

Superpower interventions in South Asia during the Nehru Era 1947-1964 and Indian security.

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ABSTRACT

After the end of World War II, the threat of fascism and Nazism ended, but for Western Europe and America a new threat of communism arose. The Western democratic world was perceiving communism as a danger because of its instinctive totalitarian nature of governance just like fascism and Nazism. Therefore, communism was perceived as an enemy of democracy and free competitive market economy like fascism and Nazism. Consequently, soon after the Second World War, the fortification of the geostrategic regions of the world started and the world gradually got involved in the competition of superpowers. West Asia became a hot spot because of the utility of oil, Europe for European security, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific region for its maritime importance became very important strategic regions. As a result, almost every region of the world has become a declared or unannounced field of superpower competition and intervention. Organizations for collective security like NATO in Europe, Cento in West Asia and Seato in the Indo-Pacific were created. Due to Pakistan becoming a member of Cento and Seato, the Cold War reached South Asia.

Key words : Afghanistan, America, arms aid, Britain, economic aid, India, Pakistan, Military, South Asia, USSR

THE BRITISH LEGACY AND DEPENDENCE ON BRITAIN

In the early years of the 1950s, both superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, remained indifferent to South Asia. American policymakers considered South Asia as a British responsibility because the Indian subcontinent was a British colony and the more important fact was that the Soviet Union was not yet spreading its influence in this region, hence the need to control the 'Soviet Containment' i.e. communism in South Asia. Therefore, in the early years of the fifties, South Asia was low on the priority list of American 'security

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strategy'. Professor Venkataramani writes about American indifference to South Asia: *"Having had the privilege of meeting President Truman several times - I concluded that his knowledge of South Asia was minimal "* (Venkataramani,1987 p.05) Some other practical reasons South Asia neither had a commercially and strategically important mineral like West Asian oil nor its geostrategic position was as important as the countries of the Mediterranean and Pacific region. There were some practical reasons for India and Pakistan's dependence on British arms in the 1950s. After partition Pakistan got only one ordnance factory out of 15 so there was no question of arms production there. In India too, there was no expansion of the defense industry before Krishna Menon became the Defense Minister in 1958. The most important fact is that all the weapons that India already had were inherited from the British. So it was natural to depend on Britain for their spare parts etc. Therefore to South Asia, the total arms receipts were about 4233 million, Great Britain's supply was the largest, about 85% ie \$ 3583 million during 1950 -1960.(Venkataramani, 1987). But this situation did not last long. South Asia quickly attracted the attention of the US State Department.

Changing geopolitics in south asia

In South Asia geopolitics was changing very fast

- Indian and Pakistan were considered in the British legacy but Afghanistan has a proximity with the USSR.
- There was a Soviet-Afghan treaty in 1920 which was updated in 1931. (Alam 1989)
- Afghanistan was receiving Soviet economic assistance as cooperation.
- In the mid-1950s 1950s soviet military aid was also present for Afghanistan.
- Consequently, at the same period, the Balochistan problem and the Afghan-Pak border dispute were boiling.
- The Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 was already worrying the American policymakers.
- India was the first country in the world to recognize China.
- Pt. Nehru and Congress had an inherent inclination towards socialism.

- India adopted the Soviet model of five-year plans for planned economic development.
- In 1954, India and China signed the principle of "Panchsheel" which was against any kind of "interventionism".
- The proximity of communist China was increasing with India.
- Pakistan was continuously making noise of Indian threat.
- Pakistan was making an effort from the very beginning of its birth to get American arms assistance. Within a few weeks of Pakistan's birth, Pakistan appealed to America for arms assistance. Mohammad Ali Jinnah gave a list of his arms requirements to America, which was \$ 170,000,000 for the army, \$75,000,000 for the Air Force and \$60,000,000 for the navy.(Venkataramani 1982 p.5.)

SOVIET AFGHAN PROXIMITY

It was evident that in the 1950s south Asia was the main priority of American foreign policy makers in the context of American policy of soviet containment, despite the Soviet-Afghan trade treaty of 1950. Up to the mid-1950s, the situation remained the same. But after the death of Stalin Nikita Khrushcheva showed his interest in Afghanistan. It is difficult to say whether the US interest in South Asia led to the Soviet Union's intervention or whether the Soviet Union's interest led to the American intervention. Because even before 1950, there was Afghan-Soviet closeness, both had economic cooperation. The ruling capitalists of Afghanistan had enough enmity with Britain because of the three Afghan-British wars in the past. Due to the proximity of Britain and America, naturally, Afghanistan also refused American cooperation. But under the Soviet control policy of America, the border neighbours of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan went into a military alliance, due to which the intervention of the Soviet Union increased very rapidly in Afghanistan. On the other hand, it can also be said that due to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, it had become a compulsion for America to increase defence cooperation with the border countries of Afghanistan. As a result, both the border neighbours of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan were included by the US in the Central Sento Military Alliance.

The Soviet Union took advantage of opportunities presented and exploited Afghanistan's short-sighted Pashtunistan policy by offering economic and political assistance. On July 17, 1950, a Soviet-Afghan economic agreement was signed. The agreement provided for duty-free transit of Afghan products through Soviet territory and barter trade between the two countries. Although Pakistan opened its borders after three months, Afghan import-export business never completely returned to its pre-blockade pattern.

Moreover, to create further opportunities for future Soviet influence in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union strongly and publicly supported the Afghan position on the Pashtunistan issue.

II. THE YEARS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SOVIETS, 1951-1963

The British organised Afghanistan as a new country in 1919 and in 1921 Emperor Amanullah sent diplomatic missions to Europe and the US to seek recognition of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union warmly welcomed the mission and immediately recognized Afghanistan. However the US, after much hesitation, recognized Afghanistan in 1934 and appointed ambassadors to both countries in 1948. Thus, since the birth of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union emerged as a natural ally. In 1950, America was financing the Helmand Valley Project in Afghanistan. But Afghanistan wanted America to provide it with military assistance and weapons as well. In 1951 Afghanistan gave the US a list of demands for arms worth about \$25 million but the US was not interested and added certain conditions that were difficult for Afghanistan to comply with. The most important of these was that this would not be an aid but a sale and Afghanistan would have to pay for it in cash. Also, this aid would be given through Pakistan and if it was used for Pashtunistan, the transfer would be stopped. At the same time, in 1950, Pakistan closed the Afghanistan border, and the supply of daily necessities from Pakistan to Afghanistan stopped. *“In 1955, border disputes led Pakistan to close once again the border that was serving as Afghanistan's trade link with the Indian Ocean. After*

the border was closed, Afghan leaders drifted into what the Afghans called the Soviet web.” (Alam,1989 p. 111) This was a golden opportunity for the Soviet Union to increase its proximity to Afghanistan, which the Soviet Union did not miss and immediately signed a four-year barter agreement with Afghanistan. Soon after the Soviet Union agreed to finance various development programs in Afghanistan and also provided Afghanistan the facility to trade with the Soviet territory so that Afghanistan could avoid Pakistani blockade. After Dawood became the Afghan Prime Minister, the closeness of Afghan-Soviet relations increased. Dawood's inclination increased towards the Soviet Union as compared to America and soon its results were visible and the Soviet Union started giving military assistance to Afghanistan. After 1955, Afghanistan received massive Soviet aid. (Khalilzad,1980 p.11)

Along with military assistance, a large number of economic development programmes were also included. The major ones among these were hydroelectric projects, the construction of airfields near the Iranian border, the construction of several roads and tunnels in the Hindu Kush region, the construction of a 470-mile-long road on the Soviet-Afghan border in Kandahar, etc. Soviet engineers constructed an air base in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, near the Tamrez air base of the Soviet republic of Uzbekistan. It is noteworthy that the Tamrez air base was used as a service centre for warplanes supplied to Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. (Nisha 1988) *“The death of Stalin marked a change in Soviet policy towards non-communist, non-aligned nations. Afghanistan became the first recipient of the new Soviet foreign aid program, and on January 27, 1954, the first Soviet loan of \$3.5 million was made to Afghanistan. “* (Sardar, 2014 p. 47) The inevitable result of this military aid to Afghanistan was that the attention of American policymakers was drawn towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan's importance naturally began to grow in American policymaking. Thus, a section in the US State Department believed that due to its geographical location and being a Muslim country, Pakistan could prove to be important in the West Asian alliance. Despite differences among American policymakers on this issue, the decisive person in favour of Pakistan was Foreign Secretary Foster Dallas, who believed that Pakistan was extremely important for America due to East Pakistan's proximity to Southeast Asia and its relations with West Asia. Consequently, President Eisenhower announced the United States' approval of Pakistan's request for military assistance. (Sardar, 2014)

It is not that America did not understand the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan but it was facing a dilemma of giving more preference to either Afghanistan or Pakistan. Between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the issue of Balochistan was such that the Soviet Union was blindly supporting Afghanistan while Pakistan was more important to America. Therefore, America could not go against Pakistan's wishes on the issue of Balochistan. Therefore, the issue of Balochistan was an important factor in Afghanistan-US relations in the 50s and 60s due to which America did not give much help to Afghanistan and gave preference to Pakistan. Due to all these reasons, Afghanistan-Soviet relations naturally became close and after Stalin's death, these increased a lot. On 21 June 1955, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed a new transit agreement under which Afghanistan got the facility of unhindered trade in Soviet areas. Its main objective was to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan in terms of daily use of goods. Bulganin and Khrushchev visited Kabul in December 1955 and signed agreements according to which Afghanistan was given aid of \$100 million, ratification of the 1931 neutrality and non-aggression pact, and support to Afghanistan in the matter of Balochistan. But in the background of these treaties, military assistance was indirectly agreed upon between Daoud and Khrushchev. As a result, the Afghan-Soviet Military Agreement was signed in 1956 and Afghanistan received arms worth about \$25 million from the Soviet Union. *“In 1956, Soviet arms began to arrive in Afghanistan. The Afghan-Soviet military agreement, involving some \$25 million, included T-34 tanks, MiG 17 fighters, 11-28 bombers, helicopters, and small arms from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and East Germany. They were paid in barter goods over eight years. The Soviets also helped to construct and expand military airfields in Mazar-i-Sharif, Shindad, and Begram. Later, Soviet military aid was expanded to create a modernized Afghan army, dependent almost exclusively on the Soviet bloc countries for new weapons, spare parts, and military instructors and advisors. And this is where the importance of the agreement lies. The Soviets started training Afghan officers, technicians, and specialists, who were sent to the USSR at the rate of 200 to 300 per year.”* (Sardar, 2014 p. 50)

In August 1957, the Afghan king visited Moscow and signed agreements for technical assistance. In 1959, the Standing Committee was strengthened by an operations agreement, and Soviet assistance was provided in the development of infrastructure, including the Kabul airport. By 1959, Soviet economic aid to Afghanistan had reached \$246 million, while US aid during that period was \$106 million, of which \$48 million was for the Helmand project alone and military assistance was virtually non-existent. Total Soviet aid to Afghanistan between 1955 and 1965 amounted to \$552 million. (Sardar 2014) The Soviet Union's massive military aid to Afghanistan and its open support for Pashtunistan was a crisis situation for Pakistan. Tensions between the two countries reached their highest point in 1955. The crisis escalated to such an extent that a state of war arose between Pakistan and Afghanistan and diplomatic relations between the two countries were severed. *“Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan rose markedly in 1955 when Pakistan- announced that it was consolidating its control over its tribal areas. In response, Afghan prime minister Mohammed Daoud Khan criticised Pakistan’s actions over the airwaves of Radio Kabul on March 29, 1955. Demonstrations that were reportedly inspired by the Afghan government flared up in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. S.M.M. Qureshi of the University of Alberta noted that Pakistan flags were pulled down and insulted and the [Pashtunistan] flag was hoisted on the chancery of the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul. This incident caused the two countries to withdraw their ambassadors, and relations weren’t fully restored until 1957. “The next crisis in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations came in 1960- 61. Khurshid Hasan, at the time a member of the Department of International Relations at the University of Karachi, recounts, In 1960, fresh border clashes took place. Afghan irregulars and Army troops dressed as tribesmen were reported to have penetrated the Pakistan side of the Durand Line with the sanction of the Afghan Government. Two other raids took place in May and fall of 1961.” (Ross & Vassefi 2012)*

US - PAKISTAN ALIGNMENT

The massive economic and military aid given by the Soviet Union to Afghanistan, the growing Afghan-Soviet friendship and the Soviet Union's open support to Afghanistan on

Pashtunistan, all these elements increased the importance of Pakistan in American foreign policy, especially in the context of West Asia. As a result, Pakistan received abundant American economic and military aid. *“The US decision to arm six divisions of the Pakistani Army, and to provide Pakistan with the supersonic F-104 Starfighter, as also the Korean War vintage F-86 aircraft led to India’s search for a supersonic aircraft.”* After 1955 266 in 1955 1086.5 in 1956 437.59 in 1957 533.3 in 1958 366.8 in 1959 1 230.39 in 1960 260.47 in 1961 549.02 in 1962 292.31 in 1963 187.55 in 1964 Total 3919.77 million dollar military assistance America to Pakistan. During the same period, the economic aid received by Pakistan from America was 15.5 billion dollars. Out of this, Pakistan received economic aid worth 106.5 billion dollars in 1956, 2334.65 million dollars in 1962, 2066.77 million dollars in 1963 and 2222.66 million dollars in 1964. *“Pakistan has historically been among the top recipients of US aid - since 1948, the US has sent more than £30bn in direct aid to the country. Nearly half of this has been for military assistance.”* (Data blog, The Guardian)

After Stalin's death, the US policy of containing communism progressed rapidly because communism was spreading very fast, especially after the communist revolution in China, America became very cautious. Due to the growing Soviet interest in Afghanistan and the Soviet ambitions to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea, Pakistan had gained a very important geopolitical importance in the US foreign policy. Its necessary outcome was that Pakistan was made a part of two military alliances formed in the East and West. It was made a member of the Baghdad Pact CENTO in the West and SEATO in the East. Apart from this, the biggest threat to India was the mutual agreement between Pakistan and America. [US Pak mutual agreement 1959](#). Thus, by the 60s a very strong alliance had been formed between America and Pakistan and America gave huge economic and military aid to Pakistan, which led to very rapid development in Pakistan in the 60s. Amidst the massive inflow of American aid, political stability enabled Pakistan to sustain high rates of growth in the 1960s. Pakistan achieved an agricultural growth rate of 5% per annum. Large-scale manufacturing grew at a rate of 16% per annum from 1960/61-1964/65. Pakistan achieved an average annual

growth rate of 6.7% in GDP during 1960-1970. ([Anjum and Michael,2017](#)) The inevitable outcome of this development was the Indo-Pak War of 1965.

India

Nehru's priorities were clear immediately after independence. He did not want to spend too much money on the army and military weapons but wanted the economic development of India through rapid industrialization. Therefore, in the 50s India's military needs were based on Britain and India's military needs were limited to spare parts of old weapons received from Britain and some new weapons which were not of much importance. *“In the early 1950s, India obtained Ouragan and Mystere fighter bomber aircraft from France. Most of the armaments of the 1950s were purchased from Britain, including naval vessels, Centurion tanks, Canberra, Hunter, Sea Hawk and Gnat aircraft. AMX-13 light tanks, Alize aircraft, and Alouette helicopters were acquired from France. Only 106 mm recoilless guns and Fairchild Packet aircraft were from the US. Most of the electronic equipment licensed to be manufactured in Bharat Electronics were from British and French firms. Almost all our training programmes for middle-level officers were in British institutions.”* (Subramanyam,2005) Research by Professor Venkat Ramani (1982) clearly shows that India was the first choice of the US administration in South Asia and not Pakistan because of India's size and capabilities. But because of his foreign policy of rapid economic development through peaceful co-existence, Pandit Nehru made it clear to the Soviet Union and America that India neither wanted to bring superpower rivalry into South Asia nor did it want to get caught in the trap of polarisation. Therefore, Pandit Nehru very politely refused the arms offers of the Soviet Union and America. *“President Eisenhower’s offer to provide India with military equipment, analogous to those supplied to Pakistan, was turned down by India as that would have violated India’s non-aligned posture...In 1954, the Soviet Union chose India as the first country (ahead of Egypt) to offer to sell military equipment. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru turned down the offer because any military relationship with the USSR at that stage would complicate India’s relationship with the Western Countries.”* (Subramanyam,2005)

During Nehru's tenure, India did not make much effort to militarise the country. It even rejected offers made by the Soviet Union and the US. Thus, Nehru's indifference and peaceful policy towards the serious threat developing in its neighborhood and the ambitions of China certainly cost the country dearly and its inevitable outcome was the Chinese aggression of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. Indo-Soviet cooperation towards armament transfer to India gained momentum only in the sixties. The US too provided arms to India after the Chinese aggression of 1962 which was in consonance with their policy of

containment of communism. *“Following the Chinese attack in October-November 1962, the Western countries and the Commonwealth promised military aid to India. The UK and the Commonwealth delivered their promised supplies. The US had promised infantry equipment for six mountain divisions, Fairchild Packet aircraft, six old dismantled radars to be installed only on the Northern frontier and not on the West, snow clearing equipment, some obsolescent signal equipment, a dismantled small arms ammunition factory; engineering equipment and such like. Though an agreement was signed between Y B Chavan and Robert McNamara on June 6, 1964, promising India US\$250 million credit and \$250 million grant for five years.” (Subramanyam 2005)*

Conclusion

Colonialism has had a serious shadow on the geopolitics of South Asia. In the situation that developed in South Asia after the long rule of Britain, mutual rivalry and attitude towards Britain emerged as an important factor. After the Soviet Revolution in 1917, the borders of the Soviet Union started touching the borders of the British Empire in Afghanistan. Since Britain did not want a direct conflict with the Soviet Union, it created a buffer state of Afghanistan between the British Empire and the Soviet Empire and withdrew from Afghanistan. However, two British-Afghan wars had filled the minds of the Afghan rulers and Afghans with animosity towards Britain. Due to this, Afghanistan naturally gradually came closer to the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the partition of India and Pakistan gave birth to a new country in South Asia that had feelings of hatred towards India, i.e. Pakistan. Due to Afghanistan's proximity to the Soviet Union and in the context of West Asia, Pakistan's geopolitical importance increased in the eyes of the US, due to which Soviet aid to Afghanistan and American aid to Pakistan started in large amounts. Hence, naturally, there was pressure on India to be cautious about the security of its borders, but due to its developmental priorities, Nehru did not do so and India had to face two major wars in the 60s. In the 1962 war, India had to lose that decisive piece of land to China, due to which China got direct access to Pakistan and ultimately to the Arabian Sea through the Gwadar port by road. Due to two wars, India's economic growth rate was also low in the 60s, and eventually, India was forced to buy weapons to maintain the balance of power. In the 60s, especially after Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister, India-Soviet economic and military cooperation grew very rapidly, which was seen at its peak in the form of India-Soviet friendship in 1971. At this time India was also accused of deviating from its non-alignment movement, but the security needs of South Asia were such that India had to pay attention to

its security interests. Therefore, in conclusion, it can be said that the military assistance given by the Soviet Union and America to Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Nehru era had very serious and wide-reaching implications, due to which superpower rivalry came to South Asia. As a result, India had to invest heavily in arms for a long time, the necessary outcome of which is that for the last decade, India has remained among the first three nations in arms importing.

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