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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 April 1985

INDIA'S POSITION ON AFGHANISTAN: PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

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Summary

The Indian Government opposes the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, but its private efforts to influence Moscow's decisions have been unsuccessful and have irritated Moscow. Given this experience, the regional repercussions of the Soviet invasion, and India's continuing reliance on Soviet arms supplies, Rajiv Gandhi probably will continue to avoid public confrontation with Moscow on Afghanistan in the near term. In two or three years, strengthened ties with the West, a strong political position at home, or signs that Moscow has ambitions beyond Afghanistan could encourage Rajiv to review his public statements and India's vote in the UN on Afghanistan.

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This memorandum was prepared by of the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 15 April 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, South Asia Division, NESAs, on

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INDIA'S POSITION ON AFGHANISTAN: PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE [REDACTED]

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The Indian Perception

New Delhi believes the regional repercussions of the Soviet invasion pose a more direct threat to India than the invasion itself. In the Indian view, the invasion has:

- Introduced increased superpower competition to a region where New Delhi aspires to unchallenged military and political dominance.
- Sparked the renewal and growth of US-Pakistani military ties that are not only strengthening Pakistani military capabilities but also, in the Indian view, seem likely to provide the US with basing rights in Pakistan.
- Allowed the security relationship between Washington and Islamabad to acquire a dynamic of its own apart from the common cause in Afghanistan, with the United States willing to tolerate Pakistani progress toward a nuclear weapons capability in return for a foothold in Southwest Asia. [REDACTED]

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India's ambiguous public position on Afghanistan also reflects an effort to bolster its nonaligned credentials by steering a course between Moscow and its opponents. The Indians view their abstention on the annual United Nations resolution on the occupation of Afghanistan as a neutral act. Rajiv Gandhi in public has echoed his mother's wish for an end to both the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and US aid to the Afghan resistance. [REDACTED]

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The Indians argue that their recognition of the Babrak Karmal regime in Afghanistan does not confer legitimacy on Babrak's Soviet backers and will ensure the country's independence and nonalignment if Soviet troops pull out. They believe a prolonged occupation will "Sovietize" Afghanistan and dim prospects for its eventual return to independence. Foreign aid for Afghan insurgents, in New Delhi's view, makes a Soviet troop withdrawal less likely. [REDACTED]

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Some Indian officials privately acknowledge embarrassment over New Delhi's policy on Afghanistan. US diplomats in New Delhi reported that the abashed official who was charged with explaining his government's vote in the UN to block a human rights investigation backed by the United States admitted that Soviet pressure has played a part in India's stance for the past two years. When pressed as to why India sided with Libya, Syria, and Mozambique, he noted that from time to time US positions on human rights have reflected conflicting political interests. [REDACTED]

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Dealing With Moscow

New Delhi's ambiguous public stance on Afghanistan conceals considerable frustration over the Soviet intervention. The Indians resented Moscow's failure in 1979 to advise them of the impending invasion. Beginning in 1981, Indira Gandhi expressed her unhappiness over the Soviet occupation with increasing openness. She even voiced some of her concerns publicly while in Moscow in 1982, to the consternation of her hosts. [redacted]

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India's public position also masks its private efforts to persuade Moscow to withdraw its troops. [redacted] Moscow has ignored New Delhi's diplomatic appeals for a negotiated settlement and Soviet troop withdrawal. [redacted]

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Because New Delhi has become convinced that the Soviets will not leave except on their own terms, the Indians avoid direct confrontation with Moscow that might threaten their vital arms relationship. [redacted]

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Indian Foreign Secretary Bhandari's recent comments to Undersecretary of State Schneider in New Delhi reiterated the basic Indian view. Bhandari said:

-- The Soviet military presence in Afghanistan is likely to become permanent unless a diplomatic solution is found soon.

-- India, however, would not get into "the game of mediation". New Delhi has indicated on other recent occasions that it might be willing to play a "a more active role" if the Soviets did not object. [redacted]

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Outlook in the Near Term

Rajiv's more evenhanded approach to the superpowers and his Western-sounding emphasis on economic liberalization indicate his desire to widen India's options and to underline its independent foreign policy. Even so, we believe Rajiv's statement to Parliament last week that he will maintain the timetested foreign policy he inherited suggests he will continue to avoid positions likely to antagonize Moscow seriously. His adherence to the status quo could reflect a desire to focus his current efforts on setting his domestic house in order, or it could imply that he has not yet formulated his own position on such key issues as Afghanistan. [redacted]

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In our view, New Delhi probably believes that a changed Indian stance on Afghanistan would yield no more tangible concessions from Washington on US regional policy than it would from Moscow. The Indians certainly doubt that the US intends to modify its security relationship with Pakistan, which New Delhi believes implicitly challenges India's regional hegemony. Earlier this month, Rajiv publicly cited the flow of US weapons to Islamabad--and to the Afghan insurgents--as an obstacle to closer Indo-US ties, and Indian planners calculate that increased US aid to the insurgents will result in a deeper US commitment to Pakistan's defense. Some Indians also believe that Washington disregards the danger that an unconditional Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan could open the way for a fundamentalist Islamic regime. [redacted]

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Rajiv in our view would resent any US attempt to alter India's foreign policy as the price for movement on technology transfer or concessional aid. New Delhi is proud of what it sees as its independent and pragmatic pursuit of its national interests and, overall, sees its carefully calibrated policy on Afghanistan as serving these interests. Any appearance of caving in response to US pressures would damage Rajiv's credibility at home and probably in the Nonaligned Movement. [REDACTED]

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The Longer Term Outlook

Several developments in our view could prompt a reevaluation of New Delhi's policy on Afghanistan two or three years hence. Growing prosperity at home and a waning of Sikh troublemaking would allow Rajiv to focus on foreign policy issues and consider major policy shifts. [REDACTED]

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A slowdown in Pakistan's military acquisitions, warmer ties with the West--including increasing flow of high technology from the United States and Europe--and progress toward arms diversification also would allow, even encourage, New Delhi to reappraise the costs and benefits of its reliance on Moscow. New Delhi, for example, might publicly condemn the Soviet invasion without simultaneously criticizing foreign aid to the insurgents. This would comprise a significant shift away from its current stance. The Indians also could shift their vote in the United Nations--a clear signal that New Delhi has reordered its foreign policy priorities. [REDACTED]

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The Indians would still have to weigh the potential price of changing their policy on Afghanistan--disruption of Soviet arms supplies that they consider essential to counter Pakistan's military might. New Delhi knows that for the rest of the decade, its reliance on Moscow for spare parts--and for sophisticated arms offered on uniquely concessional terms--could enable the Soviets to raise the cost of diverging from their preferences on a range of issues. [REDACTED]

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Despite these concerns, we believe that New Delhi's assessment of the threat posed by Afghanistan to Indian interests--and its stand on the issue--would change rapidly if the Soviets:

- Appeared ready to expand their presence beyond Afghanistan into Pakistan, reducing its viability as a buffer between India and Soviet-occupied Afghanistan.
- Stepped up pressure on India to grant military facilities or other concessions that would compromise India's independence.
- Acquired such facilities in a neighboring country.
- Markedly improved relations with China, reducing--in India's estimate --the value Moscow places on New Delhi's friendship. [REDACTED]

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Could India Move Closer To Moscow?

India's commitment to nonalignment, its sensitivity about being perceived as a tacit Soviet ally, and its reservations about longterm Soviet intentions

[REDACTED]

in the region all will continue to make New Delhi reluctant to consider closer regional cooperation with Moscow. Still, the Indian Government probably would consider closer cooperation with the Soviets if it:

- Believed that Pakistan developed a nuclear weapon with the tacit consent of Washington.
- Had firm evidence that the United States acquired the use of military facilities in Pakistan or another neighboring state.
- Saw major transfers of advanced US arms to China. [REDACTED]


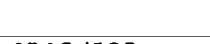
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SUBJECT: India's Position on Afghanistan: Prospects for Change



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