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Chapter 21: United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP)

Adam Baczko and Gilles Dorronsoro

Introduction

On 27 December 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, assassinating the Afghan leader, Hafizullah Amin, and replacing him with Babrak Karmal in the hope of ending a popular revolt against the Communist regime. More than 100,000 Soviet troops were quickly deployed, turning the internal revolt into a full-scale war against a foreign invader. Millions of refugees flocked to Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan became a sanctuary for the Afghan resistance, the mujahidin. The country had a long-standing border dispute with Afghanistan over Pashtun-populated areas. This tension, that several times in the past came close to armed confrontation, had been aggravated in the recent years by the ideological divide resulting from the military coups occurring in both countries. While communists had taken power in Afghanistan in 1978, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's rule on Pakistan was based since 1977 on Islamism. The mujahidin could also count on the support of some Western and Arab Gulf countries, which supplied them with money, arms and training, transforming the Afghan crisis into one of the last chapters of the Cold War.

Due to the opposition of the Soviet Union, the UN Security Council was unable to adopt a resolution condemning the invasion of Afghanistan and the matter was addressed in an emergency session of the General Assembly. Assembly Resolution ES-6/2 of 14 January 1980 deplored the armed intervention and called for the "immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan"ⁱ. Subsequently, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim appointed Javier Pérez de Cuéllar as his Personal Representative for Afghanistan. Pérez de Cuéllar shuttled between Moscow, Washington, Islamabad and Kabul, yet the positions of Afghanistan and Pakistan appeared irreconcilable. For the regime in Kabul, the mujahidin were proxies for Pakistan and direct negotiations between the two governments were necessary, while Pakistan insisted on self-determination for the Afghan people. Faced with the impossibility of a direct dialogue, the UN adopted a policy of indirect rapprochement.

Due to Perez de Cuellar's election as UN Secretary-General in 1981, Diego Cordovez (Ecuador) became the new Special Representative and succeeded in initiating indirect negotiation in Geneva, beginning in June 1982. After a series of contacts, Pérez de Cuéllar suggested a four-point agenda, which was ultimately the basis of the 1988 Geneva Accords.

The growing condemnation of the Soviet occupation among UN member states, the political reforms of Gorbachev in the USSR from 1986 and the lack of decisive military results on the ground explain the Soviet decision to withdraw. The Geneva Accords (Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan) were signed on 14 April 1988ⁱⁱ. They were designed to oversee the withdrawal of Soviet troops and a political transition in Afghanistan. The Accords consisted of four instruments:

- a bilateral agreement between the Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the principles of non-interference and non-intervention;
- a declaration on international guarantees, signed by the USSR and the United States;
- a bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the voluntary return of refugees;
- and an agreement on the interrelationships for the settlement of the situation relating to Afghanistan, signed by Afghanistan and Pakistan and witnessed by the Soviet Union and the United Statesⁱⁱⁱ.

This last instrument contained provisions to monitor the Soviet withdrawal. The UN Secretary-General was asked to appoint a Representative with a support staff. Through his good offices, the parties were to implement smoothly the arrangements contained in the Accords. A month later, in May 1988, the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) was established. It was officially confirmed by Security Council resolution 622 of 31 October 1988^{iv}.

UNGOMAP was officially created by Security Council resolution 622 of 31 October 1988 to assist Afghanistan and Pakistan in implementing the Geneva Accords and to investigate and report any violations of the Accords. The mission was active from May 1988, following the signing of the four part Agreements, and ceased operations on 15 March 1990.

The cost of the mission, \$14 million, was covered by the appropriations from the regular budget of the UN Expenditures. UNGOMAP comprised 40 officers temporarily detached from

existing peacekeeping operations (UNTSO, UNDOF, UNIFIL) and ten officers from Austria, Canada, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, Ghana, Ireland, Nepal, Poland and Sweden.

Authorized strength and maximum deployment: 50 military observers, supported by a number of international and local civilian staff

At withdrawal: 35 military observers, supported by a number of international and local civilian staff

Fatalities: None

The Course of the mission

To monitor the Geneva Accords, a Representative of the Secretary-General – Mr. Cordovez – was appointed and assisted by a support staff that constituted the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP). A senior military officer – Major-General Rauli Helminen (Finland) – was designated as Deputy to the Representative. UNGOMAP established two headquarters, one in Kabul and the other in Islamabad, each consisting of five military officers and a civilian component. Fifty military officers and up to 40 additional officers were temporarily redeployed from existing UN operations (the UN Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East, the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon)^v.

The UNGOMAP's mandate included: the monitoring of non-interference and non-intervention by Afghanistan and Pakistan in each other's internal affairs; the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; and the voluntary return of refugees.

The successful monitoring of the Soviet withdrawal

The Geneva Accords contained provisions for the timetable and modalities of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. To monitor the withdrawal, UNGOMAP coordinated with the Soviet and Afghan representatives on the schedule and roads taken. Three permanent outposts were established to monitor the Soviet withdrawal: at the border points of Hayratan and Torghundi, and at the Shindand air base, used for withdrawal by air. The Soviet army had approximately 100,000 soldiers located in half of the Afghan provinces. On 12 May, 1988 the withdrawal began at Jalalabad and Kandahar, then on 26 July at Shindand. In accordance with the stipulations of the fourth instrument of the Geneva Accords, the first withdrawal from Kabul took place in August, by which time, according to marshal Boris

Gromov, the commander in chief of the Red Army, no more than half of the Soviet forces remained, concentrated into the six provinces of Kabul, Baghlan, Samangan, Kapisa, Farah and Herat¹.

Between 15 August 1988 and 1 January 1989, Soviet troops interrupted temporarily their withdrawal, probably due to logistical problems. However, in a matter of days, troops started again to leave by air and by road in grouped convoys, and on 15 February 1989, the Soviet withdrawal was completed. Finding compliance from all actors over this issue, UNGOMAP did not face major difficulties and succeeded in this part of its mandate. The 50 officers facilitated communication between the belligerent over the different phases of withdrawal and ensured the completion of the process.

The failure to monitor non-interference and non-intervention

From the outset of UNGOMAP's mission, Kabul and Islamabad complained about each other's interference. In particular, Afghanistan mentioned the continuing border crossings of mujahidin coming from the training camps in Pakistan, the violations of Afghan airspace by Pakistani aircraft, as well as activities of the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) in Afghanistan.

Afghan complaints were especially numerous in the months following the Soviet withdrawal. From the spring of 1989, the mujahidin launched a series of military operations, the most important ones against the city of Jalalabad, which were supposed to bring down the Afghan government. Pakistan participated in this massive offensive both directly, with the presence of ISI officers alongside the mujahidin, and indirectly by providing a sanctuary and logistical help.

On the Pakistani side, the complaints included violations of airspace, the use of SCUD missiles in Pakistani territory and "terrorist attacks" (bombings attributed to the Afghan intelligence, the KHAD, especially in Peshawar).

UNGOMAP was not equipped to deal with these large-scale incidents. The outposts established in November 1988 in Peshawar and Quetta in Pakistan were far from the battlefield and the new posts established in April 1989, at Torkham, Teri Mangal and Chaman on the Afghan side of the border with Pakistan, were no more able to monitor the situation on the ground. Furthermore, neither Islamabad nor Kabul was willing to collaborate with UNGOMAP;

¹ Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan 1979 to the Present*, Hurst & Company, London, 2005.

they were following their own agendas and the UN mission had neither the mandate nor the means to accomplish its mission. Without the cooperation of the actors involved in the conflict, UNGOMAP could only register the complaints from each side without investigating them thoroughly and could not take any measure to coerce them to comply with the Accords.

The impossibility of effectively monitoring the voluntary return of refugees

Despite being an explicit part of the UNGOMAP mandate, the voluntary return of millions of refugees could not be supervised by the under-resourced UN mission. In practice, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was in charge of the Agreement on the Voluntary Return of Refugees and UNGOMAP was tasked only to inform it on the security conditions within Afghanistan. Yet with 50 personnel and its outposts located near to the Afghan-Pakistan border, UNGOMAP could not collect sufficient information. In addition, the voluntary return of refugees was an unrealistic expectation. The fighting did not stop after the Soviet withdrawal. UNGOMAP's mandate was focused on the international dimension of the armed conflict, but even without Soviet troops, the war continued between Najibullah's regime and the mujahidin. Due to this heavy fighting inside Afghanistan, few refugees were able to come back to Afghanistan during the period of the UNGOMAP mandate.

Termination of the mission

The UNGOMAP mandate was extended for two months by UN Security Council resolution 647 (11 January 1990). This was decided as the 20-month timeframe initially defined in the Geneva accords was dependent on the beginning of the implementation of the instruments, yet the third instrument on refugee return, had not begun. The Secretary-General therefore had grounds for a mandate extension, but this was conditional upon the goodwill of the Security Council's members. In fact, when Javier Perez de Cuellar tried to obtain another extension of the mission in November 1990, no consensus could be reached in the Council, and the mission therefore ended. The United States was then disengaging itself from the war and a UN mission was considered useless in the context of the new phase of the civil war.

This was effected on 15 March 1990. To maintain a UN presence, the Secretary-General created the Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP) with a mandate to assist the return of refugees and facilitate a political settlement^{vi}. Benon Sivan

(Cyprus), Assistant Secretary-General, was appointed head of the new structure and also became the Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan. However, this under-funded mission, created from the remnants of UNGOMAP whose only achievement had been to monitor Soviet troop withdrawal, could not succeed. It lacked the necessary resources to influence decisively a situation that was getting more and more complex, as Afghan factions and their respective foreign supporters involved in fighting were multiplying. Without influence on the Afghan parties and no strong support from the international community, the OSGAP was not able to contain in any significant manner the civil war that developed after the fall of Kabul in 1992 to a coalition of former Mujahidin parties, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, Ahmed Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami, Abdul Rashid Dostum's Junbish-i Milli and Abdul Ali Mazari's Hezb-e Wahdat. Fighting rapidly broke out among the various factions and, when the OSGAP mandate ended on 31 January 1995, the civil war was still going on^{vii}. The UN role became residual, a situation which lasted until 1999, when sanctions were taken against the Taliban. Three years earlier, this clerical movement, born in 1994 in the province of Kandahar, had taken over Kaboul and most of the Afghan territory from the coalition of former Mujahidin leaders. At that time, the civil war was limited to the North, where, under the name of the Northern Alliance, the remnants of the Mujahidin kept fighting the Taliban. Yet, the return of the UN involvement in the Afghan conflict did not allude to the civil war, but to the presence of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

UNGOMAP took place in the context of renewed UN activism and provided an early post-cold war indication of the potential opportunities and the challenges of UN mediation and peacekeeping. When actors were willing to comply with UNGOMAP (in the monitoring the Soviet withdrawal for example), the UN mission could accomplish its mandate. Conversely when the agenda of the states and armed groups involved cut across UNGOMAP's mandate (in monitoring the non-intervention and non-interference and the voluntary return of refugees for example), the UN operation lacked both resources and support to achieve its objectives. It could only register complaints, but not act upon them. Despite the multiplication of peacekeeping missions after the end of the 1980s, the UN as a whole remained largely dependent on the goodwill of the member states within the UN for its good offices to succeed in Afghanistan, as elsewhere. When the regional powers, notably Pakistan, took the front seat in the 1990s, the UN

was de facto marginalize and will only be back in the Afghan crisis with the sanction against the Taliban, when again a consensus could be attained between the major powers.

ⁱ The situation in Afghanistan and its implications or international peace and security, General Assembly resolution ES-6/2, 14 January 1980.

ⁱⁱ For the text of the agreements, see Diego Cordovez, Selig H. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The inside story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

ⁱⁱⁱ William Maley, "The Geneva Accords of April 1988", in Amin Saikal and William Maley, eds., *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12-25.

^{iv} Karl TH Birgisson, "UNGOMAP", in William J. Durch, ed., *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 299-314; Satish Chandra, Mala Chandra, *International Conflicts and Peace Making Process: Role of the United Nations* (Mittal Publication: Delhi, 2006), 291-298; Terry M. Mays, *Historical Dictionary of Multinational Peacekeeping* (Ilanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 284-285.

^v Afghanistan/Pakistan - UNGOMAP - Facts and Figures, www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/ungomap/facts.html

^{vi} The new structure was built based on previous General Assembly resolution: *cf.* The situation in Afghanistan and its implications or international peace and security, General Assembly resolution 43/20, 3 November 1988; The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, General Assembly resolution 45/12, 7 November 1990; The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, General Assembly resolution 44/15, 1 November 1989.

^{vii} Details/Information for Canadian Forces (CF) Operation *Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/od-bdo/di-ri-eng.asp?IntlOpId=225&CdnOpId=264>