

South Asia

# Backgrounder

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## AMERICA'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THE AFGHAN PEACE

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 643, "A U.S. Agenda for an Afghan Peace Settlement," April 4, 1988.)

The April 14 signing of the Geneva accords on Afghanistan is a testimony to Moscow's failure to score a military victory in Afghanistan. The agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan, guaranteed by the United States and the Soviet Union, specifies the terms for the withdrawal of 115,000 Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Despite eight years of brutal fighting in the longest war in Soviet history, and an estimated Soviet investment of up to \$150 billion in trying to consolidate Soviet control, Moscow has failed to subdue the resistance of the heroic *mujahideen* Freedom Fighters. This is a victory for the West and for the Reagan Doctrine's commitment to support the Afghan Freedom Fighters.

Yet it is an incomplete victory. There is no evidence that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has abandoned the "Great Game" for ultimate control of Afghanistan. He merely may be changing tactics to cut Soviet losses. Using the Geneva framework, Gorbachev may be intending to prop up his Afghan puppet regime, while undercutting and isolating the *mujahideen*.

**Halting Expansion.** If Gorbachev follows through on his promise to withdraw Soviet troops, the Reagan Administration will have won a major geopolitical victory that would halt the southern expansion of the Soviet empire, deprive Moscow of a strategic steppingstone to the Persian Gulf, and reduce Soviet abilities to meddle in neighboring Pakistan and Iran. A genuine Soviet withdrawal would lend credence to the admission to The Heritage Foundation by a Soviet official that "the Brezhnev Doctrine (if it ever existed) is dead." A Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan also would vindicate the tough-minded American strategists who advocated providing the *mujahideen* with such modern weapons as the *Stinger* anti-aircraft missile. Moscow's military strategy was blunted on the battlefield, not by fancy diplomatic footwork.

But the agreement does not end communist rule in Kabul and the geopolitical gains of a Soviet pullout will remain at risk as long as a communist regime retains power. Afghan communists laid the groundwork for the December 1979 Soviet invasion and could do so again. The Geneva agreement does not alter geography; tens of thousands of Soviet troops will remain deployed along Afghanistan's northern border. Given past Western failures to respond to communist violations of regional "peace" settlements, such as the 1973 Paris accords on Vietnam, Moscow can be expected to cheat on its commitments. Until the Soviet puppet regime is replaced by a genuinely independent Afghan government, the Brezhnev Doctrine cannot be declared dead, nor can the Reagan Doctrine chalk up its most important triumph since the 1983 liberation of Grenada. Moreover, until this happens, there will be no peace in Afghanistan.

**Flaws in the Settlement.** The sad truth is that the Geneva accords do not guarantee peace, or even a ceasefire, because the *mujahideen* were left out of the negotiations. The accords do not address the central issue behind the fighting — the unwillingness of the overwhelming majority of Afghans to acquiesce to the repressive rule of the illegitimate communist regime imposed by Moscow. Instead, the accords essentially provide a fig leaf for Moscow to "declare victory" by ending anti-communist "intervention" in Afghan affairs.

The Soviets are allowed to save face at the expense of the *mujahideen* and Pakistan. Moscow did not want to sign an agreement that would rule out Soviet aid to Kabul or to acknowledge the U.S. right to aid the *mujahideen*. Under the terms of the U.S.-Soviet side agreement on "positive symmetry," each power would suspend aid during the nine-month Soviet withdrawal period, but each reserves the right to aid its Afghan clients to the extent that the other does so. If the U.S. should exercise this right, it will put Pakistan in an awkward position due to Islamabad's commitment to halt the flow of arms crossing its borders on May 15, when the accord goes into effect. But if the U.S. does not continue its aid, the *mujahideen* will remain locked in a grueling struggle with the Kabul regime.

The Soviets surely calculate that, with huge amounts of war supplies and thousands of Soviet advisers left in Afghanistan, the proposed formula for U.S.-Soviet aid levels will help Kabul more than the *mujahideen*. Moscow, indeed, may be behind the series of sabotage bombings of *mujahideen* arms depots in Pakistan. Once the U.S. pipeline is closed, Moscow could seek to transform Afghanistan into another Lebanon by fomenting trouble between rival resistance groups in an effort to assure the survival of its Kabul surrogates.

**U.S. Policy.** Now that the U.S. has signed on as a guarantor of the Geneva accords, Washington must hold the Soviets to their promises and make the accords work to the greatest degree possible for the *mujahideen*. Washington must increase military aid to the *mujahideen* to the maximum extent possible before May 15, taking particular care to replace *Stingers* lost in recent sabotage bombings. Soviet demands that Pakistan dismantle *mujahideen* camps in Pakistan should be rebuffed firmly by Washington. The U.S. aid infrastructure must be kept intact to insure that any Soviet violations of the accord will trigger immediate resumption of U.S. aid. And the best deterrent against future Soviet meddling in Afghanistan is maintaining close Pakistani-American ties.

Washington should buttress the *mujahideen* claim to political legitimacy, something grievously lacking in the Geneva accords. The U.S. should withdraw its recognition of the Kabul regime; in its place, Washington should recognize the interim government proposed by the *mujahideen* as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. U.S. humanitarian aid to Afghans inside the country should be boosted from its current level of \$45 million per year and should be channeled through the new interim government.

The Geneva accords spell the end of overt Soviet military involvement in the conflict, but the Afghan war will rage on. Washington must monitor the situation closely to assure that the uphill struggle of the *mujahideen* to liberate their country from communism is not hampered by Soviet interference in violation of the accords.

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