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THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE AFGHAN WAR

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Afghanistan is a barren, geographically isolated land, with few resources and a largely illiterate nomadic population. However, despite its limited intrinsic importance, it occupies a geographic position that has long been recognized as providing a buffer between the Soviet Union and the South Asian subcontinent, as well as protecting certain routes of access to Iran. Its strategic significance was evident to Alexander the Great, who needed it as a stepping stone to conquests in India. Throughout the 19th Century, the British Empire fought in Afghanistan as necessary to protect its buffer status from persistent Russian expansionism. Britain's role as protector continued until World War II, including the sponsorship of a coup in 1929 necessitated by Soviet efforts in Afghanistan throughout the 1920s.

Soviet and Russian efforts to achieve hegemony over Afghanistan display a remarkable historic continuity, although the nature of those efforts has varied considerably over time. Those efforts were largely unsuccessful until the modern period, when a number of critical international conditions changed in the Soviets' favor. The aftermath of World War II brought the decline of the British Empire and hence the decline of Britain's ability and will to maintain Afghanistan's buffer state role. The Afghan government therefore appealed to the U.S. to take up the British role, much as the governments of Greece, Turkey and Iran appealed at the same time. However, the U.S. refused to replace Britain, due initially to a feeling that Afghanistan was intrinsically unimportant and later to a competing alliance with Pakistan. Nonetheless,

in this period U.S. military capability in the region exceeded Soviet capabilities, and a direct Soviet thrust into Afghanistan would almost certainly have been repelled by the U.S. in the cold war of the 1950s. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the Vietnam war bled American military capabilities, and subsequently post-Vietnam anti-military attitudes led to deterioration of the American logistics capability to support forces in such a remote region as Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the Soviet Union engaged in a steady military build-up which by the late 1970s yielded the Soviet Union a logistical network capable of supporting operations in remote areas such as Angola, Yemen, Ethiopia and Afghanistan.

But much more than relative military logistics changed in this period. During the 1970s the Soviet Union lost its power base in the Middle East. Soviet bases were expelled from Egypt, Soviet diplomats were excluded from the principal Middle East diplomatic negotiations, and even the Soviet Union's erstwhile allies, Syria and Iraq, frequently proved undependable -- as for instance when Iraq periodically executed the members of the pro-Soviet communist party. Similarly, in South Asia, the Soviet Union lost its position of power in the subcontinent with the fall of Indira Gandhi's first regime to the Janata Party coalition. On a global scale, Soviet pressures on its neighbors created an effective, although unofficial, entente among Japan, China, the ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia, the U.S., and Western Europe. In both the Middle East and the Muslim areas of South Asia, Muslim fundamentalism became increasingly important in the latter 1970s; the activities of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran were only the most dramatic evidence of a phenomenon which led Pakistan to seek ways to run its economy without interest rates and stimulated other forms of fundamentalist Muslim policy elsewhere on the periphery of the Soviet Union. Given the large Muslim population of the

Soviet Union, the rise of Muslim fundamentalism on the Soviet periphery was a threatening development. Thus, a series of regional trends provided incentives for the Soviet Union to take countervailing action.

Meanwhile, detente with the U.S. increasingly appeared less useful and less important to the Soviet Union than Soviet leaders had believed earlier in the decade. The Jackson Amendment had cramped the flow of technology to the Soviet Union, and world economic conditions had made access to Western technology less fruitful for the development of Eastern Europe than would have been estimated in the booming years when detente was initiated. SALT II appeared to be in trouble in the U.S. Senate. Detente had not prevented the emergence of a Sino-American relationship which the Soviets perceived as intensely threatening. Thus, the benefits of detente were minimal. The costs of losing detente also appeared to be minimal because the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate U.S. appeared unwilling to defend its interests in the manner of the 1950s and 1960s, and it presented no effective opposition to Soviet inroads in Ethiopia, Angola and Indochina, or to Cuban operations in these and other areas of the world.

Within Afghanistan itself, Soviet policies had undergone a series of successes and partial reverses. Beginning in 1956, the Afghan government abandoned its hope for U.S. support and adopted pro-Soviet, socialist policies. The pro-Soviet moves, reflecting the changed balance of influence in the region, gave way to a period of more liberal Afghan rule, but were followed in the mid-1960s by the reimposition of a pro-Soviet, pro-socialist government under Prime Minister Daud and by Soviet support of the communist party, Khalq, from 1966 on and of its splinter-competitor, Parcham, from 1968 on. From here on, in each succeeding phase of Afghan political evolution, the Soviets achieved more of their goals at the beginning of each new regime but faced dangers of backsliding

away from Soviet policies as each successive regime matured. Disillusioned with Daud, the Soviet Union support Taraki's revolution. The revolution under Taraki in April 1978 made Afghanistan a communist state in its domestic political structure, domestic policies and foreign policies, and brought into force a Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty and a series of other treaties which advanced Soviet objectives. The accession of Hafizullah Amin threatened some Soviet influence in Afghanistan, however, and the emergence of a fundamentalist Muslim challenge to the communist regime under Amin risked the whole of Soviet gains and threatened humiliating defeat of a government which was not only supported by the Soviet Union but actively guided by thousands of Soviet military and civilian advisers.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 sought to avoid potential loss of previous of Soviet gains in Afghanistan and to avert the potential risk of a Muslim movement which might eventually infect the Soviet Union itself. Simultaneously, the invasion moved the Soviet Union southward toward its historic goal of achieving a warm water port; this goal the Soviet Union had pursued for centuries, including most recently through its proposal to form a common market, comprising itself and South Asians, which would incidentally provide the Soviet Union with the desired access to the Indian Ocean. The invasion, followed by subversion of tribes to the south, offered a potentially more effective strategy. Moreover, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would provide Soviet military power with access to the heart of the South Asian sub-continent while simultaneously providing the Soviet Union with bases from which to influence events in Iran and to deter any U.S. military intervention to free American hostages held in the U.S. embassy in Tehran. In short, the Soviet Union was able to use military power to reverse the geopolitical consequences of its diplomatic defeats in both regions during the 1970s. The coincidence of this Soviet opportunity with Indira Gandhi's return to power in India presented the Soviet Union

with an opportunity to consolidate Soviet influence in the Indian subcontinent, assuming that Mrs. Gandhi could be induced to maintain her traditional pro-Soviet diplomatic posture. This provided the Soviet Union with its best opportunity for breaking out of the encircling (U.S.-Japanese-Southeast Asian-Chinese-European) entente which increasingly limited Soviet options throughout the world. In short, Afghanistan offered the Soviet Union the opportunity to turn a decade of defeats into a pair of power positions in the regions of the world where the principal Soviet strength (military power) was at maximum effectiveness and the West's principal strengths (diplomatic and economic attractions) possessed minimal significance.

The U.S. Response to the Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought the U.S. to the support of Pakistan. This outcome was determined in substantial part by the U.S. decision after World War II to refuse support for Afghanistan and to align itself with Pakistan through the SEATO Treaty and through the U.S.-sponsored CENTO Treaty. Although Pakistan denounced SEATO during the Vietnam War, when that treaty appeared to have potential costs for Pakistan, the U.S. relationship with Pakistan was reaffirmed in various ways even in the 1970s. During the Indo-Pakistan War over Bangladesh's successful efforts to achieve independence, the Nixon Administration followed a policy of "tilt toward Pakistan," which not only firmed up the U.S. relationship with Pakistan but also alienated India and Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the U.S. relationship with Pakistan naturally nudged both India and Afghanistan closer to the Soviet orbit. These trends were dramatically accelerated when, in establishing direct contact with China for the first time since 1949, Henry Kissinger arranged for Pakistan to be the stepping stone for his secret trip to China. Hence, the U.S. employed Pakistan, India's most immediate enemy, in an effort to establish a closer relationship with China, India's most important enemy.

After the Kissinger trip, India signed a Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union. The partial alignment of India with the Soviet Union symbolized by that treaty faded into a more even-handed non-alignment after Mrs. Gandhi was defeated and replaced by the Janata Party. However, the return of Mrs. Gandhi and her pro-Soviet view to power in New Delhi simultaneously with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the subsequent U.S. focus on supporting Pakistan and developing closer relations with China, returned India to an anti-American posture, even though Mrs. Gandhi quickly abandoned a policy which initially appeared to condone the invasion. The focus of U.S. policy on Pakistan's problems, although partly comprehensible under circumstances where Pakistan had become the principal base of refugees from Afghanistan and the principal target of Soviet accusations of foreign intervention in Afghanistan, confirmed India's worst fears about American policy.

Although some U.S. support for Pakistan was necessary and inevitable, as was a closer U.S. relationship with China, the implicit U.S. decision to make Pakistan the focus of U.S. defensive efforts in the region locked the U.S. into an old relationship with Pakistan at the expense of India. This outcome could not have better suited Soviet interests in the region, because Pakistan was at this time a hopeless ally for the U.S. The Pakistan government under President Zia ul-Haq was extraordinarily corrupt, virtually bankrupt in international financial markets, and extraordinarily unpopular at home. The Pakistani government had paid little attention to rural development and little attention to the development of literacy, and had reaped the results of such policies primarily in the form of an inability to integrate diverse tribes and diverse social groups into a common nation. Pakistan's near neighbors in Southeast Asia had faced the same problems as Pakistan, but had largely succeeded by 1980 (through economic development policies) in creating nations out of formerly feuding

tribal groups. Pakistan's development policies exhibited an extraordinarily narrow focus on industrialization and on forms of education which benefited an elite comprised largely of one ethnic group. As a result, Pakistan's heavy military expenditures, including one of the Third World's greatest efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, were of little consequence for the security of the country. Even in the strictly military area, Pakistan's armed forces had acquired a reputation for crude policies toward tribal areas and for an ability to lose wars to India while suffering very few casualties. Hence, the U.S. found itself aligned with one of the Third World's most hopeless countries against the military power of the Soviet Union.

In addition to offering Pakistan diplomatic support and military aid, the U.S. responded to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by withdrawing its ambassador to Moscow; by curtailing Soviet air flights, cultural exchanges and new consulates in the U.S.; by threatening to boycott the Moscow Olympics; by curbing Soviet fishing in American waters; by vowing to withhold grain and high technology from the Soviet Union and appealing for allied support in this policy; and by undertaking a diplomatic offensive in the Third World. In addition, the U.S. began a search for bases in the Middle East, renewed discussion of a possible Indian Ocean fleet, undertook defensive consultations with China, and held joint military exercises with Egypt.

The bulk of the Carter response to the Soviet offensive was symbolic. Withdrawal of the U.S. ambassador to Moscow during an intense crisis reflected American lack of need for this political appointee in a critical period. The curtailing of Soviet consulates, air flights and cultural exchanges was also a clearly symbolic move, despite minor practical discomfort for the Soviet Union. The most important symbolic move was to threaten the universality of the

Olympic Games scheduled to be held in Moscow during 1980. The Soviet Union had treated the presence of the Olympics in the Soviet Union as a form of international endorsement of the Soviet Union and its domestic and foreign policies. Because of this treatment by the Soviet authorities in their own press, the Olympics had become an important symbol of national Soviet pride. No other aspect of the U.S. response to the Soviet invasion carried the emotions of the cold war quite so deeply into the Soviet Union. While the ultimate significance of the threat to boycott the Olympics remained to be seen, this symbol was perhaps the most important step that President Carter endorsed.

The limitations on trade with the Soviet Union were also heavily symbolic. While U.S. allies in Europe and Japan promised to cooperate with the U.S. in tightening COCOM standards limiting trade in high technology with the Soviet Union, the scope of additional restrictions which the Europeans and Japanese were willing to accept appeared unlikely to have any major impact on Soviet economic plans. Unilateral U.S. restraints would be largely ineffective because the West Europeans and Japanese were capable of supplying almost everything that the U.S. would restrict. The Europeans specifically opposed any restrictions in the key area of petroleum development technology, because it appeared very important to them that the Soviet Union remain a net oil exporter, rather than becoming an importer and thereby acquiring incentives to be more aggressive in the Middle East. The restriction of U.S. grain exports and of Soviet fishing promised to have a measurable but small impact on the Soviet Union. While the Japanese insisted on going ahead with major Siberian developing projects, delays in some projects which require U.S. technology or U.S. capital, and potential delays in other projects due to Japanese concern about the international political situation, could have a significant impact on the Soviet efforts to develop areas of Siberia along the new trans-Siberian railway, the

Baikal-Amur Mainline.

The overall reaction of the U.S. allies proceeded on several levels. Western Europeans and Japanese experienced revulsion against the Soviet invasion and to this extent responded in synchronization with their American ally. While the West Europeans, taking a regional view of their security problem as opposed to the U.S. global view, tended to downgrade the practical importance of the Soviet invasion, they nonetheless responded with a degree of verbal unity that had not appeared in Western alliance diplomacy since the Vietnam war. In spite of the verbal unity and the shared negative reaction to the Soviets, the different evaluations of the importance of the Soviet invasion could have driven a wedge between the U.S. and Europe. However, the Soviet Union rescued Western unity when it decided in late January to exile Soviet dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov to the city of Gorky, an act that outraged West Europeans and changed their attitudes to an extent that was not matched even by the relatively U.S. reaction.

Western Europeans' reactions to U.S. policy also contained other layers of response. Key Western European leaders felt that to some extent President Carter was playing electoral politics with his strong stand against the Soviet invasion. West European diplomats expressed the view, particularly in private, that President Carter had overreacted emotionally while underreacting with practical moves. That is, by strong statements and particularly by supporting a boycott of the Moscow Olympics, President Carter had maximized the emergence of cold war emotions, and Western Europe believed this excessive. On the other hand, President Carter's actions had done nothing practical to get the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan and the U.S. hostages out of

Teheran. The Western Europeans wondered whether the contradictions between these two levels of U.S. policy might not lead to difficulty in the future. Moreover, the European response to the Carter policies was permeated by resentment of past conflicts with President Carter over economic policy, human rights in Eastern Europe, nuclear energy and non-proliferation policy, and the neutron bomb.

In the Islamic world, the rise of the Islamic fundamentalism, and the focus of fundamentalist Islamic hostility on the U.S. created by the Ayatollah Khomeini's emphasis on the crimes of the Shah and U.S. support of the Shah, threatened before the invasion of Afghanistan to isolate the U.S. to Soviet advantage. The danger was paradoxically heightened by Saudi Arabian perceptions that the U.S. was a vacillating power which had not adequately supported its friend the Shah and therefore could not be trusted to support Saudi Arabian interests. These problems in turn were heightened by the 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 and would be interpreted so as to deprive the Palestinians of a future national homeland. This was the situation on the eve of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Following that invasion, Egypt offered the U.S. military bases and entered into joint military exercises with the U.S. Saudi Arabia denounced the invasion and became the first nation to commit itself to a boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Iraq, generally regarded as a Soviet ally, vigorously denounced the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and linked it with other acts, such as invasion of North Yemen, which were denounced as crimes against Islam. The Islamic world's views achieved a substantial degree of unity in late January 1980, when a conference of Islamic nations, from which only Syria was absent, convened in Rawalpindi to announce a joint denunciation

of the Soviet invasion. The denunciation was combined with a somewhat milder denunciation of U.S. support of Israel, but this was the first occasion of modern times when the denunciation of the Soviet Union by such a conference was stronger than the denunciation of the U.S. for its support of Israel.

The reaction in Asia was far more consistent, at least in direction, than the reaction in Europe. While some European doubts about U.S. policy were undoubtedly valid, those reactions also reflected the relatively provincial view of the world that West European leaders have taken since the loss of their colonies after World War II. West European reactions to Afghanistan were also muted by the numerous entanglements between Soviet and West European interests. West Germany, for instance, is heavily dependent on natural gas delivered from the East and, more important, cares deeply about its program of purchasing the freedom of East German citizens who have fallen into official East German disfavor. Such programs can be cancelled on Soviet initiative.

Asians, on the other hand, were disinclined to minimize the importance of the Soviet invasion; Afghanistan is, after all, an Asian country. Japan took the most outspoken position in criticizing the Soviet invasion that it has taken on any major power controversy since World War II. North Korea, fearing that it might be the next Soviet ally to experience Soviet invasion, denounced the Soviet move despite a recent policy of warming relations with the Soviets. Non-communist Southeast Asia reacted equally strongly, and Australia instituted immediate economic sanctions against the U.S.S.R. The Islamic nations of the Middle East (see below) acted equally

strongly. While Vietnam and Syria remained outside the consensus, and India and Iran muted their denunciations because of preoccupations elsewhere, Asia had seldom spoken with such a unified voice.

The diplomacy of the Third World followed lines similar to those in the Islamic world. In mid-1979, the Soviet Union achieved a triumph in its relationships with the Third World when the Third World Summit was held in Havana, Cuba, and elected Castro as its president, while simultaneously adopting a platform that was extremely anti-American. However, with the convening of the U.S. sessions in the autumn, a reaction occurred against the heavy-handed Cuban approach to the Havana conference and distaste rose for Cuba's close association with the Soviet Union. As a result, Cuba was unable to win a test of diplomatic strength with Colombia for a seat on the U.N. Security Council and the presidency of the Security Council. This stalemate was significant because it involved the rejection, by a large proportion of the Third World, of the president of the Third World, Cuba, for a Security Council seat. (Subsequently, Mexico was elected.) Most of the Third World supported a U.N. vote demanding Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Third World diplomatic condemnation of the Soviet invasion was not accompanied by practical support for U.S. efforts to deprive the Soviet Union of grain. The crucial countries in this respect were Brazil and Argentina, both large exporters of grain. Both were aggrieved at Carter Administration policies. Upon coming to office the Carter Administration had launched a human rights attack on Brazil's government, which was at that time, under President Geisel, embarked upon a major effort to eliminate torture, to liberalize Brazil's politics with the eventual goal of a civilian democratic regime, and to

improve social services and the distribution of income. The State Department simultaneously attacked Brazil's nuclear energy program, out of an understandable concern over potential nuclear proliferation, in a way that was arrogant and insensitive toward the massive problems Brazil faces in obtaining sufficient energy without importing oil. The U.S. also raised sugar tariffs without consulting Brazil, in direct violation of a treaty. In the ensuing diplomatic melee, which included U.S. cancellation of military credits for Brazil and subsequent Brazilian cancellation of a military aid treaty with the U.S., mutual relations were damaged to an extent that may take decades to repair.

Argentina, also aggrieved (with less justification) over U.S. human rights and arms transfer policies, also refused to support the U.S. boycott. Argentina argued that the boycott would not work and that, anyway, the vacillating diplomatic record of the Carter administration showed that it would abandon the policy after a few months or a year, leaving Argentina in the lurch. The Argentine government pointed out that the Soviet Union was one of its best grain customers, that Argentina's largest dam depends on Soviet delivery of turbines, and that the Soviet Union has been voting with Argentina on human rights and other issues, while, on the other hand, the U.S. had failed to consult Argentina about its policy, had refused to help Argentina even to the extent of helping identify terrorists and selling bullet-proof vests for police threatened by terrorists, and had conducted a diplomatic campaign against Argentina. Thus, the successful diplomacy of encouraging Islamic and Third World reactions against the Soviet Union was unmatched by practical support for the grain boycott.

Although these various diplomatic moves resembled Cold War diplomacy of the 1950s, the U.S. treatment of Eastern Europe was sharply different from the 1950s.

Instead of treating Eastern Europe as an appendage of the Soviet Union, U.S. policy after Afghanistan attempted to divide Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union, applying sanctions only to the latter. This policy was consistent with the reality of an increasingly independent Eastern Europe and with a U.S. policy which, under various names (e.g., "building bridges to Eastern Europe" under Lyndon Johnson) and with various emphases had built up over many years an effort to distinguish between the Soviet Union and its bloc. The policy encountered severe problems, however. First, it was ineffective. U.S. corporations and banks, perceiving a radical change in East-West relations, feared that the tendencies toward re-formation of cold war blocs might go further than official policy anticipated and therefore held back on key economic commitments; that hesitation tended to make important Eastern European countries, particularly Poland, more dependent on the Soviet Union. Moreover, exclusion of Eastern Europe from the sanctions deprived those sanctions of most real bite. Soviet dependence on the West was low and had declined in recent years, whereas Poland, for instance, required \$6 billion of Western financing in 1980. Sanctions on Eastern Europe would have caused some severe economic problems, which would in turn have exacerbated political problems, particularly in Poland, and this would have caused difficulties for the Soviet Union. Thus, U.S. policy in this region made the overall sanctions policy ineffective while partially defeating the goal of separating Eastern Europe from the Soviet Union.

In contrast, Soviet policy in the region took an unusually strong form. In a partial military mobilization, the Soviet Union called up reserves in the western military districts adjacent to Europe and held large exercises in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Although partially used for rotation of troops into Afghanistan, this mobilization was of a scale and type that could not be

fully explained by events in faraway Afghanistan. The exercises kept NATO military experts guessing as to whether they were a form of military overkill tied to Afghanistan, whether they were to prepare for a potential crisis over Yugoslavia, or whether they were intended to divert Western military attention from South Asia. Whatever the motives, Western military specialists felt that the Soviets, by mobilizing large forces far from the area of crisis, had broken a long-standing rule of superpower relationships -- namely, never to create a crisis atmosphere in multiple parts of the world simultaneously. In the past, it has been viewed as too dangerous to have interacting crises in different parts of the globe.

In parallel with its diplomatic moves, the U.S. made a number of military moves. Deferral of consideration of the SALT II Treaty was nothing more than a recognition of the reality of strong anti-Soviet sentiments in the U.S. Senate; SALT II was of little military consequence, and both the U.S. and the Soviet Union promised to abide by its terms even though it was not ratified. The U.S. began talking more seriously about a perennial proposal to have a separate Indian Ocean fleet, a concept rejected by numerous studies undertaken by military specialists throughout the 1970s. Since the British first considered the issue in the 19th Century, the idea of the principal global naval power establishing a separate Indian Ocean Fleet had been rejected because, given budgetary limitations, it involved a dispersion of naval power to little advantage; a fleet can easily and quickly be moved from the Pacific or the Atlantic into the Indian Ocean. Of greater consequence was the Carter Administration's search for possible bases in the Indian Ocean, considering such potential sites as Kenya, Egypt, Oman and various others. Each site had political disadvantages, but the search for facilities rested upon a critical fact:

U.S. military superiority in the eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean during the 1950s and early 1960s had given way by the late 1970s to Soviet-U.S. balance, and in Western Asia to Soviet superiority. The U.S. cut its military budgets from 10-11% of GNP in the 1950s back to 6% in the late 1970s, despite loss of key bases, such as Wheelus near Tripoli, and use of various NATO countries' facilities, while simultaneously the Soviet Union built up a massive logistical infrastructure. The situation could only be remedied for the U.S. by investment in transport aircraft, naval transport, and bases in the region. Because of the unfortunate balance of logistical capabilities, President Carter's promise to defend the Gulf from any Soviet intrusion was credible only in those particular circumstances where the U.S. lines of supply would not be excessively stretched.

The most significant of the U.S. diplomatic and military moves was the rapid development of its relationship with China. The Carter Administration came into office totally committed to a balanced relationship with China and the Soviet Union, defined as a relationship of rough diplomatic equidistance between the two. The Soviets' involvements in Ethiopia, Angola, Indochina and elsewhere, and Chinese promises of a very friendly and mutually beneficial relationship, constantly provided a temptation to tilt toward China, but the basic policy of equidistance remained intact until Afghanistan. (Earlier breaches in the diplomacy of equidistance, such as Zbigniew Brzezinski's remarks about the Soviet Union during his summer 1978 visit to China, were roughly balanced by the emphasis by key State Department officials until the end of 1979 on detente with the Soviet Union at the expense of improvement with relations with China.) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused an immediate tilt toward China. A previously scheduled visit by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Harold

Brown to China was upgraded by changing the officials accompanying Secretary Brown. During his visit, Secretary Brown called for China and the U.S. to undertake "parallel actions" against the Soviet Union, and the visit was followed by a U.S. agreement to provide China a Landsat satellite which, while primarily used for geographical survey, also has important military uses. Preparations were made for future exchange of military officers between China and the U.S., a practice most unlikely ever to develop between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Consequences of the Afghan Invasion

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a historic turning point. A decade of emotional relaxation symbolized by the word detente vanished almost instantly. Movement from a bipolar world of blocs to a more multipolar world was halted and partially reversed. China remained independent of both blocs, and East and West Europe were far more loosely attached to their respective blocs than in the 1950s, but there was a perceptible tightening of NATO and of the Warsaw Pact. Every issue elsewhere in the world, such as the future of post-Tito Yugoslavia, acquired the trappings of a potential global crisis. The principal arms control initiatives of the Carter Administration and its predecessors in both nuclear weapons and conventional arms control, as well as more indirect confidence-building measures, were shelved. The Third World retreated from what was becoming an increasingly anti-American position, and the Muslim world found that once again it had to confront two superpowers rather than concentrating its attention on one. Along with the institutionalization of Sino-American military cooperation came a termination of Sino-Soviet efforts to achieve a partial reconciliation. The consequences of Afghanistan were in this respect much more final than the earlier, formal termination of talks initiated in the fall of 1979.

The priorities of the U.S. domestic budget and political debates were shifted in favor of foreign security issues at the expense of domestic economic issues. The focus of the defense budget debate was shifted in favor of conventional and logistical issues at the expense of strategic nuclear programs. In the absence of SALT II, a recent Carter decision to build an MX racetrack missile seemed likely to be derailed, because the expensive missile could be countered at less cost by Soviet programs which SALT II would have formally prohibited. Above all, for the U.S., the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan forced the Carter Administration for the first time to take major decisions which imposed important costs on part of the population. An American nation deeply divided since Vietnam and Watergate responded with remarkable unity to what was perceived as a major foreign threat to the country and to a President who was perceived for the first time as a leader willing to make hard decisions. The President gained support for his very controversial stand against U.S. participation in the Moscow Olympics, and won overwhelming victory in the important Iowa primary election although his grain embargo was expected to damage the interests of Iowa farmers.

Thus, the Soviet invasion of a tiny, barren, intrinsically unimportant country, far from the center of American interests, transformed East-West relations, North-South relations, the diplomacy of the Muslim world, the relationships of the superpowers with their principal allies, and the domestic economic and political priorities of the U.S. Smaller events have on occasion had larger consequences -- as, for instance, the consequences of a single shot fired at Sarajevo early in the 20th Century. But the number of such events is small.