

# Russians plan to stay in Afghanistan

by Ramtanu Maitra

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov used the occasion of his recent visit to New Delhi and talks with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to announce that the Soviets may not pull their troops out of Afghanistan by the Feb. 15 Geneva Accord deadline. The Soviet plan not to vacate Afghanistan had earlier become evident in a series of measures to re-establish Russian military and political control over the country.

Though it was cloaked in the predictable bluster about Pakistani violations of the accord, the Soviet decision to stay on became evident with the posting of Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov as ambassador in late September, and was no doubt made long before that. Following Vorontsov's arrival in Kabul, pressure on the Afghan-Pakistan border was stepped up dramatically. Reports of SU-22 planes violating Pakistani air space have since become routine.

On Nov. 3, Moscow officially announced that it had suspended further pull-out of troops from Afghanistan because of the "situation prevailing in the country." A week earlier, it came to light that some 30 advanced MiG-27s, attack planes used for offensive operations, are only being flown by Soviet pilots. Simultaneously, it became known that Moscow has supplied the Kabul regime with surface-to-surface Scud-V missiles, which have Pakistan's strategically sensitive and most populated areas within their range.

Notwithstanding the "democratic criticism" in Moscow of the late President Leonid Brezhnev for dispatching troops to Afghanistan in 1979, and a stream of doublespeak indulged in under the banner of *perestroika*, the decision to build up "Fortress Kabul" probably did not begin with Vorontsov's appointment. Long before the Russian aristocrat appeared in Kabul, the Soviet Union had been pouring arms into Kabul to prop up the fast-fading Najibullah regime, which, contrary to Soviet propaganda, does not control Afghanistan militarily or politically.

Interesting also is the fact that the Soviets have continued to protect their Afghan assets from the rough and tumble of Kabul power politics. In September, intelligence reports indicated that Afghan Interior Minister Said Mohammad Gulabzoy and Defense Minister Gen. Shahnawaz Tanai were plotting to overthrow Najibullah. Both Tanai and Gulabzoy belong to the Khalq faction of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and were trying to "cleanse" the ruling party of the Parchamites—followers of the other faction of the PDPA, Parchami. Reporting on the coup at-

tempt, *The Muslim*, an English-language daily published from Islamabad, said that the Soviets, sensing the plot, called both Tanai and Gulabzoy to Moscow to cool their heels.

But it would be wrong to assume Gulabzoy is just another hothead. Moscow realizes that Gulabzoy is a valuable asset who cannot be left to the mercy of Najibullah, who knows about the coup plot and the two Khalqis' involvement. Along with Tani and Aslam Watanjar, the communication minister and a Khalqi holding a vital post, Gulabzoy has long served Soviet interests. He played a critical role in the coup that overthrew and assassinated President Daoud on April 28, 1978.

The Watanjar-Tanai-Gulabzoy troika survived the regime of Parchamite Babrak Karmal, who came back to Afghanistan with the Soviet invaders in 1979, simply because Moscow protected them. Najibullah accommodated all of them in his cabinet following Karmal's ouster.

In early November, sensing retribution by Najibullah in the offing, the Soviets protected Gulabzoy by pressuring Najibullah to appoint him Afghan ambassador to Moscow. Moscow's likely plan is to bring in Gulabzoy with the next wave of Soviet tanks, if the latest manipulations fail. If accurate, the recent report of a broadside labeling Najibullah's PDPA as "out of step" with the Afghan people, on Soviet TV's weekly current affairs program "Panorama," may be a sign of things to come.

The game that the Soviets are playing is to establish a government in Kabul that will be broad based on paper, and so, acceptable internationally, but which in reality is controlled by Moscow's stooges.

This is the gameplan on which the Nov. 3 U.N. resolution was based. The resolution, better known as the Cordovez formulation, called for convening a *loya jirga* (convention of tribal chiefs) to arrive at an internal political settlement. The mujahideen faction of Burhanuddin Rabbani has rejected the proposal, and proposed instead the constitution of a representative *shoora* (advisory council) that would work out the mode of elections in Afghanistan. Rabbani has also rejected PDPA participation, a built-in feature of the U.N. resolution, as unacceptable.

Pakistan is also aware of the designed flaw of the Cordovez formulation. Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan, who described the Soviet decision to temporarily halt troop withdrawal as a "matter of concern and disappointment for Pakistan," has pointed out that the *loya jirga* proposal must be broadened enough to include all Afghans and not just an alliance consensus.

Moscow's flexing of muscle to shove their own formulation down the throats of the Afghans and their backers in the United States and Pakistan, indicates that Soviet propaganda about the PDPA's strength is as phony as a three-dollar bill, and unless the Soviet Army continues to stay in Kabul, Moscow's hope of extending its boundary eastward will come to nought.