer to the US in the post-Cold War era with robust economic engagement. Strategically, India has received a de-facto nuclear power status and there were significant deals on the civil nuclear energy which Pakistan was unable to procure. However, it is noteworthy that America's Central Asian strategy has been dependent on Pakistan than India. While all sorts of favours that India received from the US were aimed at balancing China, Pakistan's concerns in Central Asia were respected by the US. It is argued that it is only if the

most unlikely of scenarios were to emerge – the complete break up of Pakistan into different territorial entities - that would then allow or enable India to extend its de-facto control (through puppet regimes or the like) into much of what is today territorial Pakistan, that India could replace Pakistan as the US's favoured South Asian base for its Central Asian concerns. India has never taken note of the US's role in Afghanistan to forge its Central Asian strategy which does not co-opt Indian interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Greater Central Asian strategy of America seeks to place Afghanistan and Pakistan in the framework of Central Asian geopolitics. It is interesting to note that in India both the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in their annual report 1995-96 nowhere refer to the US role in Afghanistan. Its singular obsession with Pakistan emerges as a recurring factor. MEA says that the situation in Afghanistan “continues to be unstable”, and goes on to say that it has been “further exacerbated by the interference of Pakistan directly and more so through its creation of the Taliban”.⁷⁸ Taking this a notch higher, MOD says that Taliban “were armed and trained by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence” and goes on to say that “Pakistan's attempts to install a pliable government in Kabul would have serious security implications for us”.⁷⁹

Just after the December 26 Mumbai attack, India decided to move away from US benchmarks and expectations in Afghanistan in the absence of open American support for it. India and Russia in a joint declaration called for a “coherent and a united international commitment” to dealing with the threats emanating from Afghanistan. India welcomed Russia's initiative to organise an international conference in the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, involving its member states and observers. India came out into open support of regional initiative on Afghanistan against the interests of the US.⁸⁰

The US has so far been able to pacify India by sending its senior officials to Delhi, assuring India of its commitment in Afghanistan to fight terror and change of Pakistani approach in fighting terrorism and by raising the Chinese spectre. For example, special representative for AfPak Richard Holbrooke and Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff came to India in the month of July 2010. Holbrooke said that as Taliban reconciliation still remained a distant prospect, the US's counter-insurgency operations would continue and India should not worry unduly about the specter of the powerful Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani network grabbing power in Kabul. Mullen, on the other hand, said that India was becoming needlessly obsessive about US arms supplies to Pakistan whereas the real strategic

threat to India was China.⁸¹

India's greater dependence on the US regarding Afghan operation has blinded it to take other countries sharing common concerns on Afghan issue seriously. India has failed to engage Iran, on which its Central Asian strategy depends, in discussions on the future of Afghan issue. Rather, it has estranged its relationship with Iran on a number of issues already mentioned. Russia has not been taken seriously by India on Afghan issue. Central Asia is considered to be strategic backyard of Russia. Any Indian strategy to expand influence beyond Afghanistan into Central Asia has to depend on Russia. It is noteworthy that after India held one of its first ever overseas joint-military exercises in 2003 with Tajikistan, growing Indian influence and the plans for the two airbases drew opposition from Russia which considers Tajikistan as its own area of influence.⁸² What concerned Russia was the perceived closeness between India and the US after 2001. Both Iran and Russia share the Indian concerns regarding the Taliban, spread of drugs and illegal weapons. Lack of common strategies among these countries regarding future of Afghanistan has driven a wedge between them. While India seeks the US presence in Afghanistan until terrorist infrastructures are completely destroyed, Iran and Russia being wary of the American presence in the region seem to be more anti-American than anti-Taliban.

Contrary to the Bush, Obama has narrowed down the target, which is Al Qaeda and not the Taliban. India has been considering the Taliban as big threat as any other terrorist group. Moreover, the alliance to fight terrorism under the common platform "War on Terror" is a post-2001 phenomenon. Previously, though terrorism was always there, there was no common understanding of who the terrorists were. The US never recognised the militant groups which were trained and had well groomed infrastructure in Pakistan launching terrorist activities against India as terrorists. They were considered the legitimate offshoot of the territorial conflict between the two states.

To sum up, India's interests and role in Afghanistan have been shaped by many factors. India sought a stable and democratic Afghanistan in order to reduce Pakistani influence there as part of its effort to arrest the problem of radical Islamism and illegal trade of drugs and weaken insurgency in Kashmir. However, India's interest in Afghanistan went beyond curtailing Pakistani influence there to include protection and promotion of its own trade and energy interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia which meant undercutting the influence of

other major powers too. To India's disadvantage, disintegration of the USSR led to the emergence of six Islamic Central Asia states instead of single friendly superpower. The fact that the Central Asian states are predominantly Muslim populated created an urgency in India to stem Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and Central Asia. India looked for a stable and democratic Afghanistan so that Pakistan could not take advantage of common religion by spreading radical Islamism. India tried to refrain from backing any warring faction during the Afghan civil war. However, increasing strength of the Taliban compelled India to take calculated measures to contain their influence. India supported the Northern Alliance with humanitarian and military assistance. India's strategies received a set back with the success of the Taliban. The War on Terror created hope for India that Pakistan's strategies in Afghanistan and Kashmir would be undermined.

The geopolitical realities that India lacked physical proximity to Afghanistan and lack of acquaintance between the US military and its Indian counterparts put India in a disadvantaged position in the War on Terror. On the other hand, reliance on Pakistan to ensure military and non-military supplies for Afghan operation given the poor communication facilities between Central Asia and Afghanistan and its inimical relation with Iran are the factors that led to America's greater dependence on Pakistan. Moreover, the US feared Pakistan's coercive measures in its potential to multiply support for the radical groups to the extent of making its nuclear weapons available to them.

India took an anti-Taliban stance because of its links with Pakistan though the growing realisation among scholars is that the Afghan Taliban imbibes Afghan nationalism and concentrates more on driving foreign forces out of Afghanistan than on insurgency in Kashmir. It is noteworthy that the Taliban government like all other previous governments had not taken any anti-India stance on the Kashmir issue. Indian government's anti-Taliban position created difficulty for India to play a major role in Afghanistan. It is pertinent to note that India has never rendered clear and open support for Afghanistan on Pashtunistan issue which carries enormous importance for the Pashtuns. And by maintaining an ambiguous stance after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, India distanced itself from the Pashtuns. India's humanitarian and military support for the Northern Alliance in the civil war period in Afghanistan and its anti-Taliban stance further eroded India's role in Afghanistan.

However, in order to increase its influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, India entered into agreements on military cooperation with Central Asian states and expressed its willingness to train Afghan army. It entered into strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan and raised the possibility that it might train the Afghan army after American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Some experts point to the reports of secret intelligence activity carried out by India through its consulates in Afghanistan to abet the secessionist movement in Balochistan as part of India's ambitious project of playing a major role in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Nonetheless, there are experts who question India's ability in playing such a role. India has taken upon itself a major reconstruction and development work in Afghanistan not only to earn good will of Afghans but also to increase connectivity to Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan in the absence of direct land route through Pakistan. However, diplomatically India has failed to seriously engage itself with Iran and Russia on the Afghan issue. Their partnership is the key to India's successful role in Central Asia in future.

Endnotes

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Conclusion

Afghanistan being situated in the midst of Central, South and West Asia has attracted the attention of major powers both for military and economic reasons. Its geographical situation provides both for making military maneuvers and checking the military moves of other major powers. It is not only central to the major powers' plan for reviving the Silk Route of past, it also provides South Asian market to the Central Asian natural resources. It is noteworthy that as a Rimland state, Afghanistan joins the Eurasian landmass with the Indian Ocean and thereby facilitates multidimensional strategies both continental and naval. It contains passes like Khojak, Gomal and Khyber and corridor like Wakhon corridor which join Eurasian Heartland with Indus lowlands. The role of the Soviet Union and the US in Afghanistan can be seen as their drive to acquire both continental and naval capabilities.

Economic underdevelopment of Afghanistan provided the required leeway to the major powers like the US and Soviet Union to invest in Afghanistan's modernisation and exert influence there. Afghanistan's multiethnic population invited interference of external powers as minorities in Afghanistan are the dominant ethnic communities in its neighbourhood. However, Afghanistan tried to maintain neutrality in the midst of pulls and pressures from the major powers. Its rugged topography put challenges before the major powers to forcibly intervene in Afghanistan. Afghanistan played one major power against another to maintain its neutrality. Balance of power was always maintained in Afghanistan by the major powers to prevent this geopolitically important area from falling into the sphere of influence of any particular power.

There were a number of factors that made the Soviet Union think that it was opportune time to tilt balance of power in Afghanistan in its favour in the 1970s. The Watergate scandal, attacks on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) by American Congress, increasing unwillingness of the Carter Administration to involve the US in conflicts situations, the fall of Haile Selassie, attack on American Embassy in Pakistan and the fall of Shah of Iran were viewed by Moscow as decline of American will and power to intervene in distant regions like West Asia and Southwest Asia.

The power vacuum in the region prompted the Soviet Union to move further south in order to reach the Indian Ocean and develop its naval strategy. It was argued that if Suez Canal was closed, the Soviet Union's sea communications with both India and Pakistan via the South Atlantic and Indonesia were even longer than those between the sub-continent and Western Europe, Japan, or the United States. Furthermore, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan could provide it with overland routes to Pakistan and India. More importantly, Soviet Union's military presence in Afghanistan placed itself only four hundred miles away from the vital oil region of the Gulf, posing a major threat to access to oil from the Gulf and oil shipments through the straits of Hormuz. The fact that the decision to militarily intervene in Afghanistan came largely from the Soviet military points to the important role played by geopolitical calculations in the Soviet decision.

The Soviets did not consider Afghanistan as a true socialist state that had undergone socialist revolution. There were serious differences between the Afghan and Soviet leadership. The Soviet Union had developed strong dislike for Amin who promoted purges and radical policies. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that the Soviet Union militarily intervened to save Afghan socialism. Furthermore, Afghanistan was neither a member of Warsaw pact nor of Comecon, though it enjoyed observer status with the latter group. Thus, there was no governmental obligation on the part of the USSR to militarily intervene in Afghanistan to protect the Afghan regime. So, the Soviet role in Afghanistan can be termed as helping a coup rather than supporting a revolution. People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan's (PDPA) support base was confined to Kabul and it did not have the support of rural masses.

Afghanistan was committed to a policy of Neutrality and Mutual Non-aggression with Soviet Union and pursued a policy of non-alignment. A careful analysis of the history of Afghanistan points to the fact that the Afghan rulers prioritised Afghan neutrality above all other needs of a modern state. People of Afghanistan played an important role as resistance forces against the British and Russian Empire. They supported Basmachi movement against the Russians and fought three wars against the British to protect their

country's independence. The rulers maintained strict neutrality during both the World Wars and became a part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) later. Therefore, neutrality was more important for Afghanistan than following any other ideology.

The US policies in Afghanistan till then did not pose an imminent threat to the Soviet Union. The American attention was more focused on the internal problems that Pakistan was facing. The flow of refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan gained considerable momentum by the end of 1978. During this time, the Carter administration was tightening the screws on the Pakistani junta on the twin issues of human rights and the nuclear programme. However, the US attention decisively shifted to Afghanistan after the Soviet Union militarily intervened in Afghanistan in 1979.

The American reaction to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was shaped by the need to contain the Soviet influence expanding further south. However, as the US perceived balance power moving in its favour as the Afghan war progressed, its objectives in Afghanistan changed. The US now was no longer interested in a neutral Afghanistan as it believed that Afghan mujahideen would come to power in future. This would allow the US the required leeway and maneuverability in the region to realise the aim of weakening the Soviet Union and spreading its influence over Eurasian Heartland. Diplomatically, the US slapped enormous sanctions against the Soviet Union to weaken it. However, it excluded the Eastern Europe from the purview of economic sanctions meant for the Soviet Union. The American plan was to move the Eastern Europe away from Soviet orbit of influence towards its own sphere of influence. More importantly, when many Afghans considered the jihad ended with the departure of Soviet troops, the US adopted a rollback policy which increasingly relied on Salafi Arab fighters who joined the jihad for very different reasons than Afghans had.

The US role in Afghanistan strengthened Islamic forces in the region. The Islamic dimension of the resistance was encouraged by Pakistan to keep the resistance dependent on it. Fighters from all over the Muslim world were encouraged to join the jihad in Afghanistan. The US sponsored Pakistan's policy of grooming mujahideen to raise jihad

in Afghanistan resulted in huge loss of human lives in Afghanistan and promoted illegal economy in the mujahideen controlled areas of Afghanistan and border areas of Pakistan. Militancy and drug-trade became transnational. Though the US assistance to the Islamic groups stopped after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the groups generated money from the trade of arms and drugs and this moved in a circular way and took the form of narco-terrorism. The American intelligence agency, the CIA, allowed the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan to handle arms and assistance during the Afghan war. The US brought many sophisticated weapons and missiles to fight Soviet forces in Afghanistan. For example, the first ground-to-air missiles in the form of American Stinger were introduced in Afghanistan in 1986. Hi-tech military weapons, like the F-16 and AWACS, were supplied to Pakistan by the US. The CIA did not monitor the inflow of weapons. It did not even ensure that the weapons reached the commanders in the field. The main recipients of the arms were parties in Peshawar who were also engaged in illegal drug trade.

Pakistan tried to develop nuclear weapon in such a security environment as the attention of the West was focused on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Dr. Abdul Qader Khan, the head of the Atomic Plant at Kahuta described Pakistan's success in developing uranium enrichment by centrifuge method in 1984. Promotion of non-state actors like militant groups weakened Pakistan as a state actor which created the fear of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of militants later.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, the US lost interest in Afghanistan as American attention was focused on the Gulf. The Islamic forces increasingly turned against the American interest in the region as Afghanistan was left conflict-ridden once the US objective was attained. After the disintegration of the USSR and with the emergence of independent states in the Eurasian Heartland, American interest in Afghanistan was revived and its interest in former Soviet Republics became more pronounced. The US was looking for an entry into Eurasian landmass that would allow the US to develop continental strategies. Adding to the importance of the region, the

natural resources hidden in the Central Asian region became globally known in the 1990s.

Though the Taliban emerged as a radical Islamic group in Afghanistan during the Afghan civil war, the US considered it as a stabilising force in Afghanistan and a counterweight to Iranian and Russian influence in Central Asia. To justify their support for the Taliban, the US officials said, on several occasions, that the Taliban should be acknowledged as an 'indigenous movement' and that they found 'nothing objectionable' in the steps taken by the Taliban to impose Islamic law. They also paid several visits to Kabul to meet the Taliban government functionaries. The US declared its neutrality in the Afghan civil war and withdrew its recognition of the national unity government of President Rabbani, and therefore, by implication, gave recognition to the Taliban. However, the bombings of the US embassies in East Africa in 1998 and unwillingness of the Taliban to cooperate with the US to apprehend Osama bin Laden distanced the Taliban from US. The relationship deteriorated further when several protests were organised in Washington which condemned violation of women's rights by the Taliban.

After the collapse of the USSR, the US looked for a global-scale overriding threat around which it could organise its geopolitical interests. International terrorism appeared to be such a threat after 9/11. The War on Terror in Afghanistan provided the US an entry into the Central Asian states. The US established military bases and secured transit rights in Central Asia for the military and non-military supplies to the western forces. The military bases in Afghanistan, Pakistan and in Central Asia provided the US the routes from the sea to the Eurasian landmass thereby raising the possibility to develop multi-dimensional strategies.

Geopolitical interests of major powers in Afghanistan engender a military perspective on peace and security. Evidences are many which point to the US adopting a military-driven policy in Afghanistan. In the first place, America took to war without applying legitimate methods to capture individuals who masterminded the 9/11 attack. Secondly, it allied with warlords knowing that the warlords were not less violent than the Taliban in order to

make its Afghan mission successful. Thirdly, it sidelined the socio-economic problems of Afghanistan. It is noteworthy that the US spent eleven times more on military operations in Afghanistan than it did on reconstruction, humanitarian aid, economic assistance and the training of Afghan security forces combined between 2001 and 2005. Fourthly, the US applied a top down approach to ensure security and socio-economic development in Afghanistan and it hardly made any serious effort to engage Afghanistan's tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and other local institutions in all these endeavours.

To pursue its geopolitical interests unilaterally, the US tried not to allow Russia, China and Iran any major role in the development of Afghan war strategies or in the peace initiatives. The US relied heavily on Pakistan, its Cold War days ally, for its war strategies and reconciliation plan. However, there has been growing anti-Americanism in Pakistan. American abandonment of Pakistan after the former's interests in Afghanistan were achieved was still fresh in Pakistan's memory. However, both America and Pakistan had a shared interest in promoting the Taliban. Still there were differences between them as to the way Taliban have to be reconciled, as to who should play the leading role in the reconciliation strategies and more importantly, regarding which the groups or men from the Taliban are to be inducted to the Afghan governance structure. While the US supported those groups which benefited it geopolitically to make its Central Asian strategy effective, Pakistan supported groups which not only helped it in Afghanistan but also undertook anti-Indian operations and strengthened insurgency in Kashmir. For an instance, the US wanted to curb the activities of Haqqani network while Pakistan assisted it with all kinds of support.

The militaristic and unilateral policies of the US in Afghanistan failed to secure the desired outcomes and there was rising domestic pressure on the American government to withdraw from Afghanistan as it was draining out both human and material resources. The US developed an exit strategy based on reconciliation and re-integration with the Taliban and hoped by reviving its old relationship with the Taliban and working through Pakistan; it could defend and promote its geopolitical interest. However, the US exit policy has not brought expected results. The Taliban has not shown enough interest in the

reconciliation plan and waits for the US withdrawal in 2014 as it remains a resilient force in Afghanistan on account of its ethnic attachment with the Pashtuns who constitute the majority. Pakistan makes common cause with the Pashtuns, who straddle both sides of the porous Durand Line. Furthermore, Pakistan wields control over the Haqqani network which perpetrates violence on NATO and US forces. In fact, the “reality is that the Taliban are nowhere near defeat and the Afghan government forces are nowhere near capable of maintaining peace and security. With regional players such as Pakistan, India and Iran and international big powers, all jostling to position themselves in the so-called Afghan endgame, the situation can only get more muddled”.¹

Unlike the Great Games of the past wherein the actors were only two Empires (the British and Russian) and two superpowers (the US and the USSR), the new Great Game has multiple actors like the US, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, India, China, and the Central Asian states. More independent regional powers and secret and shifting alliance between the states and non-state actors like radical religious groups add to complexity of the game. The major powers have different and conflicting geopolitical objectives in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s Afghan policy not only aims at acquiring strategic depth against India by offsetting power imbalance with it and strengthening insurgency in Kashmir, it is also directed to get to the natural resources of Central Asia, defuse Pashtunistan problem, and gain diplomatic leverages on international issues important to it by expanding control over the Central and Southwest Asia. India’s role has been to neutralise Pakistan’s influence and expand its own influence through engagement with other powers like Iran and Russia. The US is very much interested to establish its hegemony in the region while Russia does not want to shed its historical control over the region. Iran does not want extra-regional power like the US to expand control over the region. After Iraq lost its power position in the region, Iran thinks it has the necessary power capabilities to expand its influence in the region. Though the major powers are seemingly united against terrorism, they have different geopolitical objectives. Apart from the respective geopolitical objectives, they have concern over each other’s expansion of power in Afghanistan which results in weakening the fight against terrorism.

For a nation-state, realising national interests and security in the post-Cold War era has become very difficult given the complex nature of security environment. The end of bipolarity based on balance of power between the two superpowers removed the foreign policy restrictions on regional powers as they were no more like Cold War allies. Furthermore, growing interdependence and availability of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction to large number of state actors granted more independence to regional powers. Therefore, intra-state conflicts, prominence of the non-states actors like radical religious groups and more independence of regional powers pursuing their geopolitical interests independent of great powers characterise this era. There are also increasing cases of secret alliance between regional players and these non-state actors.

The Afghan problem can be addressed within a regional framework respecting Afghan neutrality and evolving strategies of regional cooperation with the initiatives and lead taken by the UN. Afghanistan's stability is dependent on the behaviour of its neighbours and extra-regional players like the US. Historically, Afghanistan pursued a policy of neutrality rather than joining any power-blocs or endorsing any ideology externally imposed. Therefore, solution to the Afghan problem lies in upholding its neutrality status. The geostrategic situation of Afghanistan has tempted major powers to intervene there. However, the lesson that is to be learnt is that no Empire or state has been able to occupy Afghanistan. The British and Czarist Empires, Soviet Union and United States failed to achieve their desired objectives in Afghanistan.

The Bonn conference held in December 2001 underlines the importance of upholding neutrality of Afghanistan and the role of UN in this regard. It states: “(the participants) request the United Nations and the international community to take the necessary measures to guarantee the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Afghanistan as well as the non-interference by foreign countries in Afghanistan's internal affairs.”² This principle was also incorporated in the declaration of Istanbul conference held in November 2, 2011. Chinmaya R. Gharekhan argues that “All that is needed is for the U.N. Secretary-General to appoint either a single person or a group of persons, all

highly respected internationally, to talk to the regional parties to see whether they would agree to conclude a solemn undertaking not to interfere.”³

To regulate the behaviour of regional powers which has so far been driven by their conflicting geopolitical objectives, certain mechanisms can be developed which can ensure sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. According to Gharekhan, “the mere signing of a declaration is meaningless without some teeth to enforce it. The “teeth” can be in the form of U.N. observers with the necessary mandate. The task of the observers will not be to use force to stop interference; that would not be practicable. Rather, it would be in the nature of a complaints mechanism. If any country suspects another of violating its obligations under the pact, it would lodge a complaint, with supporting evidence, with the observers. The country against whom the complaint has been filed must cooperate in the investigations; refusal to cooperate would be tantamount to admission of guilt. A country which refuses to be part of such a pact would also raise suspicions about its intentions. This idea can be further refined during the course of consultations”.⁴

The major powers need to shed military understanding of security purely based on their respective geopolitical interests, avoid quick military solutions to the problems and instead wait for a prolonged process of consultations and negotiations and take care of the socio-economic problems. Afghanistan needs economic assistance for its development and security. Afghan army needs to be properly trained to ensure security after the US leaves Afghanistan. Afghanistan also requires international support in order to turn into a democratic country by representing its multi-ethnic groups in the governance structure and conducting free and fair elections. Cooperation and understanding between the major powers can reduce the strength of radical groups and, therefore, bring them to negotiating table.

Containment strategy and adopting adversarial policies towards each other in Afghanistan have cost the major powers in terms of both men and money. This has also become a source of domestic political instability for them. For an instance, Pakistan runs the risk of

losing control over radical religious groups with which it promotes its interests in Afghanistan. Promotion of militancy as an important element of Pakistan's foreign policy has not only resulted in growing radicalisation of Pakistani society, it has also increased frictions between the government and military, weakening the state institutions. Similarly, US containment policy towards Iran and Iran's aspiration to be an influential player in an expanded region also adversely affect each others' interests.

Acknowledging Iran's stakes in Afghanistan, on June 23, 2011, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: "you cannot ignore Iran. Iran is a big player in the region and has a long border with Afghanistan and Pakistan."⁵ However, nothing much has been achieved on ground beyond these words to increase US-Iran cooperation, particularly, in relation to Afghanistan. In similar vein, Indian diplomats suggest that Pakistan has genuine concerns in Afghanistan and therefore there is an urgent need for Afghanistan-specific India-Pakistan dialogues. However, conflicts over other issues between the two countries have held such dialogues to hostage. In this larger context, the UN needs to play a significant role as it would lessen the fear that if a major power does not promote its influence in Afghanistan, their adversaries would take advantage of that and spread their own. The UN can be an effective check against a particular major power increasing its influence at the cost of others. However, the effectiveness of the UN depends on the lessons learnt in Afghanistan by the major powers that it has benefited none but affected all.

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