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## 13. Russian–Afghan relations

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### I. Introduction

Afghanistan is a classic buffer state at the very heart of Asia. It acquired this role in the second half of the last century after the British colonial power discovered the presence of Russian imperial interests in the mountainous region to the north-west of the Indus. The division of spheres of influence between the two powers made Afghanistan a neutral zone with a definite inclination towards the British authorities in India. After the demise of the British Empire in Asia another overseas great power, the USA, partly stepped into its shoes. By that time the Russian 19th-century empire had given way to a 20th-century reincarnation in the form of the USSR, a multinational, ideological state and military superpower. The geographical proximity of the Soviet Union, its ideological pull and sheer strength contributed to a change in Afghanistan's traditional orientation to the south-east. In 1973–74 and more decisively since 1978–79, the Afghan Government chose to link its destiny with that of its great northern neighbour. The choice proved wrong as Soviet Russia had already entered the rough waters of history.

The 'Saur Revolution' of April 1978 ended the traditional rule of the Afghan Pushtu elite. The then President, General Muhammad Daud, and many of his family and supporters were killed in a bloody coup and the Moscow-oriented People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) established control. The new regime soon met with stiff opposition from the traditionalists and Islamic fundamentalists. Bitter personal rivalry and intra-party cleavages weakened the PDPA's hold on power, further destabilizing the political situation in the country and making its future course uncertain.

The USSR was dragged into the conflict reluctantly. Geopolitically involvement seemed damaging as the situation to the south of Soviet Central Asia was not arousing acute concern. The USSR, however, felt the need to sustain the momentum of geo-ideological offensive<sup>1</sup> and the hasty decision to intervene was taken in December 1979. The Afghanistan issue subsequently assumed enormous significance for Russia. The material and symbolic losses suffered by the Soviet power in and through Afghanistan contributed dramatically to its rapid shrinking both along its actual borders and in the area of its power projec-

<sup>1</sup> Bulatov, Yu. A., 'Narodno-demokraticeskaya partiya Afganistana: teoriya i praktika borby za zavoyevaniye politicheskoy vlasti v strane' [The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan: theory and practice of the struggle for political power in the country], Dissertation summary for the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), Moscow, 1997, p. 25.

tion. The disengagement from Afghanistan is one of the most visible cases of a strategy of pulling back followed willy-nilly by the authorities in Moscow.

The Russian policy of disengagement of the late 1980s and early 1990s has given way to one of stabilization, and the extent of Russia's present and future stakes in Afghanistan and the adjacent region is debatable.

## II. The stages of Russian disengagement

The chance to get out of Afghanistan was lost in 1980–81 before the involvement was complete and its grave consequences became obvious. Whether the option was seriously considered at the time in Moscow remains an inside story, although with hindsight it later seemed to some of those close to the Kremlin to be the best solution.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, no later than in 1982 the USSR set its course to disengagement by agreeing to talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan in Geneva. The negotiations were conducted by the special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Diego Cordovez, and were called 'proximity' talks since the two delegations did not meet but communicated through the UN mission.<sup>3</sup> Although the Soviet engagement persisted and military actions grew in intensity, the USSR did not lose sight of the possibility of a political solution. In early 1988 Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev made public plans to take the troops out of Afghanistan and in April of that year the talks bore fruit.<sup>4</sup>

The Geneva Accords of 14 April 1988 allowed the USSR to make a dignified retreat. Implemented by mid-February 1989, they did not (unexpectedly for most observers) result in immediate victory for the Afghan Mujahideen ('holy warriors') with their bases outside the country, chiefly in Pakistan. The reasons for this lay in internal rifts among the leaders of the *jihād* (holy war), the guerrilla forces' inability to stage a large-scale offensive, and the financial and technical help which the government in Kabul continued to get from Moscow. The impasse lasted for more than three years—in retrospect not the worst period in the recent history of the war-worn country.

After the unsuccessful August 1991 attempted coup in Moscow, and against a background of enthusiasm in certain quarters of the emerging Russian elite for sweeping changes in all fields and complete revision of the former Soviet strategy abroad, then Russian Foreign Minister Boris Pankin reached agreement with US Secretary of State James Baker to stop aid to all the parties in Afghanistan from 1 January 1992.<sup>5</sup> This decision proved fatal for the Russian-backed

<sup>2</sup> This point was stressed in a conversation of the author with the Soviet Ambassador to Pakistan, Abdurrahman Vezirov, in Moscow in 1988 on the eve of his appointment as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

<sup>3</sup> Cordovez, D. and Harrison, S. S., *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1995), pp. 73–90.

<sup>4</sup> Urquhart, B., 'Conflict resolution in 1988: the role of the United Nations', *SIPRI Yearbook 1989: World Armaments and Disarmament* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989), pp. 451–52; and 'Key sections of the accords on Afghanistan as signed in Geneva', *New York Times*, 15 Apr. 1988, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Cordovez and Harrison (note 3); and Vladimirov, Yu., 'Tretya osen bez shuravi' [Third autumn without the Soviets], *Pravda*, 26 Sep. 1991, p. 3.

President, Mohammad Najibullah. He tried desperately to keep his hold over the north-western parts of the country which were logistically crucial for his survival. That failing, in March 1992 he agreed to resign, placing his hopes on the endeavours of the UN mission to arrange a peaceful transfer of power.<sup>6</sup> The Pakistan-based Mujahideen, however, preferred the triumph of victory and effectively buried the UN plan.

The interim government headed by Sibghatulla Mojadedi in late April 1992 proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, but the divisions that had weakened the Mujahideen during the ‘holy war’ became even more acute after their takeover of power. Vicious battles broke out between heavily armed rivals on the streets of Kabul while the country became fragmented still further into a cluster of self-ruled and self-sustaining regions.<sup>7</sup>

In June 1992 presidential office passed to Burhanuddin Rabbani, leader of the Jamiat-i Islami, one of the two major components of a bloc of seven Sunni parties. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the other leading group, the Hezb-i Islami, moved in opposition to Rabbani and his military commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud. The Islamic goals of the power struggle having faded after the end of communist rule, there was a search for identity among the rival factions. Ethnicity coupled with regional and confessional (Sunni–Shia) distinctions began to be the main rallying-point for loyalties and alliances.

The new Russian foreign policy makers initially tried to follow the line of full cooperation with the West, thus giving it the chance to enhance its influence in the former Soviet Central Asia and the adjacent region. In spite of the failure to arrange an orderly transfer of power in Afghanistan, then Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev visited Kabul in May 1992 and signed the Russian–Afghan Declaration,<sup>8</sup> trying to distance himself from the former Soviet policy and from responsibility for the blunders of the previous Russian Government. After the visit the Russian side gave some maps and plans of minefields to the new Afghan authorities and allowed them to set up an embassy in Moscow.<sup>9</sup>

### III. The extent of Russian involvement

The Russian preoccupation with Afghanistan reached its lowest ebb in the early months of 1992, but this loss of interest proved short-lived. With the fading of hopes in a miraculous cure for the Russian economy thanks to the ‘shock therapy’ of Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and promised US aid of \$24 billion came the realization of an ordinary state’s preoccupations and obligations. The return to a more pragmatic internal and external policy was symbolized by per-

<sup>6</sup> Najibullah reportedly resigned on 16 Apr. 1992. Gargan, E., ‘Afghan President ousted as rebels approach capital’, *New York Times*, 17 Apr. 1992, pp. A1, A10.

<sup>7</sup> Rubin, B., *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (Yale University Press: New Haven, N.J., 1995), pp. 230–46.

<sup>8</sup> Yusin, M., ‘Sensatsionny vizit Andreya Kozyreva v Kabul’ [Sensational visit by Andrey Kozyrev to Kabul], *Izvestiya*, 14 May 1992, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Davydov, A. D. (ed.), *Afghanistan: Problemy Voyny i Mira* [Afghanistan: problems of war and peace] (Institute of Oriental Studies: Moscow, 1996), p. 141.

sonal changes in the government and by the signing of the May 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security with four of the five Central Asian member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>10</sup> The beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan brought out the importance of the treaty, which in effect equated the strategic and security interests of Russia in Central Asia with the stakes of the Soviet Union there.

From 1992 Russian policy on Afghanistan was officially one of genuine neutrality. This approach manifested itself in support for all projects floated by the international community, represented mostly by the UN, aimed at solving the chronic problem of bringing peace and political stability to Afghanistan. Russia also participated actively in multilateral activities initiated by the regional powers.

Neutrality and cooperation in efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to the Afghan problem evidently did not stop Russia from unofficially taking sides in the evolving bickering over power in the country, prompted by the conviction that other regional and non-regional actors, such as Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the USA, were doing the same. Since the time of his visit to Moscow in November 1991, President Rabbani had commanded a certain backing there. This can be explained by the non-extremist although clearly revivalist brand of Islamic ideology espoused by the Jamiat-i Islami and perhaps more significantly by the predominantly Tajik composition of the party and its military force, which had bases in the north-eastern parts of the country and across the border with Tajikistan. In addition there was Rabbani's alienation from Pakistan, which was viewed in Moscow as a trusted ally of the USA.

The support given to Rabbani's government in 1992–96 was in line with the predominant international response to developments in Afghanistan and corresponded with specific Russian goals and interests in the region. After late September 1996, when control over Kabul and the greater part of Afghan territory was lost to the Taleban (Islamic students) forces, Russia went on to back the Rabbani Government diplomatically by (like the greater part of the world community) not recognizing the new authorities in Kabul.

In spite of official denials of any partiality, Russia was believed to be providing material help to the political-cum-military groupings of both Rabbani and Rashid Dostum. It was rumoured that Russia and Uzbekistan were printing and delivering Afghani banknotes,<sup>11</sup> the influx of which affected the dollar rate of exchange and allowed the erstwhile Kabul authorities and the Mazar-i-Sharif administration headed by Dostum to build up a badly needed stock of hard currency. Outside observers speculated about the transfer of goods and weapons from Central Asia to north-western Afghanistan and via the Salang tunnel to Kabul, and believed that the hand of Russia was revealed in August 1995 when Taleban fighter aircraft brought down an Il-76 cargo plane full of weaponry

<sup>10</sup> For the text, see *Izvestiya*, 16 May 1992, p. 3. The original signatories were Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. By the spring of 1994 Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia had also joined.

<sup>11</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Pakistan, Afghanistan: Country Report*, 1st quarter 1996, p. 41.

belonging to a Russian private company and manned with a Russian crew (although the arms it was carrying were Chinese products bought in Albania).<sup>12</sup>

In retrospect, it seems that the peak of Russian interest in Afghanistan coincided with the war in Chechnya (from late autumn 1994 to summer 1996) and the instability in Tajikistan, particularly on the Afghan–Tajik frontier where Russian border guards were directly involved. Since mid-1996, following the election victory of President Boris Yeltsin, the beginning of the peace process in Chechnya and the easing of tensions in Tajikistan, Russian worries about Afghanistan have become less intense. Nevertheless, Russia has maintained its military posture in the adjacent region by keeping its border forces and the 201st Motor Rifle Division in Tajikistan<sup>13</sup> and preserving a ‘security umbrella’ over Central Asia through a network of multilateral and bilateral agreements.

#### IV. Russia’s security concerns

Initially, after its emergence as the chief successor state of the USSR, Russia was disturbed by the possibility of being charged by Afghanistan with responsibility for Soviet policy and the damage inflicted by the Soviet forces there. In the last years of the Soviet Union, plans were being elaborated in Moscow to deny responsibility and provide would-be Afghan refugees with places to live and work in the Central Asian republics. With the disintegration of the union the plans for refugees were abandoned, while work on preparing to meet demands for compensation with countercharges based on outside parties’ engagement in the Afghan war continued for some time. The return to the homeland of all Soviet prisoners of war held by different Mujahideen factions was one issue which was played up to even the equation. With the passage of time, however, the issue was gradually forgotten: the number of those missing (put at some 300) was comparatively small, while a dozen or so returned and others expressed a wish to stay abroad.

The first steps by the leaders of Chechnya in the direction of breaking away from the Russian Federation, in the autumn of 1991, coincided with the appearance of Islamic revivalism as a threatening political and ideological phenomenon in Russia and other former Soviet areas. The ‘Islamic factor’ in combination with ethno-nationalist aspirations may indeed constitute a real danger to the integrity of Russia and mean the beginning of chaotic conditions in the country. Islamism taken separately does not pose a serious threat. Muslims make up no more than 10 per cent of the population of the Russian Federation (the total population is around 150 million) and Russians around 83 per cent. The areas where Muslims are in a distinct majority are few and are only in the north Caucasus. The Caucasus and Central Asia are both conduits for the

<sup>12</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Pakistan, Afghanistan: Country Report*, 4th quarter 1995, pp. 33–34.

<sup>13</sup> The Russian border forces as of Nov. 1998 numbered 11 500 and the 201st Motor Rifle Division forces c. 6700. ‘Russian Border Service’, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report–Central Eurasia: Military Affairs (FBIS-UMA)*, FBIS-UMA-98-302, 29 Oct. 1998; and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28 Nov. 1998.

Islamic influence infiltrating from abroad, but the former is less significant, being more distant and isolated from the homelands of Tatars and Bashkirs and other Muslim peoples in the Middle Volga–Southern Urals region. Terrorism, associated in the world with Islamic extremism, in Russia is mostly linked with the Caucasian corridor. Afghanistan per se can hardly be considered a menace in this respect, although it used to have and still harbours training camps of Muslim militants of various brands and nationalities.<sup>14</sup>

More real is the danger of wholesale destabilization of the political situation in the region to the north of Afghanistan. The former Soviet Central Asian republics were at their inception widely regarded as a potential ‘black hole’ on the international arena. The civil war in Tajikistan instilled and justified these fears. The worst-case scenarios have been shelved since the gradual restoration of more peaceful conditions in Tajikistan and the maintenance of order in the other Central Asian republics, but the continuation of war in Afghanistan is perceived as a possible detonator of a new explosion in the region. For Russia it would cause intolerable humanitarian problems because of the flow of refugees from the Central Asian region. The number of emigrants has recently fallen in comparison with the period immediately following the break-up of the Soviet Union, although the problems pertaining to refugees and displaced people are considerable and the state authorities have proved not to cope with them well.<sup>15</sup> Central Asia has the largest number of would-be emigrants in the former Soviet territory and the deterioration of internal conditions there could trigger unforeseen consequences.<sup>16</sup>

Drugs are another formidable problem for Russia and intimately connected with Afghanistan. In less than a decade Afghan territory has become a major opium poppy-producing zone. In 1989 production was estimated to be around 40 tons; in 1995 it was put at 3000 tons.<sup>17</sup> Some recent estimates led the UN to conclude that Afghanistan had overtaken Burma as the world’s largest opium producer.<sup>18</sup> Poppy growing has become the foremost source of earnings for peasants in the south as well as the north. The raw material for the heroin often travels from the northern provinces of Afghanistan to laboratories in the mountains of the Pushtu tribal belt in the south-east of the country, cutting across the lines of control of different warring factions and coalitions. Portions of heroin produced in the Pushtu tribal belt travel back to the north of Afghanistan and are spirited across the Afghan–Tajik border in the Pamir. Another route lies

<sup>14</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Pakistan, Afghanistan: Country Report*, 1st quarter 1997, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Vitkovskaya, G. (ed.), *Migratsiya Russkoyazychnogo Naseleniya iz Tsentralnoy Azii: Prichiny, Posledstviya, Perspektivy* [Migration of the Russian-speaking population from Central Asia: causes, consequences, prospects] (Moscow Carnegie Center: Moscow, 1996), pp. 45, 46, 140–41.

<sup>16</sup> Vitkovskaya (note 15), pp. 76–77, 84; and Olcott, M., Tiskov, V. and Malashenko, A. (eds), *Identichnost i Konflikt v Postsovetskikh Gosudarstvakh* [Identity and conflict in the post-Soviet states] (Moscow Carnegie Center: Moscow, 1997), p. 472.

<sup>17</sup> Davydov (note 9), p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> US Department of State, *Statement by Karl F. Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs* (Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 22 Oct. 1997), p. 3.

through north-west Tajikistan into Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and further west.<sup>19</sup>

Although the drug and related humanitarian problems are perceived as quite staggering, the predominant thinking in policy-making quarters seems to be still determined more by concerns about the state interests.

## V. Afghanistan and Russian policy in Central and South-West Asia

The Soviet Union mostly followed a ‘closed border’ policy along its southern perimeter. Its geopolitical pressure on Europe and the Far East, augmented by efforts to build a blue-water fleet and achieve superiority in the sky and outer space, gave the East–West, trans-Eurasian dimension predominance in policy considerations. The demise of the Soviet Union greatly changed the essence, as well as the geography, of political efforts. The southern frontiers have become vulnerable. The transparent intra-CIS boundaries constitute the first tier while the former Soviet borders, now the outer borders of other countries in the CIS, form the second tier. Uncertainty in the Caucasian region and in the trans-Caspian steppe belt encompassing vast tracts of land on both sides of the Russia–Kazakhstan border is bringing new Russia’s policy choices seemingly close to Imperial Russia’s geopolitical priorities of the mid-19th century. More in line with the geographical projections of the imperial than of the Soviet period, Russia is confronted with challenges and opportunities in the region to the south of its core, resulting in the appearance of two longitudinal directions for its policy activity—the Caucasian–Near Eastern and the Central–South-West Asian.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of the latter, although at present less than that of the Caucasian–Near Eastern direction, is the result of a combination of threats and opportunities. The security concerns of Russia in connection with Afghanistan, which is the true heartland of the region, have already been discussed. It is enough here to list the salient features on the security agenda for the region generally—political uncertainty combined with economic disarray, ethnic strife and disorder, the rise of autocratic nationalism and Islamic extremism, pressure on the Russians in Central Asia to leave, the increasing scale of drug trafficking and the spread of terrorism.

Russia’s prospects in the region lie in (a) cementing ties with the CIS Central Asian states, primarily with Kazakhstan which is the only country of the region that borders on Russia, and (b) the express desire of the present leadership of

<sup>19</sup> Chufrin, G. (ed.), *Narkobiznes: Novaya Ugroza Rossii s Vostoka* [Drug dealing: a new threat to Russia from the East] (Institute of Oriental Studies: Moscow, 1996), p. 31–38; translated as ‘The drug trade: a new security threat to Russia from the East’, Paper presented at the Third Meeting of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia–Pacific (CSCAP) Working Group on Transnational Crime, Manila, 23–24 May 1998.

<sup>20</sup> For further detail, see Belokrenitsky, V., ‘Geopoliticheskaya vertikal v serdtse Azii’ [The geopolitical vertical line in the heart of Asia], *Pro et Contra* (Moscow Carnegie Center), vol. 2, no. 2 (spring 1997), p. 99–108.

Tajikistan for Russian backing in order to counter the dominance of Uzbekistan and other Turkic neighbours. This latter point is controversial as it could alienate Russia from Uzbekistan, which is rightly considered to be the core state of former Soviet Central Asia. Under growing pressure from Islamists in the country, the current regime of President Imomali Rakhmonov in Tajikistan seemed for a time to be reconciled to Uzbek predominance, making it possible for Russia to build a united front, but this changed and relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan became strained when Uzbekistan was accused of assisting an anti-government revolt in Khujand in the north of Tajikistan in November 1998.<sup>21</sup>

Cultivating links with Iran has been an essential element of Russian policy in the whole Central–South-West Asian region during the greater part of the 1990s. Russia has thus tried to use the opportunities created by the US policy of ‘double containment’ of Iran and Iraq. However, the election of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997 as President of Iran signalled the beginning of a change in Iranian policy towards the USA. Washington responded cautiously but an improvement, however slow and gradual, of US–Iranian relations may introduce a novel feature into the geopolitical equation in the region, forcing Russia to review its policy. It should be admitted, however, that Russia was never blind to the limits to its flirtation with Iran, being under constant pressure from the USA in regard to its aid to Iran in the construction of the nuclear power plant in Bushehr and cooperation in the field of military technology.

Russian policy towards Pakistan was motivated by three inter-linked considerations. First, Pakistan was considered a regional power trying to follow a strategy of pushing to the north with the goal of dominating Afghanistan and opening up Central Asia to the exclusive benefit of itself and its allies. Second, in this attempt it was believed to have US blessing and support. Third, Pakistan’s unrelenting rivalry with India made it seem a force set to destabilize the situation in South Asia generally.

## VI. Prospects for a settlement in Afghanistan and the future of Russian–Afghan relations

The end of the US policy of ‘containing’ Iran<sup>22</sup> may in time profoundly alter the situation around Afghanistan as the US factor has been a considerable irritant in relations between Iran and Pakistan, both intimately involved in Afghan affairs. Iranian moves to patch up ties with Saudi Arabia (former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani visited Saudi Arabia in August 1998) may dispel fears of a Sunni–Shia regional confrontation.

<sup>21</sup> Zviagelskaya, I., ‘The Tajikistan conflict’, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), pp. 67–68.

<sup>22</sup> Some Russian observers express the view that it will take about 2 years for Iran and the USA to normalize their relations. See, e.g., Kazeyev, K., ‘Iran: zapad ili Islamskaya respublika?’ [Iran: the West or the Islamic Republic?], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 1 Oct. 1998, p. 3.



However, it must not be forgotten that the external conditions for peace and compromise in Afghanistan have at no point been really bad in recent years. Outside assistance, although undoubtedly needed for prolonging any power struggle, is rarely more than a secondary factor. Assessing among other issues the role of external backing in the process of Afghan political mobilization, one analyst illustrates the point that Hekmatyar's Hezb-i Islami failed to mobilize, in spite of massive outside support, because of lack of community backing. In contrast the Taleban and Shi'ite Hezb-i Wahdat, having a community basis as well as external assistance, were successful in military and political terms.<sup>23</sup> Another relevant factor is the origin and character of foreign interference in the light of the ideals and expectations of the participants in the military confrontation. The socio-psychological preferences of the combatants are rooted largely in their Islamic as well as their ethnic identities, and they are held together by their opposition to any culturally alien or non-regional influence.

A combination of heterogeneous internal and external factors determined the impressive military successes of the Taleban in July–August 1998. Russia reacted rather nervously. It initiated several steps to strengthen the Afghan–Tajik border and assured both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan of its overall support.<sup>24</sup> In May 1998 a troika had been formed, consisting of Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, specifically to counter Islamic extremism.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, a division of opinion was discernible among the politicians, journalists and experts in Moscow. Some see the Islamic students' movement as a largely ethnic force to restore the dominance of the Pushtu ethnic group and as capable of running Afghanistan on the basis of a gradual return to normal and the traditional power-sharing system. Others regard the 'students' as all-out militants who cannot stop fighting and will carry on their struggle in and beyond Afghanistan. This division of outlook can have some impact on the range of decisions which Russia has and will have to take. It seems that Afghanistan, under the green banner of Islam, may once again play a significant role in Russia's fortunes.

Even if one is cautiously optimistic about the prospects of a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, it is hard to foresee that any external initiative that runs counter to the prevailing domestic conditions will be successful. The military predominance of one force, which is the Taleban at present, could pave the way to a provisional settlement provided some other parties are given a role to play in state affairs or left in peace in their territorial enclaves, while some kind of international support is summoned up.

<sup>23</sup> Harpviken, K. B., 'Transcending traditionalism: the emergence of non-state military formations in Afghanistan', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Aug. 1997), p. 283.

<sup>24</sup> To this end a high-ranking military–political Russian delegation headed by First Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov and Chief of Army Staff Gen. Anatoly Kvashnin also visited Dushanbe on 19–20 Aug. 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 8, section III, in this volume.

Russia will definitely wish to have a say in the outside support to the process of peace brokering. It has more to win than to lose from the restoration of peace and order in Afghanistan.

In the longer run, relations with Afghanistan will depend largely on the future of the Russian state and power. If Russia succeeds in overcoming the present economic crisis, it will clearly strengthen its geopolitical stand in Central Asia and obtain economic interests in the region connecting it with the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan might once again come into the purview of Russian policy, but the lessons of the previous disastrous engagement will loom large in the considerations of future policy.