

# Afghanistan moves toward partition plan

by Ramtanu Maitra

The Soviet hammer is now poised to fall again on Afghanistan, as the Feb. 15 deadline for Russian troop withdrawal draws near. On Jan. 9, the Pakistan-based seven-party mujahideen guerrilla alliance said it would not hold further talks with Moscow on a future Afghan government until all Soviet troops withdraw. Yuli Vorontsov, first deputy foreign minister and Soviet ambassador to Kabul, told newsmen in Moscow, upon his return from Islamabad on Jan. 10, that "things might take a turn forcing the Soviet Union to postpone the scheduled withdrawal." It is still an open question, whether that complete withdrawal will happen at all.

The Soviet determination to keep a part of Afghanistan, if they cannot get the whole country, is fast becoming a reality. The purpose of bringing Vorontsov into Kabul in November, 14 weeks before the due date for total withdrawal, was to create a crisis within Afghanistan that could lead to its partition, with Moscow keeping control over the northern part.

The one card that Vorontsov—a smooth talker and suave diplomat with friends in the subcontinent—kept out of the pack, was the Afghan groups' demand for the removal of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) from any power-sharing arrangement following the Soviet withdrawal. This demand is a crucial one. Vorontsov knew all too well that no Afghan rebel group would accept participation of the PDPA, the party that brought in the Soviet invaders to save their own skins and then participated with the invaders in killing more than 1 million Afghans and driving 5 million more into neighboring countries.

Vorontsov also contacted King Zahir Shah, who for the last decade has lived in considerable comfort in Rome without raising his voice against the Soviet invasion and the subsequent plight of the Afghans. Vorontsov also knew well that it was King Zahir Shah who, while he was in power, allowed the growth of the PDPA and supported the secessionist movement to carve out a separate "Pakhtoonistan" from the western wing of Pakistan.

## Soviets learned from the British

The Soviet gameplan, as it has unfolded following the signing of the Geneva agreement on April 15, 1988, bears an uncanny resemblance to the British colonial policy in the

subcontinent. The British succeeded in creating enough hostilities among various political forces within India to get away with partitioning the country. The Soviet plan follows the same line. Unfortunately, there is no Mahatma Gandhi living in Afghanistan to stand up and tell the Soviets: "Quit Afghanistan!"

Vorontsov, who was sent to Kabul to do the same job the British sent Lord Mountbatten to India for in 1946, began to sort out the Afghan imbroglio. Along with Vorontsov, the Soviets sent 30 MiG-30 Flogger D fighter planes and SS-1 Scud missiles which can hit the interior of Pakistan, and moved their SU-24 bombers closer to their own borders with Afghanistan. This message was duly delivered to Pakistan, while the latter was preparing for a general election after 11 years of President Zia ul-Haq's military rule.

Vorontsov set about to exploit the inherent contradictions existing among the various factions of Afghans. The method was akin to that of the British during the last days of the Raj in India, when they exploited a segment of the Muslim population and the contradictions that existed within the Indian national Congress—the main voice claiming India's independence. Indian Communists, as in Afghanistan, collaborated with the occupying power.

While Vorontsov was meeting the Peshawar-based and Iran-based Afghan rebel leaders with the purpose of enhancing hostilities between the groups, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov went to New York to lay down before the U.N. General Assembly a new set of conditions for the troop withdrawal. Gorbachov's proposals called for a ceasefire and "neutralization" of Afghanistan through an international peace conference. Following this, Vorontsov made a much-publicized trip to Rome to meet the former Afghan King, asking him to play a role in the post-Soviet Afghanistan.

Needless to say, the Afghans are deeply divided on some of the issues that the Soviets have raised, and the Soviets, in turn, have rejected the rebel leaders' proposal to form a council consisting of all the Afghan factions except the PDPA. The Soviet gameplan has always been to magnify these differences, as the rationalization for why the Soviet troops cannot leave Afghanistan and, eventually, the country requires a partition. The trick is in no way original.

The Soviet plan is to partition Afghanistan three ways. The northern part, which must include Kabul and the Kabul-Termez Road leading to the Soviet border, will be under Soviet control with the PDPA in power, and may even be called the Soviet Socialist Republic of Afghanistan (S.S.R.A.). The western part will be in control of the pro-Iranian Afghans—most of whom are Shi'ites—with the tacit blessings of Iran's rulers. The eastern part will remain under the control of various warring Afghan groups.

In the coming days, Moscow will further intensify its military and political pressure, to keep alive the option of swallowing that part of Afghanistan which they came to grab nine years ago.