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Introduction

Amin Saikal and William Maley

After nearly a decade of bloodshed and political turmoil following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979, the withdrawal of Soviet combat forces from Afghanistan brings to an end the only episode of sustained foreign occupation in the country's modern history. The introduction of Soviet forces *en masse* resulted not simply in an unprecedented trauma for Afghanistan, but in a regional and global crisis which in a very real sense snuffed out the *détente* between the Superpowers which had developed in fits and starts from at least the late 1960s.[1] An end to the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan is a momentous development on two different levels. The people of Afghanistan have borne the brunt of Soviet military activities, and an evacuation of Soviet troops is for them an occurrence of singular importance. But they are by no means the only actors to have felt the impact of the war. Other regional states have been forced to adjust to the Soviet presence, and this has influenced their domestic political structures and their relations with each other. The Soviet Union has been affected in manifold ways. And even at the global level, the Afghan crisis has impinged on the international relations of the USSR. The purpose of this book is to examine the more important consequences of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

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The Geneva Accords on Afghanistan of 14 April 1988, concluded under the auspices of the United Nations between the Soviet-backed communist regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the Government of Pakistan, and jointly guaranteed by the Soviet Union and the United States, provided the overall framework for the Soviet withdrawal. They met with widespread international approval, and also delivered a diplomatic triumph for the United Nations, which for some time prior had been under mounting criticism for extravagance and inefficiency.

Yet the Geneva Accords could at best furnish a starting point for a comprehensive settlement to what is an exceptionally complicated problem. They did not provide for transition to a legitimate government in Afghanistan based on the claim of Afghans to determine their own future free of outside interference—and thus they left one of the key elements of the Afghan problem unresolved. None the less, as Soviet troops were withdrawn through 1988, the further weakening of the Kabul regime[2] ultimately prompted an exasperated Soviet leadership to commence direct talks with the Afghan Islamic resistance forces (*Mujahideen*)—thereby meeting a longstanding resistance demand. In early December, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador to Kabul Iu.M. Vorontsov met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, with a *Mujahideen* delegation headed by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani. These discussions have opened new avenues through which a viable settlement may ultimately be procured.

Afghanistan is indeed a very complex political unit. The Afghan crisis of the last decade finds its roots in this complexity. Whilst the external boundaries of the Afghan state had largely been settled by the end of the nineteenth century, the degree of control exercised over its territory by the central state administration remained comparatively feeble.[3] Afghan society has been marked by sharp divisions on ethnic, linguistic, tribal, and even sectarian lines, and between country and city. The cleavage between the important tribally-organised Pushtuns and the rest of the population (also split into a number of different groups) has always been sharp. Amongst the Pushtuns, tribal rivalries have frequently been intense. Furthermore, whilst the overwhelming majority of Afghans are Sunni Muslims, a significant minority, of 15-20%, are adherents of the heterodox

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Shi'ite sect. The most important units of social organisation have historically been tribal or local, with political and economic interactions based on Islamic and customary law, rather than on decrees from the capital. Kabul remained remote and relatively unimportant.

When the central state intruded upon the prerogatives of important non-state actors, a clash could quickly develop. This happened in 1928-1929, when the reformist King Amanullah, who had succeeded in securing Afghanistan's sovereignty in foreign as well as domestic affairs, was overthrown in a revolt led by a Tajik bandit known as *Bacha-i Saqao* ('The Son of the Water Carrier').[4] The rule of the *Bacha* lasted only a matter of months, and he was displaced with relative ease by General Nadir Khan, a prominent Pushtun with royal connections. Nadir was assassinated in November 1933, and his throne went to his nineteen-year-old son, Mohammad Zahir. The new king understandably showed no inclination to rock the boat. For nearly thirty years, he left the running of the country first to his two uncles (1933-1953) and then to his cousin and brother-in-law Mohammad Daoud, Prime Minister from 1953-1963, and, following a 1973 coup against the King, President of the short-lived Afghan Republic until the April 1978 PDPA coup. Kabul's interventions in the countryside throughout this period of extended stability were as a rule carefully planned, and the clash of 1928-1929 was not repeated. But paradoxically, the contentment of the countryside with Kabul's behaviour disguised the fact that forces were developing in the capital which had the capacity to overthrow the government, even though they had no basis on which to secure the loyalty of the powerful rural population.

The most important of these forces was the small, factionalised, but strategically-placed communist movement. In the mid-1950s, Daoud was eager to embark on a limited process of state-building for which, however, he needed outside financial backing and arms. This was not forthcoming from the United States. Daoud's need for arms sprang in part from a border dispute with Pakistan—and as the US was at the time allied to Pakistan, its response was to advise Daoud to resolve the dispute by diplomatic means.[5] This drove Daoud into the hands of the post-Stalin leadership of the Soviet Union, which was seeking to counterbalance American penetration of the region. As a result,

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the USSR embarked upon a generous process of economic and military aid,[6] as it did also for India, another non-aligned regional state in dispute with Pakistan. This aid was sufficient to give the Soviet Union a very strong infrastructure of influence in Afghanistan. In particular, the Soviet Union was assiduous in cultivating radical elements in the tiny Afghan intelligentsia, and in building support for the USSR amongst largely de-tribalised youth sent to the Soviet Union for military training. The eventual result was the emergence by the mid-1960s of two minute but well-positioned pro-Soviet factions, the *Khalq* ('Masses') group led by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, and the *Parcham* ('Banner') group headed by Babrak Karmal. From the very beginning, relations between these two groups were tense, in part due to their different social constituencies, but also because of hostility between their leaders. The *Khalq* was dominated largely by Pushtuns of rural origin, whereas the *Parcham* derived backing mainly from urbanised speakers of Dari (a dialect of Persian). In 1965, the factions were organisationally united in the PDPA, but in 1967 the party split, and it was only in 1977, under Soviet pressure, that it re-formed.[7]

The remoteness of these factions from Afghan society can hardly be overemphasised. Yet in the hot house of court politics, especially during the liberal climate of the 'constitutional period' following Daoud's resignation in 1963, they were able to play a larger role than their size merited. And a tactical alliance between Daoud and the *Parcham* faction, informally approved by the Soviet leadership, was crucial in triggering the July 1973 coup against the monarchy.[8] *Parcham*'s joy of course was short-lived, as Daoud moved to rid himself of those *Parchamis* and *Parcham* supporters who figured in his first republican Cabinet; and in some ways sought to distance himself from the Soviet Union.[9] By 1978, Daoud appeared untrustworthy to both the Soviet leadership and the communists in Kabul. Thus, when he moved to crack down on the PDPA leaders following a large public demonstration in April 1978, there was little to deter his opponents from attempting a coup. *Parchamis* in the Soviet-trained-and-equipped Afghan Air Force and Tank Brigade had little difficulty in liquidating Daoud and most of his immediate associates. Within a matter of days, the PDPA leaders announced the establishment of the 'Democratic Republic of Afghanistan', to which the Soviet Government immediately

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pledged its full support. Nur Mohammad Taraki was appointed President and Prime Minister, with Karmal and Amin each serving as Deputy Prime Minister.

The cleavage between the PDPA and the bulk of Afghan society sabotaged its attempts to consolidate its rule, despite extensive Soviet support, confirmed in a Treaty of Friendship between the regime and Moscow signed in December 1978. Its policies—including ill-considered 'land reform' proposals and decrees on the status of women[10]—were from the point of view of most Afghans not only unnecessary and provocative but repulsively anti-Islamic. Combined with the insensitivity of cadrés charged with imposing the new policies, this prompted a series of rural uprisings, which began in late 1978 and spread swiftly in spring and summer of 1979. The regime was in no position to deal effectively with this opposition, for it had rapidly been rent by the resurfacing of the old split between the *Khalq* and *Parcham*. Karmal and his associates were first sent abroad on diplomatic postings, and then expelled from the party in their absence. At this point, most headed for Moscow. Yet even within the *Khalq* faction, unity could not be maintained. In September 1979, the Soviet leadership plotted with Taraki to remove Amin, Prime Minister since March of that year and the firmest proponent of radical change through mass terror, and to replace him with Karmal. The Soviet leadership had always preferred Karmal and his faction, which they saw as both more sophisticated politically and more reliable ideologically. However, the plot miscarried disastrously; Taraki was eliminated by Amin, who replaced him as President and leader of the PDPA. This, and the deteriorating military situation in Afghanistan, confronted the Soviet leadership with a considerable dilemma—whether to intervene to save a collapsing Soviet-backed regime, or to let it collapse, with all the implications that such a collapse would carry for Soviet interests not only in Afghanistan but elsewhere in the world. The Soviets decisively resolved this dilemma when they despatched their invasion force to Afghanistan in late December 1979, killing Amin, replacing him with Karmal and citing the 1978 Treaty in defence of their action.[11]

Any hopes the Soviets may have entertained for a swift victory were quickly confounded. Rather than suppressing popular opposition to the regime, the introduction of Soviet forces boosted it. The use of terror against the civilian population, far

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from undermining the determination of the opposition, simply fuelled hatred of the invaders and their surrogates.[12] Resistance, which to that point had largely been localised, took a national character, focused on the Islamic forces known as *Mujahideen*. Resistance political parties, which previously had attracted little attention, became conduits for the supply to affiliated field commanders of military aid sent by states affronted by the Soviet invasion. Of these, the most important proved to be Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China and the United States—not to mention Pakistan, which not only provided haven for a population of Afghan refugees which by 1988 came to number over three million, but also facilitated the flow of arms to the *Mujahideen*, and housed the headquarters of the seven most important Sunni resistance parties.

These parties, while all Islamic, reflected the influence of different strands of thought within Islam. Four were touched by radical ideas which had developed in other parts of the Islamic world,[13] although in varying ways. These were the *Hezb-i Islami* (Islamic Party) of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a party of the same name led by Yunis Khalis, the *Jamiat-i Islami* (Islamic Society) headed by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, and a very small organisation, the *Ittehad-i Islami* (Islamic Alliance) of Professor Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Of these, Rabbani's developed into the best-organised and most moderate. A further three displayed the influence of democratic tendencies within the framework of traditional Afghan Islam, and were at one in championing the claim that former King Mohammad Zahir, living in exile in Rome, could play a constructive role in resolving the Afghan crisis. These were the *Harakat-i Enqilab-i Islami* (Islamic Revolutionary Movement) of Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi; the *Jabhe-i Najad-i Melli* (National Liberation Front) of Professor Sibghatullah Mojaddedi; and the *Mahaz-i Islami* (Islamic Front) of Ahmad Gailani. Relations between these various parties were often poor, with Hekmatyar seen as particularly ambitious and obstreperous. None the less, these parties managed to form a loose coalition in May 1985 under the title of *Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen*. While this alliance excluded a number of Shi'ite parties based either in Afghanistan or Iran, it brought together the parties whose field commanders would be crucial to a viable settlement of the Afghan problem.[14]

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The activities of these field commanders were instrumental in creating the Kremlin's post-invasion dilemmas.[15] By their determined armed resistance, augmented from mid-1986 by the supply from Western countries of Stinger and Blowpipe anti-aircraft missiles, they succeeded—despite their relative lack of unity—in denying the Soviet Union the *political* objectives which underpinned the invasion. This, together with the palpable weakness of the Kabul regime even after the replacement of Karmal by his fellow *Parchami* Dr Najibullah in May 1986, finally prompted a new Soviet leadership generation under General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to use the veil of a 'negotiated settlement' as cover for a Soviet retreat.

The way in which this was managed is examined in William Maley's chapter. His concern is to explain the origins of the Geneva negotiating process from which the April 1988 Accords issued, to identify the main provisions of the Accords, and to evaluate the Accords as legal and political documents. He concludes that the omission of any provision for the exercise by the Afghan people of their internationally-backed right to self-determination remitted the resolution of the Afghan conflict to the battlefield, at potentially great cost for the civilian population.

The prospects for orderly government in Afghanistan are taken up by Louis Dupree. He outlines in considerable detail the cultural responses which prevented communist rule from taking root in Afghanistan, and draws on these to elucidate questions relating to the repatriation of the external refugee population, and the forms which government in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal may take in the medium-to-long term. He believes that in the long-run, a federated Islamic republic based on substantial regional autonomy provides the best prospect for effective resolution of the Afghan conflict, and that efforts by outside regional powers to determine Afghanistan's political future are likely to be fruitless.

The consequences of Soviet withdrawal for the regional states of Pakistan, Iran, and India are explored in detail by Amin Saikal. He notes that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provoked complex adjustments in the regional and global positions of each of these powers, and that these adjustments determine in part the implications for the states of Soviet withdrawal. None the less, these are also partly determined by exactly what happens in Afghanistan in the wake of Soviet withdrawal, and by changes

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which may consequently take place in the foreign policies of the other regional states. He draws on three broad scenarios of political developments in Afghanistan in order to investigate the more important of these implications.

The consequences for the Soviet Union of its Afghan debacle are discussed by T.H. Rigby. While doubting that the impact of the withdrawal will be deep-going or persistent, he sees substantial economic and political advantages flowing from the Soviet leadership's willingness to cut its losses in Afghanistan, and argues that important theoretical conclusions may be derived from the Afghan experience. Taking a longer perspective, he points to the distinctive attitudes of Soviet veterans of the war (*afgantsy*), and of Muslims in Soviet Central Asia alienated by the prosecution of the war, as factors which may impact seriously on Soviet domestic politics in the future.

Geoffrey Jukes focuses on the lessons which the Soviet armed forces may be disposed to draw from the Afghan experience. He notes that the armed forces are largely prepared for major war against the US and its allies, and that the forces which invaded Afghanistan were ill-equipped to engage in counterinsurgency activities. None the less, because of this very focus on major war, the lessons which could be learned from the war in Afghanistan were necessarily of minor relevance, something reflected in the muted treatment which the war received until 1986 in the military publications *Krasnaia zvezda* and *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*. He emphasises that as a consequence of the official policy of *glasnost'* ('publicity'), the Soviet armed forces are now meeting with criticism on a range of grounds, of which the conduct of the Afghan war is but one.

The reactions, to the withdrawal, from Soviet allies in Eastern Europe are investigated by Robert F. Miller. He identifies distinctions which the Soviets have drawn between different categories of alliance partner, and argues that the withdrawal from Afghanistan marks not simply a change in Afghanistan's status, but tacitly a breakdown in the distinct category of states of 'socialist orientation'. He identifies liberal and conservative positions in the reactions of Eastern European states to the withdrawal from Afghanistan, but emphasises that it is premature to conclude from the fact of the withdrawal that the Brezhnev Doctrine is on the point of collapse.

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The position of the withdrawal in the complex politics of Sino-Soviet relations is discussed by Leslie Holmes. He makes it clear that the withdrawal alone will not allay Chinese suspicions of Soviet global intentions; and after outlining the emergence of the Sino-Soviet dispute, identifies the different ways in which China was influenced by the Soviet invasion. He notes a number of factors which may impinge upon Sino-Soviet relations *other* than the three which the Chinese have reiterated—Afghanistan, Border Forces, and Kampuchea—and concludes that while relations between the two powers may improve appreciably, this is unlikely in the changed context of the 1980s to pose a threat to the West.

The place of the Afghanistan 'settlement' in the future of world politics is analysed by Richard A. Falk. He regards effective opposition to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as one of the few genuine triumphs of the approach to foreign policy of the Reagan Administration. He sees support to the *Mujahideen* as very different from support for the Nicaraguan Contras; the former, in his view, advances the cause of self-determination while the latter inhibits it. He argues that a thoughtful Western response may reinforce those Soviet leaders who favour the withdrawal, and contribute to a solid footing for a new *détente*, and at least a dramatic muting of the Cold War. While the indifference of the Geneva negotiators to the fate of the Afghans during the transition period points to the primacy of geopolitics, the effectiveness of the Afghan resistance illustrates the primacy of politics over mere military strength in world affairs. Noting that the withdrawal of Soviet forces does not add up to the attainment of peace and justice for the Afghan people, he concludes with a powerful plea that they not be abandoned and forgotten by Western governments.

The volume concludes with a chapter by J.L. Richardson, who seeks to identify certain key themes which run through the earlier chapters, and to delineate the characteristics of the Afghan crisis—notably the abundance and decentralised character of actors—which made it peculiarly difficult to manage. In doing so, he notes the contrast between the Afghan case and the earlier precedent of negotiated US disengagement from the war in Vietnam, in the context of more general ideas about the conditions conducive to the effective practice of crisis diplomacy.

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FOOTNOTES

1 See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985) p.887.

2 Soviet concern became especially marked after a publicly-acknowledged coup attempt against the regime: see BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts* FE/0292/C/5, 26 October 1988. On 13 November 1988, Mikhail Leshchinskii observed on Soviet television that 'the party, as before, is being torn by contradictions between fractions and wings' and that the PDPA 'has no support in the people': BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts* SU/0309/A3/1, 15 November 1988.

3 These processes are discussed from somewhat different perspectives in Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization 1880-1946* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969); Hasan Kawun Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); and Michael Barry, *Le Royaume de l'Insolence: La résistance afghane du Grand Moghol à l'invasion soviétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984).

4 This involved episode is examined in greater detail in Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); and in M. Nazif Shahrani, 'State Building and Social Fragmentation in Afghanistan: A Historical Perspective', in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner (eds.), *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986) pp.23-74.

5 For a discussion of US diplomacy in this period, see Leon B. Poullada, 'Afghanistan and the United States: The Crucial Years', *The Middle East Journal*, vol.35, no.2, Spring 1981, pp.178-190.

6 Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985) pp.21-28.

7 See Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983) pp.23-63.

8 On the politics of the 'constitutional period', see Sabahuddin Kushkaki, *Daha-i Qanun Asasi: Ghaflat Zadagi Afghanha wa Fursat Talabi Rusha* (Peshawar: Shurai-i saqafati Jihad-i Afghanistan, 1986).

9 This brought him into open conflict with L.I. Brezhnev during a visit to the Soviet Union in April 1977: see Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account* (McLean: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988) pp.178-179.

10 On land reform, see Latif Tabibi, 'Die afghanische Landreform von 1979: Ihre Vorgeschichte und Konsequenzen', unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 1981. On the position of women see Nancy Hatch Dupree, 'Revolutionary Rhetoric and Afghan Women', in M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (eds.), *Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1986) pp.306-340.

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