# BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND SOLIDARITY

## Swiss Good Offices in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992


LILIANE DÉSIRÉE STADLER

ST. ANTONY'S COLLEGE

DPhil in History


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Liliane Stadler
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# Short Abstract

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, the Swiss government initially concluded that as a neutral and unaffected country, Switzerland had no role to play in the crisis. However, not only did Switzerland begin to deliver humanitarian aid to the region in 1979, between 1982 and 1986, Switzerland also agreed to extend a protective power mandate to Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In exchange for transferring these POWs to Switzerland for their internment, it was hoped that the ICRC would regain access to Afghanistan, from where it had been expelled in 1980. Finally, between 1990 and 1992, following the retreat of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the Swiss government accepted a request to mediate between a moderate faction of the Afghan resistance – commonly known as the *mujahideen* – and the Soviet-installed Afghan regime, both of which had remained at war after the Soviet retreat. This thesis asks, what the driving forces were behind this gradual evolution of policy and what this tells us about Switzerland's role as a small neutral state during the last decade of the Cold War. It argues that between 1979 and 1992, the Swiss authorities gradually began to hope that their good offices might make a difference in the Afghan crisis. Moreover, they began to hope that this in turn could help tackle two underlying dilemmas in Swiss Cold War foreign policy: the predicament of diplomatic isolation that was inherent in permanent neutrality, and the resulting desire to compensate for this predicament by demonstrating solidarity vis-à-vis major developments of international politics. That said, this thesis shows that Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan highlighted rather than resolved these dilemmas. As such, it represented an instance of continuity, rather than change in Swiss foreign policy.

Liliane Stadler
St. Antony's College
DPhil in History
Hilary Term 2021

Liliane Stadler
28 January 2021

# Long Abstract

This thesis is about Swiss foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and its immediate aftermath from 1979 to 1992. As such, it spans the timeframe between the Soviet invasion of December 1979 and the collapse of the Soviet-installed Afghan regime in 1992. Within this period, it focuses primarily on Switzerland's role as a provider of good offices in the Afghan crisis, as opposed to on the Afghan crisis itself. The period of 1979 to 1992 also encompasses the collapse of superpower *détente* and of the Cold War international system, both of which had important consequences for Swiss foreign policy. As a small neutral state outside of both major Cold War alliance systems, as well as outside of the United Nations (UN), Switzerland was highly dependent on its international environment and had limited means to play a decisive role in it. Using the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a case study, this thesis explores how Switzerland employed a variety of foreign policy tools, ranging from humanitarian aid, to hosting international conferences, extending protective power mandates and ultimately to mediating in the conflict itself by means of personal contacts. In doing so, this thesis has profited from a substantial number of recently declassified archival documents, from a number of granted Freedom of Information Access (FOIA) requests, as well as from interviews with individuals involved in Swiss foreign policy-making at the time.

The paradox behind Switzerland's foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was that Switzerland might well have remained aloof of the Afghan crisis. The rationale of this thesis is to explain the significance of Switzerland's growing involvement as a provider of good offices in Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War. More specifically, the question that it asks is: *how did Swiss foreign policy towards Afghanistan evolve between 1979 and 1992 and what does this tell us about Switzerland's role as a small neutral state at the end of the Cold War?* In a sense, it is a case-specific question about the age-old predicament of change versus continuity in foreign policy and in this

particular instance, it exemplifies the inherent tension between Swiss permanent neutrality and good offices in the context of a systemically changing international environment.

Overall, it argues that there were two dilemmas that were specific to Swiss Cold War foreign policy and that Swiss policy-makers gradually began to see the Afghan crisis as an opportunity to overcome these. Ultimately, however, Switzerland's growing involvement in Afghanistan accentuated, rather than resolved these dilemmas, partially as a result of the concurrent collapse of the Cold War international system. The first dilemma was that the Swiss government's strict interpretation of permanent neutrality, which came into place during the early post-war period, inherently contained the latent threat of diplomatic isolation. In 1946, the Swiss government under Foreign Minister Max Petitpierre intended to join the UN under the condition that the UN exclude Switzerland from its collective security mechanism on account of Swiss neutrality. The UN refused and in fact, many UN members – especially the victors of the Second World War – felt that the Swiss had shown insufficient solidarity with their cause during the war. As a result, Switzerland was alone among the permanent neutrals not to join the UN.

In response, Petitpierre formulated the so-called concept of Neutrality and Solidarity. This policy drew a conceptual link between Switzerland's long-standing but separate traditions of neutrality and good offices for the first time. More specifically, it argued that permanent neutrality made Switzerland an ideal provider of good offices – meaning those acts of third-party diplomacy that are in pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution. It also implicitly assumed that Switzerland's mere readiness to provide good offices sufficed as a demonstration of solidarity with the international community. That was the second dilemma of Swiss foreign policy, seeing as it did not actually resolve the first. Moreover, this thesis argues that both dilemmas significantly shaped Switzerland's approach to the Afghan crisis between 1979 and 1992.

Chapter one discusses Switzerland's struggle to position itself as a permanent neutral outside of the UN, which, as discussed, dates back to the early post-war period. Against this backdrop, chapter two traces the onset of the Afghan civil war after 1973 and the events that led to the Soviet invasion of 1979. Chapter three analyses the Soviet invasion from the perspective of the Swiss government and argues that despite being outwardly committed to the concept of Neutrality and Solidarity, the Swiss originally saw no role for themselves in the Afghan crisis.

In the meantime, chapter four shows that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan triggered an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in the conflict region with over four million refugees. Initially, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), dispatched conventional material and financial aid to these refugees, mostly through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The main issue however, was that in the wake of the Soviet invasion, the Soviet-installed regime of President Babrak Karmal expelled most foreign humanitarian aid organizations from Afghanistan. A number of these, including *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and *the* Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) continued to conduct illegal cross-border operations into Afghanistan from neighbouring Pakistan. The ICRC, on the other hand, made repeated attempts to return to Afghanistan with the approval of the Afghan authorities, both to dispense humanitarian aid and to visit political prisoners.

Chapters five and six show that in 1982, the ICRC approached the Swiss government with a plan to transfer Soviet prisoners of war (POWs), captured by the Afghan resistance, to neutral Switzerland for their internment. In exchange, the ICRC hoped to persuade the Soviet Union and the Afghan regime of the merits of its return to Afghanistan. The FDFA supported this plan, despite the fact that it lacked an enforceable legal framework and that it contained an ethically questionable caveat. According to a memorandum of understanding, signed between the ICRC and the Soviet Union in January of 1982, the prisoners were to be repatriated to the Soviet Union after two years despite the fact that the 1949 Geneva Conventions Relating to the Treatment of Prisoners of War mandated

for repatriation only on medical grounds or after the cessation of hostilities. During the fall of 1982, both the Swiss press and parliament caught on to the inconsistencies in the arrangement and began to criticize the FDFA for its lack of principle. Until this point, only five prisoners had been transferred to Switzerland and after a short visit to Afghanistan in August, the ICRC had been expelled anew. Ultimately, the organization's return to Afghan territory proceeded only in 1987, after most POWs chose to repatriate.

Concurrently, as chapter seven shows, the Soviet Union began to make plans for its withdrawal from Afghanistan. As part of these plans the Soviet Politburo replaced President Babrak Karmal with former secret service chief Mohammad Najibullah in 1986 and opened bilateral discussions with the government of Pakistan. Ever since 1982, the Pakistani government and the Afghan regime had been engaged in indirect diplomatic talks, mediated by the UN in Geneva. Yet these talks had made little progress until 1986, when the Soviet Union began to signal genuine support. Switzerland had originally been approached to host similar discussions by various intergovernmental bodies, yet the Swiss never formed part of the UN-mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan.

Chapters eight and nine ultimately demonstrate that this became an advantage for the Swiss government, as the 1988 UN-mediated Geneva Accords on Afghanistan broke down following the Soviet withdrawal of 1989. Throughout the 1980s, the UN had refused to include the Afghan resistance in the talks that led to the Geneva Accords. As a result, moderate members of the resistance began to turn to the Swiss government through the use of personal contacts beginning in 1990. The same was the case for the Najibullah regime. This brought the FDFA into institutional competition with the UN over mediation in Afghanistan, as it became increasingly clear that the two organizations were pursuing different strategies. Then, on 1 January 1992, both the former Soviet Union and the United States ceased to supply weapons to the Afghan regime and the Afghan resistance respectively and on 18 March, President Najibullah resigned against the backdrop of renewed civil war.

It might be tempting to simply conclude from this that the FDFA had failed in Afghanistan. Thomas Fischer, for instance, has done so.[1] Yet focusing on the mere success or failure of Switzerland's involvement in the Afghan crisis does not explain a number of questions about the broader significance of Switzerland's engagement in the conflict. Throughout the 1980s, the Swiss actually crafted a number of successive opportunities for themselves in Afghanistan by deploying a wide variety of foreign policy tools, including humanitarian aid, good offices, personal contacts and ultimately mediation. The principal issue was not that these tools were insufficient to resolve the Afghan crisis. This was self-evident for all those involved. The principal issue was that time-again and especially in Afghanistan, especially at the end of the Cold War, the Swiss were relying on a foreign policy that was both inherently problematic and insufficiently adapted to the changes that rocked the international system over the course of this period.

In pursuing this line of argument, there are four sets of literatures that this thesis engages with. These include the literature on Swiss neutrality, the literature on Switzerland's good offices and its humanitarian tradition, and the literature on small and neutral states in the Cold War international system. It also includes a substantial amount of literature on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, but seeing as this is primarily a thesis about Swiss foreign policy, it will mostly draw on this particular literature as source material, rather than material for historiographical discussion. The exception to this is the recent work of Timothy Nunan, whose studies on humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan raises a number of questions that are relevant especially for the work of the ICRC. Within the literature on Swiss Cold War foreign policy, on the other hand, there is an ongoing debate on change versus continuity, especially where the policy of permanent neutrality, but also the role of public participation are concerned. Traditionalists such as Daniel Frei, Andreas Wenger and Christian

[1] Thomas Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace: Switzerland's Contribution to International Conflict Resolution,' in Jürg Martin Gabriel and Thomas Fischer, *Swiss Foreign Policy, 1945-2002*, 74-104, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 74.

Nuenlist, for instance, argue that foreign policy-making tended to be of little interest to the Swiss public because permanent neutrality had historically guaranteed a high degree of continuity in Swiss foreign policy.[2] Beginning in 2004, however, authors such as Thomas Fischer have begun to question both the role of the public in Swiss foreign policy, as well as the willingness of the Swiss government to embrace change in foreign policy.[3]

The literatures on Switzerland's humanitarian tradition and on the role of small and neutral states in the Cold War international system, meanwhile, have raised additional questions that are important for this thesis. In 2007, Odd Arne Westad published *The Global Cold War*, which explores the impact of the ideological, material and territorial confrontation between the Cold War superpowers on the so-called Third World. According to Janick Marina Schaufenbuehl, Sandra Bott, Jussi Hanhimäki and Marco Wyss, "For some time now, scholars have pointed to the importance of not limiting Cold War studies to the interactions between the superpowers."[4] Yet while there has been considerable interest in processes such as decolonization, post-colonial independence and non-alignment, there has been little research into the relationship between neutral and non-aligned states. Where there is research, it revolves mainly around the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and on its follow-up process. Beginning in 1972, a number of neutrals, including Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and Finland, teamed up with non-aligned Yugoslavia – and later Malta and Cyprus – to mediate between the Cold War blocs at the conference and thereby ultimately played an important part in finalizing the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. This being said, according to Peter Ruggenthaler's and Aryo Makko's contribution to their forthcoming edited volume on Cold War neutrality, most studies on Cold War neutrality are "almost exclusively based on Western sources

[2] Daniel Frei, 'Schweizerische Aussenpolitik = Politiqe étrangère,' *Annuaire suisse de science politique = Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Politische Wissenschaft* 15 (1975), 32 ; Andreas Wenger and Christian Nuenlist, 'A "Special Case" between Independence and Interdependence: Cold War Studies and Cold War Politics in Post-Cold War Switzerland,' *Cold War History* 8(2008), 218.
[3] Thomas Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität: Schweizerisches KSZE-Engagement und gescheiterte UNO-Beitrittspolitik im kalten Krieg, 1969-1986* (Zürich: Chronos, 2004), 18.
[4] Schaufenbuehl et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting: Independent Pathways in the Cold War,' *The International History Review* 37(2015), 901.

and perspectives."[5] This thesis makes an attempt to address this issue in order to explore the leverage that a small neutral such as Switzerland had in an international crisis that directly affected a non-aligned state, namely Afghanistan. In doing so, it also raises questions relating to the cohesion among neutrals outside of the CSCE, to cooperation between the neutrals and the non-aligned in times of international crisis, as well as to the role of neutrals and non-aligned states in international organizations.

In terms of source material, it draws primarily on recently declassified and at times still classified archival documents from the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne (CH-BAR) and the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* in Bubendorf (CH-SBA). Both of these archives hold Swiss government documents on Switzerland's good offices in Afghanistan, including meeting minutes, internal memoranda, speeches and diplomatic cables. Where the transfer of Soviet prisoners of war to Switzerland between 1982 and 1986 is concerned, these materials have been triangulated using classified archival material from the ICRC.

This being said, because they remain classified, the ICRC has asked that these archival materials do not appear either the footnotes or the bibliography of this thesis. In accordance with the Rules governing Access to the Archives of the ICRC, adopted in 2017, where information contained in these archives confirms information gathered from other archives, it will cite the latter. Where information contained in the ICRC archives contradicts information gathered from other archives, the author has attached a footnote instructing the reader to apply for specific access to the classified archives at the ICRC to verify the relevant details.

To include the perspective of the UN on the other hand, this thesis has relied on the publicly available personal papers of former Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, held at the Yale University

[5] Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko, 'Introduction,' in Ruggenthaler and Makko, Forthcoming, 3.

Archives and Manuscripts Division in New Haven. These materials do not fall under the Thirty-Year rule and therefore appear in the footnotes and the bibliography. As do materials from the British National Archives and the Ronald Reagan Library. Translated Soviet archival material is drawn from the George Washington University National Security Archive (NSA), the Wilson Center Digital Archive, as well as the Current Digest of the Soviet Press.

Liliane Stadler
St. Antony's College
DPhil in History
Hilary Term 2021

Liliane Stadler
28 January 2021

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# Table of Contents

**Short Abstract** ..... **1**

**Long Abstract** ..... **2**

**Acknowledgements** ..... **10**

**List of Abbreviations** ..... **13**

**Introduction** ..... **15**

**Chapter 1: Swiss Neutrality, Good Offices, and the United Nations, 1946-1979** ..... **48**

**Chapter 2: From *Détente* to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1973-1979** ..... **81**

**Chapter 3: Switzerland's Initial Response to the Invasion, 1979-1982** ..... **103**

**Chapter 4: The Afghan Humanitarian Crisis and Swiss Humanitarian Aid, 1979-1982** ..... **126**

**Chapter 5: The ICRC and the Transfer of Soviet POWs to Switzerland, 1982-1986** ..... **155**

**Chapter 6: The Return of the ICRC to Afghanistan, 1986-1987** ..... **178**

**Chapter 7: The UN-Mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan, 1982-1986** ..... **200**

**Chapter 8: The Geneva Accords and the Soviet Withdrawal, 1986-1989** ..... **223**

**Chapter 9: Swiss Mediation in Afghanistan at the End of the Cold War, 1990-1992** ..... **244**

**Conclusion** ..... **277**

**Appendix: Photographs of Individual Protagonists** ..... **288**

**List of Illustrations** ..... **291**

**Bibliography** ..... **293**

# List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| CH-SBA | *Bibliotheca Afghanica*, Bubendorf, Switzerland |
| CH-BAR | Swiss Federal Archives, Berne, Switzerland |
| CIA-ERR | Central Intelligence Agency Electronic Reading Room |
| COCOM | Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CSCE | Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| CWIHP | Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars |
| DRA | Democratic Republic of Afghanistan |
| EC | European Community |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| EFTA | European Free Trade Association |
| FAZ | *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* |
| FCMA | Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance |
| FDFA | Federal Department of Foreign Affairs |
| FMD | Federal Military Department |
| FOIA | Freedom of Information Access |
| FPD | Federal Political Department |
| GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| GRU | Soviet Military Intelligence *(Glawnoje Raswedywatelnoje Uprawlenije)* |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IIGA | Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| ISI | Inter-Services Intelligence |
| ISN | International Relations and Security Network |
| KHAD | Afghan Domestic Intelligence Service *(Khadamat-e Aetela'at-e Dawlati)* |

| | |
|---|---|
| MSF | *Médecins Sans Frontières* |
| N+N | Neutral and Non-Aligned Group |
| NAM | Non-Aligned Movement |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NNRC | Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission |
| NNSC | Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission |
| NSA-GWU | National Security Archive, George Washington University, USA |
| NWFP | North-West Frontier Province |
| NZZ | *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* |
| OIC | Organization of the Islamic Conference |
| OSGAP | Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan |
| PDPA | People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan |
| POW | Prisoners of War |
| SALT | Strategic Arms Limitation Talks |
| SCA | Swedish Committee for Afghanistan |
| UK-TNA | The National Archives, London, United Kingdom |
| UNA | *Unterabteilung Nachrichtendienst und Abwehr* |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNGOMAP | United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organization |
| UNOCA | UN Coordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Relating to Afghanistan |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| YAM-USA | Yale Archives and Manuscripts Division, New Haven, USA |

# Introduction

This thesis analyses Switzerland's foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and its immediate aftermath from 1979 to 1992. It covers 1979 to 1992 so as to encompass both the Soviet invasion of December 1979, as well as the collapse of the Soviet-installed Afghan regime in 1992. More broadly, these years include the collapse of *détente*, the collapse of the Cold War international order and the period of subsequent fluctuation, tension and uncertainty in-between. It was an important period for Swiss foreign policy and this was reflected in the nature of Switzerland's growing involvement in Afghanistan. Over the course of the 1980s, Switzerland provided humanitarian aid to the conflict region, hosted diplomatic talks and itself became active as a mediator in the conflict. This thesis will introduce new archival material on this subject for the first time with the aim of exploring these diverse facets of Swiss foreign policy-making over time. In doing so, it will unpack the inherent tensions between Switzerland's permanent neutrality and its provision of good offices in the changing international environment at the end of the Cold War.

The Swiss government could have remained aloof of the crisis that unfolded in Afghanistan after 1979. After all, it was directly affected neither by the military, diplomatic or humanitarian manifestations of the crisis itself on account of being permanently neutral. As with many puzzling phenomena about relations between states, there tend to be competing explanations for why particular policies emerged. The simple explanation for Switzerland's growing involvement in Afghanistan was that the Swiss were asked to become more and more involved. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for instance, asked the Swiss government to contribute humanitarian aid in 1979. The European Community (EC) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) respectively asked the Swiss to host diplomatic talks on Afghanistan between 1980 and 1981. Having been expelled from Afghanistan in 1980, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) approached the Swiss authorities in 1982 to host a small number of Soviet prisoners of war, captured by the Afghan resistance, so as to be able to negotiate its return to Afghanistan in

exchange. When this scheme began to falter, the ICRC briefly asked the Swiss to mediate between themselves and the Soviet Union between 1982 and 1984. Ultimately, the Afghan regime and the Afghan resistance both approached the Swiss government for mediation in 1990.

Yet the simple explanation that the Swiss were merely asked to provide their good offices in Afghanistan does not fully explain why the Swiss agreed to do so. As this thesis will show, there were two dilemmas inherent in Switzerland's conduct of Cold War foreign policy. Both of these dilemmas can be traced back to Switzerland's struggle to define a role for itself as a permanent neutral state in the early Cold War international system. What was more, this thesis will argue that they became sharpened during the closing decade of the Cold War, especially in view of Switzerland's growing involvement in Afghanistan. The first is the dilemma that inherent in Switzerland's permanent neutrality there was the unwanted threat of diplomatic isolation. By abstaining from joining military alliances and collective security organizations, Switzerland risked appearing indifferent to the major developments in the international system. This was a problem for Switzerland, because as former diplomat Ulrich Lehner has recently commented in conversation with the author of this thesis, Switzerland was also a small state. Unlike great powers, Switzerland was forced to rely much more on diplomacy than on material strength in pursuit of its interests.[6] Switzerland's chosen Cold War strategy to counteract this first dilemma was threefold: To establish diplomatic relations with as many states as possible – a principle known as universality.[7] To provide good offices in times of crisis – a principle known as Neutrality and Solidarity – and to join multilateral organizations provided that they did not violate Swiss neutrality – a principle embodied in the so-called Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954. However, as this thesis will argue, especially over the course of the 1980s, it became clear that the latter two components of this strategy did not suffice to overcome the threat of diplomatic isolation inherent in permanent neutrality. This was the second dilemma in Switzerland's conduct of Cold War foreign policy.

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[6] Ulrich Lehner, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 22 June 2020.
[7] Ibid.

## Research Question

The question here is how the Swiss dealt with these dilemmas during the changing international context of the collapse of *détente* and the end of the Cold War. Using Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan as a single case study, this thesis therefore asks the following research question: *how did Swiss foreign policy towards Afghanistan evolve between 1979 and 1992 and what does this tell us about Switzerland's role as a small neutral state at the end of the Cold War?* I will argue that over the course of their growing involvement in Afghanistan as a provider of good offices, Swiss policy-makers gradually became cautiously optimistic that they could make a difference. They also began to hope that their involvement in Afghanistan might serve as a counterexample to the dilemmas inherent in Swiss neutrality. As this thesis will show, the Swiss government applied a variety of policy tools and tactics, from humanitarianism to protective power diplomacy, as well as to personal contacts, track two diplomacy and mediation. Yet ultimately, as both the Cold War international order and the Soviet-installed Afghan regime collapsed between 1989 and 1992, Switzerland's engagement in Afghanistan not only failed to bring about a resolution to the ongoing conflict, but it began to clearly highlight – as opposed to resolve – the two underlying dilemmas of Swiss Cold War foreign policy introduced above.

To be clear, this thesis will not argue that the case of Afghanistan added new complexities to the Swiss understanding of neutrality. Rather, it uses the case of Afghanistan to demonstrate how Swiss foreign policymakers became confronted with the same foreign policy dilemmas at the very end of the Cold War that their predecessors had failed to resolve at its very beginning. As such it reveales the inconsistencies within the long-term foreign policy strategy of Neutrality and Solidarity, as well as arguably its lack of effectiveness. This being said, it also suggests that many within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) were aware of the juxtaposing imperatives of change versus continuity within Swiss foreign policy at the time. Yet to date, there appears to have been no comprehensive review of the significance of Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan for the general

direction of Swiss foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. This thesis is an attempt to provide such a review. It is not about judging the success or failure of Switzerland's various foreign policy tactics in Afghanistan itself. Neither is it a comparative case study of various neutrals. Rather, it is a single-case study about how Switzerland became increasingly involved in Afghanistan as a provider of neutral good offices, whilst at the same time trying to develop its role as a small neutral state in a changing international system.

## Literature Review

This thesis mainly relies on primary source material to respond to the research question introduced above. However, there exist at least four distinct bodies of secondary literature that pertain to the overall topic of this thesis. These relate to Switzerland's permanent neutrality, its provision of good offices, its changing international environment at the end of the Cold War and its concurrent involvement in Afghanistan. The literature review for this thesis is therefore divided into four parts: the first is on how Swiss foreign policy is made and how it is both shaped and constrained by concepts such as neutrality. A second part is on Swiss good offices and humanitarianism. Please note that more detailed definitions and a conceptual analysis of the terms neutrality, solidarity and good offices will be introduced not in the present literature review, but further on in chapter one. A third part explores the current state of the evolving literature on the Cold War international system. This part will particularly emphasize a so-called "neo-neo revisionist" strand of this literature, which has begun to explore the role of neutral and non-aligned states in the Cold War international system. The final part of this literature review briefly introduces the literature on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. However, with the exception of Timothy Nunan's work on humanitarian intervention and neutral non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan, it will use this set of literature primarily as background reference. This is because because the focus of this thesis rests on the evolving nature of Swiss foreign policy against the backdrop of Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan, rather than on the war in Afghanistan itself.

## Swiss Foreign Policy and Neutrality

There are two broad strands within the literature on how Swiss foreign policy is made: one about form – meaning how foreign policy is made in practice – and one about substance – which refers to the conceptual tools and constraints that determine the outcomes of Swiss foreign policy. Both are intricately linked. The traditionalist interpretation of Swiss foreign policy-making attributes the ability to make foreign policy to the government and to legislative oversight. Yet after the government failed to win a nation-wide referendum on UN membership in 1986, a revisionist strand of literature began to explore the role of popular sentiment in Swiss foreign policy-making, especially with regard to Swiss neutrality. This literature review first explores the technicalities of the Swiss foreign policy-making process. It then considers how this process has led to a discussion on form versus substance between traditionalists and revisionists.

According to article 102 of the Swiss constitution of 1874 – which continued to apply until its parliamentary revision of 1999 – the executive branch of government, the so-called Federal Council, was responsible for representing Switzerland's national interests abroad.[8] The Federal Council consists of seven members, each of whom is elected individually for a period of four years with every fresh election of the National Assembly.[9] The National Assembly is the lower house of parliament, the upper house being the Council of States. Whereas the National Assembly is elected at a national level by proportional representation, the Council of States consists of two representatives from each canton within the confederation.[10] This being said, what has been interesting about the Swiss government then as now, is that neither the executive nor the legislative branches are divided into

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[8] Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 'Bundesverfassung der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft vom 29. Mai 1874,' 29 May 1874, https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/data/bj/staat/gesetzgebung/archiv/bundesverfassung/bv-alt-d.pdf.
[9] Ibid.
[10] There are a few exceptions to this rule. Demi-cantons only send one representative to the Council of States. Examples include Basel Stadt and Baselland, as well as Appenzell Innerrhoden and Appenzell Ausserrhoden.

government and opposition parties. Instead, by way of a principle called *concordance*, the Federal Council is composed of representatives of the four most popular parties, whose task it is to govern through compromise agreements.[11] As well as representing their political parties, each councillor also heads one of seven government ministries, called Federal Departments.[12] At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pierre Aubert of the Social Democratic Party was foreign minister and I will briefly introduce the role of the foreign ministry here, before proceeding to the role of parliament in providing legislative oversight.

In 1979 the so-called Law of Administrative Organization (*Verwaltungsorganisationsgesetz*) renamed the Federal Political Department (FPD) as the FDFA. At the same time, it also introduced the role of Secretary of State to the department as the highest administrative official reporting to the foreign minister. His or her main tasks were to inform the Federal Council on issues relating to foreign policy and to enact the foreign policy decisions taken at the executive level. For this, he or she relied on a highly intricate administrative apparatus and perhaps the most important sub-division within the department was the so-called Service for Political Documentation. Its purpose was to collect incoming reports from Swiss diplomatic representatives abroad and to consolidate these into one of two types of briefing papers for internal circulation. The first were background papers, containing long-term descriptive accounts of developments in foreign countries. The latter were situational papers. These covered rapid international or domestic developments involving particular states, as well as the major driving forces behind them.[13] Both will feature throughout this thesis as primary sources. In most cases, they were immediately relayed to the members of the Federal Council, as well as to the most senior civil servants in the department.[14] The Council was briefed on the

[11] Hanspeter Kriesi, 'Perspektiven neuer Politik: Parteien und neue soziale Bewegungen,' *SVPW Jahrbuch = Annuaire ASSP* 26 (1986), 337.
[12] Ulrich Klöti, 'Regierung,' in *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*, edited by Peter Knoepfel et al. (Zürch: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2014), 193.
[13] Armin Daeniker, 'Die Rolle der Verwaltung in der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik,' *Annuaire suisse de science politique = Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Politische Wissenschaft* 6 (1966), 69.
[14] Ibid.

developments in these reports every Wednesday morning.[15] On top of that, the reports were delivered to the relevant embassies, either in original form or condensed into weekly bulletins.[16] Lastly, they served as the basis for informational briefings, which the relevant foreign minister was periodically obliged to deliver to the Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs of both the National Assembly and the Council of States.[17]

In addition to the Service for Political Documentation, the FDFA included a legal counsel to the Head of the Department, the so-called Political Directorate, in charge of bilateral relations to other states, the Political Secretariat, responsible mostly for planning Switzerland's involvement in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) over the course of the 1970s, the Press and Information Service, the Directorate for International Law, the Directorate for International Organisations, the Directorate for Technical Cooperation, as well as the Protocol Service.[18] The purpose of these sub-divisions was to gather and process information effectively and objectively for the purpose of informing the foreign policy decision-making process in the Federal Council. Their work was also inherently dependent on the Swiss ambassadorial and consular network, which had grown to include two thirds of the FDFA's 1'732 staff by 1973.[19] As of that year, it included 86 embassies, 39 consulates-general, 60 consulates, one vice-consulate and five missions to intergovernmental organisations – in keeping with the principle of universality in bilateral relations with other states.[20]

Parliament did not receive reports from the FDFA directly. Nor was it briefed on international developments directly by the FDFA. Instead the Federal Council briefed the Parliamentary

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[15] Christian Blickenstorfer, interviewed by Liliane Stadler [email exchange], 22 October 2017.
[16] Daeniker, 'Die Rolle der Verwaltung in der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik,' 69.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Luzius Wildhaber, 'Kompetenzen und Funktionen der Bundesverwaltung und des diplomatischen Dienstes im Ausland,' in *Handbuch der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik*, edited by Alois Riklin, Hans Haug and Christopher Binswanger (Bern: Haupt, 1975), 282.
[19] Ibid., 281.
[20] Ibid., 276.

Committees on Foreign Affairs through the relevant Federal Councillor and senior members of his or her departmental staff. In 1936, the National Assembly had established a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs of roughly 25 members and in 1945, the Council of States established its own Committee of thirteen members.[21] Members were nominated by their respective parties and selected on the basis of proportional party representation.[22] The meetings of both commissions usually took the form of a briefing, followed by a discussion. Occasionally, they consisted entirely of discussion, on the basis of which the Federal Councillor present would later report back to the Federal Council as a whole.[23] In other words, the purpose of these meetings was less to inform parliament about ongoing international affairs, but to invite discussion on a regular basis to guarantee accountability for a stance or action that the Federal Council proposed to take.[24]

In other words, Swiss foreign policy making had evolved as a consultative, rather than a unidirectional process, with much deliberation between the executive and the legislative level. The role of the FDFA was to provide the factual basis for this process and to execute the decisions that were negotiated within the Federal Council and in consultation with the Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs. There were also occasions when foreign policy-making required public discussion in parliament itself. These included the appointment of diplomatic representatives abroad, the recognition of a sovereign state, announcing foreign policy guidelines and aims, monitoring national and international developments, as well as introducing unilateral, bilateral or multilateral initiatives and informing the public about any of the above where appropriate.[25]

[21] Franz Betschon, 'Der Nachrichtendienst,' in *Erinnerungen an die Armee 61*, edited by Franz Felix Betschon and Gerhard Wyss (Frauenfeld: Huber, 2009), 21.
[22] Ruth Lüthi, 'Das Parlament,' in *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*, edited by Peter Knoepfel (Zürch: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2014), 169.
[23] Betschon, 'Der Nachrichtendienst,' 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Luzius Wildhaber, 'Kompetenzverteilung innerhalb der Bundesorgane,' in *Handbuch der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik*, edited by Alois Riklin, Hans Haug and Christopher Binswanger (Bern: Haupt, 1975), 254.

According to this traditionalist account of Swiss foreign policy making, rendered by Ulrich Klöti, Armin Daeniker and Ruth Lüthi, among others, the public actually had very little say on Swiss foreign policy. This may appear strange, seeing as the Swiss people have in fact had the right to take up a referendum against the ratification of bilateral and multilateral treaties since 1921.[26] Public opinion researchers Dusan Sidjanski and Nicola Jacques have cautioned in 1975 not to exaggerate the role of the public in foreign policy-making.[27] Partly due to indifference and partly due to divided opinions, they argue that the influence of public opinion on the everyday conduct of foreign affairs was slim. That same year, Daniel Frei has argued that foreign policy tends to be of little interest both to the average Swiss citizen and to the average parliamentarian.[28] Interestingly, the reason that he gave for this is Switzerland's ingrained tradition of neutrality in foreign affairs.[29] In other words, Frei argued that permanent neutrality has given Swiss foreign policy a degree of continuity that is so manifest as to alleviate the need for public scrutiny.

There are other observers who support this line of argument. In their survey on the state of the literature on Swiss foreign policy in 2008, Andreas Wenger and Christian Nuenlist argue that "Swiss foreign and security policy during the Cold War was characterized by a high degree of continuity and only a few strategic principles: neutrality, economic cooperation without political integration, and an autonomous national defence system…"[30] According to Wenger and Nuenlist, "The essence of what was an extremely narrow definition of a neutrality policy was codified in the so-called Bindschedler Doctrine in 1954 and can be summarized as follows: for neutrality reasons, Switzerland should not become a member of any political or military organization that is not universal, and it should not participate in a customs union. However, for reasons of solidarity, it should play an active

[26] Ibid., 257.
[27] Dusan Sidjanski and Nicola Jacques, *Quelques Aspects de la Politique étrangère suisse à la lumière du sondage d'opinion de 1972* (Bern: Haupt, 1975), 315.
[28] Daniel Frei, 'Schweizerische Aussenpolitik = Politiqe étrangère,' *Annuaire suisse de science politique = Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Politische Wissenschaft* 15 (1975), 32.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Andreas Wenger and Christian Nuenlist, 'A "Special Case" between Independence and Interdependence: Cold War Studies and Cold War Politics in Post-Cold War Switzerland,' *Cold War History* 8(2008), 218.

role in economic, humanitarian and technical organizations."[31] Similarly, Thomas Fischer argues in a forthcoming edited volume by Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko that, "During the whole period of the Cold War we can discern a very homogenous national understanding of what role neutral Switzerland should play in international security affairs."[32]

This is interesting, because during much of his earlier work, Thomas Fischer has identified an important caveat in the traditionalist interpretation of Swiss foreign policy-making. While the Swiss government began to revise its long-standing, strict interpretation of permanent neutrality in view of its bid to join the UN in 1986, it was the public, which rejected this bid in a nation-wide referendum and thereby prevented any conceptual revision of Swiss neutrality until after the end of the Cold War.[33] According to Thomas Fischer and Daniel Möckli, "The onset of superpower *détente* and a shift of focus in the UN system from the East-West to the North-South axis" convinced the Federal Council, the FDFA and ultimately parliament to reconsider the Bindschedler Doctrine in favour of UN membership over the course of the 1970s.[34] Yet by this point, permanent neutrality had also become an important domestic determinant of Swiss national identity.[35] This shows not only that Swiss neutrality was not as static as traditionalist interpretations of Swiss foreign policy tend to argue. It also shows that during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, government and popular interpretations of the value of permanent neutrality began to diverge and that the public in fact had an important say in the matter. Finally, the fact that the Swiss government began to re-think the merits of joining the UN during this period shows that unlike the Swiss public, the government became increasingly aware of the dilemma inherent in permanent neutrality, namely the threat of diplomatic isolation. According to Fischer and Möckli, throughout the early Cold War period, the Swiss government had

[31] Ibid.
[32] Thomas Fischer, 'Swiss Cold War Neutrality: Undisputed Principle of Foreign Policy,' in Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko, Forthcoming: 59.
[33] Thomas Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität: Schweizerisches KSZE-Engagement und gescheiterte UNO-Beitrittspolitik im kalten Krieg, 1969-1986* (Zürich: Chronos, 2004), 18.
[34] Thomas Fischer and Daniel Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation: Swiss Neutrality Policy in the Cold War,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 2016(18), 12-13.
[35] Thomas Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 19.

gone to "great lengths to emphasize that its neutrality did not mean indifference and indeed could be of service to the polarized international community."[36] Yet as the literature on Swiss good offices has since shown, this strategy was not as effective as originally hoped.

## Swiss Good Offices and Humanitarianism

In 1989, former Swiss Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Raymond Probst, published a monograph entitled *"Good Offices" In Light of Swiss International Practice and Experience*. He argued that, "Experience shows that the neutral state, and especially the permanently neutral state, is frequently in a favoured position to assist other nations in settling their conflicts."[37] According to Probst, Swiss neutrality provided an "element of continuity, security and stability," which made it well-suited as a mediator, a protective power or as the host of international conferences.[38] This in turn presumably made good offices a promising tool to demonstrate Switzerland's solidarity with the international community. A number of authors, Daniel Trachsler and Thomas Fischer among them, have since confirmed that Switzerland deservedly enjoys a reputation as a reliable protective power, acting as a communication channel between states that have severed diplomatic relations. Yet unfortunately, the same is not true for mediation, which actively involves a third party in finding a solution to a conflict.[39]

In 2000, Jon Fanzun and Patrick Lehman published a lengthy contribution in the journal *Zürcher Beiträge*. In defiance of Probst's hypothesis, they argued that, "Switzerland has never played a

[36] Fischer and Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation,' 23.
[37] Raymond Probst, *"Good Offices" in the Light of Swiss International Practice and Experience* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1989), 13.
[38] Ibid., 14.
[39] Daniel Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' *Bulletin 2004 zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik*, 2008, 43; Thomas Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace: Switzerland's Contribution to International Conflict Resolution,' in Jürg Martin Gabriel and Thomas Fischer, *Swiss Foreign Policy, 1945-2002*, 74-104, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 79.

meaningful role as a mediator in interstate conflicts."[40] As a result, Switzerland was like many other "small European states, which possessed little freedom of manoeuvre during the Cold War."[41] Thomas Fischer added to this in 2003 that, "The argument that permanent neutrality predestined Switzerland to act successfully as an intermediary in conflicts where the UN would be paralyzed and great power interests would be at stake proves to be undeniably unfounded" for the past fifty years.[42] In sum, Daniel Trachsler wrote in an article of 2008, neutrality "does not represent a comparative advantage in mediation."[43]

The reasons for this trend remain less explored in the literature. According to Reto Borsani, over the course of recent decades, international organizations began to enter the domain of good offices both at a global and regional level. Citing the United Nations, the CSCE and its successor the OSCE, as well as eventually the European Union, the Organization of American States, the Arab League and the Organization for African Unity, Borsani suggests that especially after the end of the Cold War, neutral states have been driven from their roles as mediators by international organizations.[44] What is more, he notes that other, non-neutral states, have begun to enter the domain.[45] Similarly to Borsani, Fanzun and Lehman argue that especially the trend that saw intergovernmental organizations take on mediating roles already began during the second half of the twentieth century.[46] This particular dynamic also became apparent between Switzerland and the United Nations in Afghanistan between 1991 and 1992 and will form an important part of this thesis. It

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[40] Jon A. Fanzun and Patrick Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt: Aussen- und sicherheitspolitische Beiträge der Schweiz zu Frieden, Sicherheit und Stabilität, 1945-2000,' *Zürcher Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktforschung* 57(2000), 106-107, author's translation from, "Die Schweiz hat in zwischenstaatlichen Konflikten nie eine bedeutende Rolle als aktive Vermittlerin gespielt."

[41] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 106-107, author's translation from, "reiht sich somit in die Reihe der kleinen europäischen Staaten ein, die diesbezüglich während des Kalten Krieges wenig Handlungsspielraum besassen."

[42] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 96.

[43] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste,' 36, author's translation from, "Neutralität stellt bei der Vermittlungstätigkeit keinen komparativen Vorteil dar."

[44] Reto Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste: Ein weiterer Grund für den Alleingang?' *Swiss Political Science Review* 1(1995), 12-13.

[45] Ibid., 13.

[46] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 107.

appears to me, however, that institutional competition – the competition between organizations providing a similar service – was only a secondary contributing factor towards Switzerland's dilemmas of neutrality, solidarity and diplomatic isolation. What appears to be more important in this respect is that in offering its good services, Switzerland took on little risk and responsibility in the international system. After all, in maintaining their neutrality, the Swiss by definition chose to have very little stake in international conflicts. In other words, the paradox of Swiss *disponibilité* is that it is an inherently selective demonstration of solidarity with those in crisis, one that in fact inherently prioritizes neutrality over solidarity and which does little to dispel the equally inherent threat of diplomatic isolation for a neutral state.

There is one notable exception to this trend, however, which is Switzerland's humanitarian tradition. According to the statutes of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the meaning of humanitarianism is "to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance."[47] Switzerland's humanitarian tradition has been a constant in Swiss foreign policy since the nineteenth century and it arguably began with the Red Cross movement itself. In 1859, Swiss citizen Henry Dunant began to organize medical and humanitarian aid for the wounded at the battle of Solferino and in 1863, together with a small group of all-Swiss citizens, he founded the Red Cross movement in Geneva.[48] Switzerland's humanitarian tradition has been associated with the Red Cross movement ever since, but according to Jean Freymond, it was not until the end of the Second World War, that the Federal Council began to systematically pursue the provision of humanitarian aid in conflict situations as a demonstration of solidarity.[49] After having introduced a programme of donations for war victims in 1944, the Federal Council began to institutionalize a budget for humanitarian aid and to make substantial financial

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[47] ICRC, 'Statutes of the International Committee of the Red Cross,' accessed 4 June 2020, https://www.icrc.org/en/document/statutes-international-committee-red-cross-0.
[48] J. D. Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners,' *International Organization* 39(1985), 616.
[49] Jean Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz,' *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspoliti*k, 18(1999), 27.

contributions to the ICRC.[50] This change coincided nicely with the Federal Council's post-war strategy of demonstrating the compatibility of neutrality and solidarity and according to Fischer and Möckli, it had the added benefit of being politically acceptable to the majority of the Swiss population.[51]

The sole contention in the literature on Switzerland's humanitarian tradition is the issue of whether or not the ICRC, which also came into being in 1863, was genuinely politically independent of the Swiss government in light of their shared history. J.D. Armstrong has argued that in theory, "the ICRC's extraordinary role in world politics is directly linked to Switzerland's own unique status and to its own relationship with the Swiss government."[52] Switzerland is a depositary state of the Geneva Conventions and of its Protocols. Further, during the period covered in this thesis, it provided approximately two thirds of the ICRC's regular income and the ICRC's governing body was made up entirely of Swiss citizens.[53] Yet there are also dissenting opinions. Cornelio Sommaruga, for instance, who served as the president of the ICRC from 1987 to 1999, argues that the Swiss government and the ICRC relied on two ultimately distinct forms of neutrality. The former, according to Sommaruga was essential for the preservation of Switzerland's sovereignty and territorial integrity, whereas the latter was essential for the ICRC to fulfil its humanitarian mission on behalf of individuals, namely the victims of armed conflict.[54] Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan was an important test case for this debate and as this thesis will show, in fact the Swiss government and the ICRC ultimately played very distinct roles in the Afghan crisis.

[50] Ibid.
[51] Fischer and Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation,' 25.
[52] Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners,' 641.
[53] Ibid., 617-618.
[54] Cornelio Sommaruga, 'Swiss neutrality, ICRC neutrality: Are they indissociable? An Independence worth protecting,' *International Review of the Red Cross* 32(1992), 268.

Switzerland's evolving Cold War Environment

Having explored the historiographical debates surrounding Swiss foreign policy, how it is made and how it related to concepts including neutrality, good offices and humanitarianism, the present literature review now turns to Switzerland's international environment at the end of the Cold War. In his 2007 monograph *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective*, Archie Brown has rehearsed the argument that the Cold War was essentially a stand-off between the USA and its allies and the Soviet Union and the communist bloc.[55] According to Brown, this struggle ended in 1988, when, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev announced to his party and later to the UN General Assembly, that he believed the people of each state to be free to choose their own political and economic system.[56] The literature on the Cold War has undergone a substantial number of revisions, both during the Cold War itself and as the relevant archives began to selectively open up during the post-Cold War period.

Up until the late 1980s, most accounts tended to focus on the ideological and the geostrategic competition between the United States, the Soviet Union and their related alliance systems as the defining elements of the Cold War.[57] American authors tended to locate the blame for the outbreak of the Cold War in Soviet expansionism until revisionists – who were much influenced by the implications of the Vietnam War – began to argue that the United States was itself also expansionist. Neo-revisionists have added to this that American foreign policy was guided not just by power and interest calculations, but by domestic factors, including economic and ideological ones. John Lewis Gaddis, for instance, has argued this during his earlier works.[58] At the same time, during the late

[55] Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 241.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Michael Hopkins, 'Historiographical Reviews: Continuing Debate and New Approaches in Cold War History,' *The Historical Journal* 4(2007), 913.
[58] John Lewis Gaddis, 'Response to Painter and Lundestad,' *Cold War History* 7(2007), 118.

1970s and the early 1980s, various authors including Anne Deighton and John Young, began to explore the role of Britain and France, among others.[59]

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the slow and sporadic opening of select Soviet archives, which have allowed scholars such Alex Pravda, Vladislav Zubok and Archie Brown to explore the domestic developments within the Soviet Union during the final stages of the Cold War. According to Pravda, the collapse of the Soviet Union involved "two intertwined processes."[60] Whilst the Soviet leadership pursued a program of radical economic and political liberalization, the union of Soviet republics began to succumb to demands for greater political autonomy.[61] Vladislav Zubok, on the other hand, argues that these processes had their origins in the mid-1970s, a time which "became known in Soviet history as the time of stagnation."[62] According to Zubok, "Above all, it was a time of drift and inertia, bereft of ideological, economic and social vitality."[63]

To these successive and various expressions of Cold War traditionalist, revisionist and neo-revisionist historiography, recent analysis has added a layer of what some might call "neo-neo-revisionism." According to Janick Marina Schaufenbuehl, Sandra Bott, Jussi Hanhimäki and Marco Wyss, "For some time now, scholars have pointed to the importance of not limiting Cold War studies to the interactions between the superpowers."[64] In 2007, for instance, Odd Arne Westad published *The Global Cold War*, which pointed to the impact that direct and indirect military and ideological

[59] Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); John Young, *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe, 1945-1951* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984), John Young, *Winston's Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War 1951-5* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
[60] Alex Pravda, 'The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1990-1991,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume III)*, edited by Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 356.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Vladislav Zubok, 'Soviet foreign policy from *détente* to Gorbachev, 1975-1985,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume III)*, edited by Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 93.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Schaufenbuehl et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting: Independent Pathways in the Cold War,' *The International History Review* 37(2015), 901.

superpower confrontation had on the so-called Third World during the latter half of the twentieth century. Since then, scholars such as Schaufenbuehl, Bott, Hanhimäki and Wyss, have begun to turn Westad's subject of investigation on its head. They began to ask themselves, "If and to what extent independent agency was possible on the margins of the Eastern and Western blocs" and whether leeway existed "for smaller states, independence movements or regional alliances to find pathways that were 'in the Cold War but not of it.'"[65] In other words, some researchers specifically began to investigate the roles of neutral and non-aligned states, which operated outside of the traditional sphere of influence of the Cold War superpowers.

These neutral and non-aligned states were also heavily affected by the constraints of the bipolar Cold War order in their roles. During the early and mid-Cold War period, the decline of European empires such as the British, the Dutch and the French led to the independence of many of their former colonies. Many of these, including Ghana, Indonesia, Mali and Egypt, became deeply wary of the implications of taking sides in the Cold War, especially in the wake of the Suez crisis of 1956, which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this thesis. In 1961, they met in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, to officially form the so-called Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Its purpose, according to Schaufenbuehl et al., was to "actively support movements for national liberation, pursue peaceful coexistence and to refuse to enter into multilateral or bilateral alliances or regional defence pacts if they were concluded in the context of Cold War superpower policy."[66] In this respect, Lorenz Lüthi has pointed out that the NAM was essentially a product of the Cold War.[67]

Hanhimäki has argued that the same was the case for many small and neutral states in Europe. Austrian and Finnish neutrality in particular, he argues, were essentially products of the early Cold

[65] Ibid., 901-902.
[66] Ibid., 903.
[67] Lorenz Lüthi, 'The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War, 1961-1973,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 18(2016), 98.

War.[68] In 1955, the Austrian State Treaty ended a decade of American, British, French and Soviet occupation, yet the Soviet Union insisted that as a newly independent state, Austria maintain strict neutrality. Similarly, Finland signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) with the Soviet Union in 1948, agreeing not to let Finnish territory be used to militarily attack the Soviet Union. According to Hanhimäki, both Sweden and Switzerland also adapted their foreign policies to "fit the new order." "Add to the mix Yugoslavia and Ireland," he continued, "and the geopolitical map of Cold War Europe had been set until the upheavals of 1989-91."[69] Chapter one will analyze the contrasts between these diverging manifestations of neutrality in greater depth, both to conceptually engage with the concept of neutrality, as well to explain the nature of Switzerland's own position as a neutral in more detail.

In the meantime, according to Peter Ruggenthaler's and Aryo Makko's contribution to their edited volume on Cold War neutrality, "There has been a wave of new studies" on the role of neutrality during the Cold War which are relevant for this thesis. However, these are "almost exclusively based on Western sources and perspectives."[70] Much of this literature has focused on the role of the neutrals as mediators at the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) between 1972 and 1975.[71] Nuenlist, for instance, has argued that the neutrals "actively shaped the substance of the Helsinki Final Act" and Fischer has added to this that the neutrals, together with non-aligned Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Malta, Liechtenstein and San Marino "performed important services as bridge-

[68] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Non-Aligned to what? European Neutrality and the Cold War,' in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs?*, edited by Sandra Bott (New York: Roudledge, 2016), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Peter Ruggenthaler and Aryo Makko, 'Introduction,' in Ruggenthaler and Makko, Forthcoming, 3.
[71] Ibid., 6.

builders for new ideas and as mediators for compromises" in this context.[72] According to Hanhimäki, it would not even "be a stretch to argue that the neutrals acted as midwives to *détente*."[73]

However, Hanhimäki has been careful to emphasize that, "None of this is to argue that the small European neutrals were, somehow hugely influential in shaping the international history of the Cold War."[74] In fact, he maintains that despite being active mediators in the context of the CSCE, the neutrals and their non-aligned partners "ultimately never produced a coherent alternative that would have challenged the perception of an essentially bipolar world order."[75] Outside of the context of the CSCE and of its follow-up meetings, the neutrals scarcely coordinated their foreign policies, which partially resulted from the fact that their understandings of permanent neutrality varied widely. Compared to other neutrals, Finland for instance retained relatively close diplomatic ties to the Soviet Union in light of its 1948 FCMA. Sweden, on the other hand, condoned NATO overflights across the south-western part of Sweden, entertained a secure line of communications between the Swedish Defence Staff and the US Air Force headquarters in Cronenberg, Germany, and prepared Swedish airbases to receive NATO aircraft.[76]

What is more, Schaufenbuehl et al. have rightfully pointed out that research into the neutrals has tended to "concentrate solely on the European theatre."[77] According to a different article by Bott,

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[72] Christian Nuenlist, 'Expanding the East-West Dialogue Beyond the Bloc Division: The Neutrals as Negotiators and Mediators, 1969-1975,' in *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-1975*, edited by Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny and Christian Nünlist (London: Routledge, 2008), 201-202; Thomas Fischer, 'Bridging the Gap Between East and West: The N+N as Catalysts of the CSCE Process, 1972-1983,' in *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Trans-Atlantic Relations and the Cold War, 1965-1985*, edited by Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad (Copenhagen: Tusculanum Press, 2010), 167.

[73] Hanhimäki, 'Non-Aligned to what?,' https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Neutrality and Non-Alignment During and Beyond the Cold War,' in *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War: Between or Within the Blocs?*, edited by Sandra Bott (New York: Roudledge, 2016), https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.

[76] Mikael Nilsson, 'Amber Nine: NATO's Secret Use of a Flight Path over Sweden and the Incorporation of Sweden in NATO's Infrastructure,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 44(2009), 287; Ola Tunander, 'The Uneasy Imbrication of Nation-State and NATO: The Case of Sweden,' *Conflict and Cooperation* 34(1999), 180.

[77] Schaufenbuehl, et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting,' 902.

Hanhimäki, Schaufenbuehl and Wyss, "The involvement of neutrals in general, and of Switzerland in particular, in the Cold War in the Third World, is largely misconceived."[78] In a 2015 article in *Relations Internationales*, they argued that the onset of the Cold War did not just challenge the Swiss to review the relationship between neutrality and solidarity in general. The processes of decolonization, which also set in during the second half of the twentieth century, also caused the Swiss government to rethink its foreign policies of neutrality, good offices and humanitarianism with emphasis on the Third World.[79]

This thesis is an attempt to engage this particular point in the literature of the Cold War that a small, neutral state such as Switzerland began to reconsider the merits of its foreign policy not just in the European theatre, but beyond. Unlike Bott, Hanhimäki, Schaufenbuehl and Wyss, it will not focus on the early and the mid-Cold War periods for this purpose, but on the final decade of the Cold War and then on the early post-Cold War period. Further, it will not focus on how Switzerland's Cold War foreign policy in the Third World came into being. Using non-aligned Afghanistan – a country which had never been colonized – as a case study for Switzerland's use of its various foreign policy tools, it will examine how the Swiss government's understanding of the value of each of these tools began to change during the closing decade of the Cold War and what this meant for the overall direction of Swiss foreign policy more broadly.

## The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan and its Immediate Aftermath

As previously mentioned, this thesis primarily engages with the literatures on Swiss foreign policy, its neutrality, good offices and humanitarianism, as well as with the neo-neo-revisionist literature on the role of neutrals in the Cold War international system. In using Afghanistan as a case study, it

[78] Sandra Bott et al., 'Le rôle international de la Suisse dans la Guerre froide globale: un équilibre précaire,' *Relations internationales* 163 (2015), 5, author's translation from, "L'implication des pays neutres en général, et de la Suisse en particulier, dans la Guerre froide au tiers-monde est encore largement méconnue."
[79] Ibid., 7.

necessarily also draws on the literature on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and on its immediate aftermath. However, with the exception of Timothy Nunan's work on humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan, it principally draws on this literature as source material, rather than as material for historiographical discussion. As with most of the English-language literature on the Cold War and on the role of the neutrals within it, most of the English-language literature on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan draws on Western sources and eye-witness accounts. During the 1980s, these have included journalistic accounts from Edward Girardet and Anatol Lieven, for instance.[80] After the withdrawal and the collapse of the Soviet Union, academic studies of the occupation itself have come from long-term observers such as Barnett Rubin, Olivier Roy and Artemy Kalinovsky.[81] In fact, Kalinovsky, was one of the first to rely not only on Western source material, but on Soviet materials from the Gorbachev Foundation Archive and the Washington-based National Security Archive.[82] Former UN officials, including UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former UN mediator Diego Cordovez and former UN speechwriter Phillip Corwin have also recounted their experiences in Afghanistan in their respective memoires.[83]

Timothy Nunan adds an important dimenstion to these accounts with his focus on the changing nature of humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan over the course of the 1980s. Using France's *Médecins sans Frontière*s (MSF) and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) as principal case studies, Nunan shows how the ideological divide of the Cold War and especially the "global spread of 'real existing socialism'" actually became an important contributing factor towards "the formation

[80] Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Anatol Lieven, 'The War in Afghanistan: It's Background and Future Prospects,' *Conflict, Security and Development* 9(2009), 333-359.
[81] Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Olivier Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[82] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 277.
[83] Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace: A Secretary- General's Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, editors, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

of transnational humanitarianism."[84] At the same time, Nunan argues, the role of these NGOs was not that of "challengers pressing up against the state from below, but as horizontal contemporaries of the organs of the state."[85] In fact, Nunan points to Afghanistan as an important turning point in the historiography of NGO activity and as a moment of transition from state-centric development to an NGO-centric order that has persisted until today.[86] While Nunan does not explicitly address the involvement of the Swiss government in the Afghan crisis, his analysis equally applies to the work of the Red Cross movement in Afghanistan. More specifically, this thesis will include a comparison of the work of the Red Cross with that of MSF and of the SCA in order to highlight a few important differences between their respective approaches.

Overall, there exists very little literature on Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan during and after the Cold War. Between 1985 and 1989, for instance, only three authors commented on the significance of the transfer of Soviet POWs to Switzerland. These included Edward Girardet, Mary Ellen O'Connel and Charlotte Carr-Gregg and without exception, they focused on the role of the ICRC, rather than on the role of the Swiss government in this prisoner transfer scheme.[87] Edouard Brunner, who served as Switzerland's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs shortly after the completion of the POW transfer scheme, later commented on the scheme in his memoires.[88] Yet he too gave only a brief overview of events without placing them into context or analysing their overall significance for the evolution of Swiss foreign policy at the time.

[84] Timothy Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development? Afghanistan's Cold War Encounters with International Development and Humanitarianism,' in *The Development Century: A Global History* , edited by Stephen Macekura and Erez Manela (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 237.
[85] Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion: Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.
[86] Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development?, 237.
[87] Mary Ellen O'Connel, 'Soviet Prisoners in the Afghan Conflict,' *Columbia Journal of Translnational Law* 23(1985), 497-504; Charlotte Carr-Gregg, 'An Extension of Humanitarian International Law: The Case of Soviet Soldiers Captured by Afghan Liberation Movements, 1982-1986,' *War & Society* 7(1989), 95-105.
[88] Edouard Brunner, *Lambris dorés et coulisses: Souvenirs d'un diplomate* (Genève: Georg, 2001).

Finally, there are two authors, Olga Pavlenko and Thomas Fischer, who have commented on Switzerland's role as a neutral mediator in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces in 1989. Fischer commented on it in a volume on Swiss foreign policy, which he edited together with his former doctoral supervisor, Jürg Margin Gabriel, in 2003. According to Fischer, the "Swiss Federal Department on Foreign Affairs tried – in vain – to mediate in the Afghan civil war by applying traditional 'good offices' to a domestic conflict situation."[89] Yet he did not comment on the wider significance of this attempt for Swiss foreign policy. Rather, he concluded that the "experience demonstrated clearly that bilateral activities conducted by a neutral state are by no means more successful than the activities of multilateral organizations."[90] In my opinion, this analysis falls short of capturing the essence of Switzerland's experience in Afghanistan. Olga Pavlenko comes closer. In her contribution to Peter Ruggenthaler's and Aryo Makko's forthcoming edited volume on neutral states during the Cold War, which is largely based on Soviet documentation, she comments on Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan as follows: "We can see that there was a clear surge in the foreign policy activities of Switzerland against the background of the system-wide collapse that covered not only the USSR, but also the entire Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations."[91] I would go even further than Pavlenko and argue that over the course of its involvement in Afghanistan, the Swiss began not only to hope that they could make a real difference, but to hope that in doing so, they might make a dent in the threat of diplomatic isolation inherent in permanent neutrality since the early Cold War.

## Sources

In order to support this argument, this thesis primarily relies on interviews and archival materials alongside the secondary literature discussed so far. For the most part, the interviews conducted for this thesis have been face-to-face, semi-structured and on the record. The majority of interviewees

[89] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 74.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Olga Pavlenko, 'The Soviet Union and Neutral Switzerland: Concerns and Hopes in 1989,' in Ruggenthaler and Makko, Forthcoming, 102.

asked for a preliminary list of open-ended questions in advance, which were then expanded on over the course of a recorded conversation. Each interviewee also received a written transcript of the interview itself, the opportunity to offer further comment on the transcript, as well as the opportunity to comment on the manner in which interview material was integrated into the thesis itself. Interviewees have included former Swiss policy-makers from the FDFA and from the ICRC. Cornelio Sommaruga, Jacques de Watteville, Marianne von Grünigen, Christoph Bubb and Ulrich Lehner have all graciously offered up their time to recount their personal insights as they pertained to Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan, as have former Swiss army and intelligence officers Hans Wegmüller and Armin Bachofen. Finally, representatives and associates of the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* (CH-SBA) in Bubendorf, including Paul Bucherer and Andreas Koellreuter have recounted their personal experiences. It is thanks to Paul Bucherer that the FDFA has granted this research project Freedom of Information Access (FOIA) to archival materials which still fall under the Thirty-Year Rule, both at the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* and at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne (CH-BAR). In the following, I will briefly recapitulate which archives I have consulted for the purpose of this thesis, what kinds of documents they revealed and how accessible they were.

The Swiss Federal Archives in Berne, Switzerland, have been the most important source of information for this research project, closely followed by the archives at the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* and those of the ICRC. The Federal Archives hold numerous documents on the overall conduct of Swiss foreign policy over the course of the Cold War including the conduct of good offices during this period. On this subject, the archives hold government-internal reports, memoranda and meeting minutes. They cover the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in detail, judging by the volume of diplomatic correspondence both within the FDFA, between the FDFA and the Federal Council, the executive branch of Swiss government, as well as in bilateral exchange with other states. The archives also hold valuable documentation on the Swiss reaction to the Soviet invasion. These include press clippings, meeting minutes of parliamentary committees, intelligence briefings and speeches of government ministers to parliament, international organizations or private assemblies. Similarly detailed

coverage exists on the conduct of the UN-mediated Geneva Talks, on the provision of Swiss humanitarian aid to the conflict region and on the Soviet prisoner transfer to Switzerland. Finally, the FDFA has granted the author a number of FOIA requests such that the Federal Archives have also made available documents on Switzerland's mediation in Afghanistan from 1990 to 1992. However, all Federal Council decisions relating to the subject of this investigation remain inaccessibly classified.

These insights have made it possible to triangulate large amounts of original source material on Swiss mediation in Afghanistan from the *Bibliotheca Afghanica*. The substantial majority of materials from the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* itself fall into the period of 1989 to 1993. They include materials that document the original contacts between the Afghan conflict parties and the Swiss authorities in 1990, as well as the evolution of these contacts, including meetings with the former Afghan King, Zaher Shah, and representatives of the United Nations. They further include written and at times audio-visual records of meetings in Switzerland, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States. Finally, the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* holds a vast amount of German-language press coverage on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The ICRC has graciously given this project specific access to the classified archives on the internment in Switzerland of Soviets prisoners of war captured during the Soviet-Afghan war for the first time, in line with Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 March 2017. This being said, special access does not change the status of the consulted archives, which remain classified for as long as the series is not open to the public. Per request of the ICRC, this thesis will therefore not quote or reference the consulted classified archives, some of which remain protected by the ICRC's privilege of non-disclosure. Instead, where information contained in these archives confirms information gathered from other archives, it will merely cite the latter. Where information contained in the ICRC archives contradicts information gathered from other archives, the author has attached a footnote instructing the reader to apply for

specific access to the classified archives at the ICRC to verify the relevant details. The decision of granting a special access will remain at the sole discretion of ICRC.

The remaining archives consulted for this thesis include the *Fondation Jean Monnet* in Lausanne, the Yale Archives and Manuscripts Division in New Haven, Connecticut (YAM-USA), the British National Archives (UK -TNA) at Kew in London and the Ronald Reagan Archives in Simi Valley, California. The personal papers of former UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar held at Yale, have been valuable for the purposes of triangulation, as well as for introducing an archivally based perspective of the United Nations on the Afghan crisis. They include high-level meeting minutes and records of correspondence between the Secretary-General and various heads of state, foreign ministers, as well as ambassadors and representatives to the United Nations headquarters in New York. Finally, they also include public statements, correspondence within the UN and occasional exchanges between UN personnel and the Afghan resistance. Most of Pérez de Cuéllar's documents date from 1980 to 1992, yet the archive has required no FOIA requests for research access. Regular archival documents at the UN archives tend to fall under a Twenty-Year Classification Rule.[92]

The same is not the case for a number of other archives consulted for this thesis, including the UK-TNA at Kew in London and the Ronald Reagan Archives in Simi Valley, California. While both of these archives have provided valuable insights for this thesis, they selectively continue to maintain strict confidentiality and inaccessibility both within and at times beyond the Twenty-Year Rule and the Thirty-Year Rule respectively.[93] Nevertheless, the Ronald Reagan Archive has made a number of records available for consultation, which document high-level correspondence within the Reagan

[92] United Nations, 'Access to the Archival materials,' accessed 4 June 2020, https://www.unog.ch/unog/website/library.nsf/(httpPages)/F43B10BD2DF0D7B4C1257C850047F251?OpenDocument.
[93] The National Archives, '20-year rule,' accessed 5 June 2020, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/our-role/transparency/20-year-rule/; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 'National Archives and Records Administration,' accessed 5 June 2020, https://www.archives.gov/about/laws/nara.html.

Administration on issues concerning the administration's stance towards the Afghan resistance. UK-TNA, on the other hand, has given this project insights into the dynamics within intergovernmental bodies to which Swiss diplomats had fewer connections than the British. These include the Islamic Conference and the European Community, but also the Non-Aligned Movement. On rare occasions, some UK-TNA files outside of the Thirty-Year Rule have contained withdrawal sheets.

In contrast, most Soviet archives have remained inaccessible for this research project for two reasons. The first is that most of the relevant materials in current-day Russian archives remain classified. The second is that I do not possess the necessary Russian language skills to read and analyze them independently. Instead, I have relied on three archives that publish selected translated Soviet sources online and in the English language. These were the Wilson Center Digital Archive (CWIHP), the National Security Archive of George Washington University (NSA-GWU), as well as the Current Digest of the Soviet Press. Over the course of the 1980s, press coverage on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was scarce in the Soviet Union. According to Rodric Braithwaite, the official government line was that Soviet soldiers were doing their "international duty" in Afghanistan, but were not involved in hostilities.[94] Even as late as 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, press coverage on the occupation was still heavily censored.[95] The Current Digest of the Soviet Press has since made translated Soviet newspaper clippings available, especially from the Gorbachev area. What is more, the Wilson Center and the National Security Archive have separately released a series of Politburo meeting minutes and reports that document the original Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan in 1979. These documents have been invaluable especially for the first few chapters of this thesis.

[94] Rodric Braithwaite, *Afghantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-1989* (London: Profile, 2011), 236.
[95] Ibid.

## Thesis Structure

The final section of this introduction covers the content and structure of all nine chapters of this thesis. There are three main strands of narrative that intersect throughout these chapters to explore Switzerland's changing foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Each draws both on the secondary literature discussed in the literature review and on the archival and interview materials introduced above. The first is the Swiss narrative, driven by the dilemmas inherent in Swiss neutrality and by the resulting struggle to define Switzerland's role at the end of the Cold War. The second is the Afghan narrative, which, to use the words of Schaufenbuehl, Bott, Hanhimäki and Wyss, was 'in the Cold War but not of it.'"[96] It survived both the Soviet occupation and the collapse of the Cold War international system and throughout this time, I would argue that it epitomized a number of characteristics generally associated with post-Cold War conflicts. These include large-scale refugee movements, transnational military aid flows, as well as concurrent but ineffective peace talks. This particular aspect is also at the heart of the third narrative strand of this thesis, namely that of the UN. The UN played a dual role with respect to Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan. Both during and after the Cold War, the UN played an important role in the international system as the principal and most universal manifestation of multilateralism and as such it became the focal point of Switzerland's neutrality dilemma. At the same time, the UN became an institutional competitor for Switzerland in Afghanistan, where both parties ultimately sought to demonstrate their effectiveness as providers of good offices.

Chapter one introduces the concepts of neutrality, solidarity and good offices in detail. Further, it traces the interaction between the Swiss and UN narratives, beginning in 1945 and leading up to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Unlike other neutrals, while the Swiss government also applied for UN membership after 1945, the Swiss asked to be excused from the UN's collective

[96] Schaufenbuehl et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting,' 901-902.

security mechanism on account of their strict interpretation of neutrality. As alluded to previously, the UN refused to admit Switzerland on these terms, leading the Swiss government to formulate a strategy literally called Neutrality and Solidarity. This strategy was essentially intended to compensate for Switzerland's continued absence from the UN and to demonstrate that Switzerland could nevertheless be an active and useful participant in international affairs in spite of its neutrality.

Chapter two picks up the Afghan narrative during the late *détente* period. At the time, the Swiss government began to discover the merits of multilateralism as a neutral mediator at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) between 1972 and 1975. Concurrently, Afghanistan began its descent into civil war following a communist coup against the ruling monarch, Zaher Shah, in 1973. In-fighting within the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) continued until a second coup in 1978, after which the armed Islamic resistance began to amass sufficient strength to pose a serious military threat mostly from its nearby bases in neighbouring Pakistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of December 1979 came as a shock to most observers and it shattered the principle of territorial inviolability contained both in the Helsinki Accords of 1975 and in the UN Charter of 1945.

Chapter three brings the Swiss and the Afghan strands of narrative together. It describes how the Swiss government initially feared that in the absence of a demonstration of Western unity and solidarity, the invasion of Afghanistan might become a precedent for future Soviet interventionism on the European continent. Over the course of the *détente* period, the Soviet Union had interfered militarily in a number of Third World states, but its invasion of Afghanistan was both its first full-scale overt invasion, as well as its first such interference in a non-aligned state. There were a number of neutral and non-aligned states in Europe as well, which the Swiss now feared to be vulnerable to attack. Nevertheless, the Swiss concluded that there would be no role for them to play in the Afghan crisis.

Chapter four introduces an important policy exception to this attitude, which was humanitarian aid. Like many other governments, the UNHCR had approached the Swiss government for humanitarian aid on behalf of the vast numbers of refugees generated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Yet as chapter four argues, there were a number of problems associated with humanitarian aid. The first was that the Afghan regime had expelled most humanitarian organizations from its territory in the wake of the Soviet invasion. Concurrently, the new Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini mistrusted foreign aid organizations and refused systematic UNHCR access to its territory until 1983. As a result, most humanitarian aid became directed at neighbouring Pakistan, where – and this was the second problem – in the absence of government intervention, the boundaries between refugees and resistance fighters became highly permeable. Finally, competition for material aid also enhanced competition and factionalism amongst the Afghan *mujahideen* based in Pakistan, which had important consequences after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

Chapter five explores how, in an attempt to negotiate its return to Afghanistan, the ICRC approached the Swiss government in 1982 to arrange for the transfer of Soviet POWs, captured by the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, to Switzerland. The resulting arrangement was unprecedented and a series of issues arose both from the number of state and non-state actors involved, as well as from the fact that the arrangement itself lacked a universally recognized legal framework. Inherent in this was a dispute concerning the applicability of the 1949 Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Throughout the duration of the Soviet occupation, the Soviet Union actually denied that it was engaged in an act of war in Afghanistan and it therefore also argued that the convention did not apply.

Chapter six goes on to show that out of the initial confusion surrounding the applicability of the convention, there grew a veritable public relations nightmare for all those involved. Especially the subject of repatriation at the end of the prisoners' internment became the subject of heated discussion in the Swiss and the international press. While the Soviet Union insisted that all POWs

return to their homeland, discussion in the press began to revolve around concerns of what might happen to them if they did. Meanwhile, the ICRC continued to be denied permanent access to Afghan territory throughout the early and mid-1980s, causing a number of *mujahideen* groups to stop offering their prisoners to the transfer scheme. As a result, it was only in 1987 that the ICRC was finally allowed back into Afghanistan on a permanent basis.

After discussing the developments that led to the ICRC's eventual return, chapter seven then resumes the UN narrative of the thesis. It retraces the period of 1982 to 1986 covered in previous chapters, but from the point of view of the UN. In doing so, it will show that while Switzerland became increasingly involved in Afghanistan as a provider of humanitarian aid to Afghan refugees and as a provider of good offices to the ICRC, the UN began to dominate the field of mediation in the Afghan conflict. More specifically, beginning in 1982, the UN began to mediate diplomatic talks between the Soviet-installed Afghan regime of Babrak Karmal and the Pakistani government of Mohammad Zia ul-Haq in Geneva. These talks did not involve the Swiss authorities, despite the fact that they took place in Geneva and despite the fact that a number of organizations initially approached the Swiss to hold such talks in the absence of a clear UN mandate to do so prior to 1982. Arguably, therefore, as early as 1982, there developed a degree of institutional competition between the UN and the Swiss government on the subject of mediation.

Chapter eight, however, goes on to show that the UN-mediated talks actually contained a number of considerable flaws, most notably that they included neither the Soviet Union nor the *mujahideen*. As a result, the Geneva Accords that the UN finalized in 1988 did not resolve the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and after 1990, both the Afghan regime and a series of *mujahideen* groups approached the Swiss authorities for mediation instead. As chapter eight also shows, an important factor in this pivotal moment for the Swiss was the fact that in 1986, the Swiss government held a nation-wide referendum on UN accession, which was decisively rejected by the Swiss population. In other words, had Switzerland become a UN member in 1986, it is doubtful that the Swiss would have been asked

to mediate in Afghanistan. What this also goes to show, however, is that during the 1980s, the Swiss government began to seriously engage with the question of change versus continuity in its foreign policy, especially where the role of neutrality in its relationship with the UN was concerned.

Chapter nine, the final chapter of this thesis, reflects on the details of Switzerland's involvement as a mediator in Afghanistan between 1990 and 1992. It also stresses the role of personal contacts and track two diplomacy among individual non-state actors in bringing it about. Concurrently, it explores how this involvement ultimately accentuated not only the element of institutional competition that had begun to develop between Switzerland and the UN since 1982, but the twin dilemmas inherent in Swiss foreign and neutrality policy since the early post-war period. By 1990, the Afghan war had become one of the longest of the Cold War and had grown into one of the largest humanitarian crises of the time. The fact that the UN had failed to resolve it, originally appeared to provide the Swiss government with a unique opportunity to demonstrate the compatibility of neutrality and solidarity, as well as the complementarity of Swiss and UN good offices. Unfortunately, however, the gradual collapse of the Soviet Union by 1991 and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan regime in 1992 meant that the Swiss were unable to mediate a peaceful solution to the conflict either. What was more, as both regimes collapsed and as the Afghan civil war intensified, the Swiss government found it increasingly difficult to cooperate with the UN, which, it ultimately became clear, actually pursued a different agenda from the that of the Swiss.

In the conclusion, this thesis recaps how Switzerland became gradually more involved in Afghanistan, using a variety of methods of foreign policy, including humanitarian aid, protective powers and mediation, as well as personal contacts and track two diplomacy. It should be stressed that the Swiss had no conscious strategy or plan in applying these tools. Rather, they tended to offer them if asked – a principle known as *disponibilité*. Over the course of the 1980s and in the context of Afghanistan, they were asked repeatedly. Perhaps as a result, the Swiss authorities therefore appeared to gain confidence in their abilities to provide good offices in times of crisis and even to cautiously anticipate

that they might make a dent in the threat of diplomatic isolation inherent in being a permanent neutral outside of the UN. However, in fact, the changing constellation of the Cold War international system reinforced, rather than alleviated these concerns and ultimately contributed to making it impossible for the Swiss to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict. This became an important lesson for the Swiss. To overcome the threat of diplomatic isolation in the post-Cold War international order, they would ultimately need to prioritize change over continuity in the relationship between neutrality and solidarity. More specifically, they would need to demonstrate solidarity with the international community not just selectively, not just when asked and not just when it suited them, as had been the case over Afghanistan. They would need take on responsibility as well as show solidarity and in order to do this, ultimately, they would need to join the UN despite popular sentiment to the contrary as graphically shown in 1986. The thesis concludes by suggesting that researchers might explore the role of other small, or neutral states in the Afghan conflict which involved so many players in a complex period of twentieth century history. Likewise the thesis raises issues about Swiss-UN relations both at a time when Switzerland failed to become a UN member, and then after it eventually joined in 2002, so as to evaluate to what extent UN membership helped Switzerland and other neutrals to counteract the threat of diplomatic isolation.

# Chapter 1: Swiss Neutrality, Good Offices, and the United Nations, 1946-1979

Most observers would assume that initially, the defining parameters for Swiss Cold War neutrality were the opposing Cold War superpower blocs. However, Switzerland's relationship with the UN was equally important in shaping the evolution of its neutrality during the Cold War. The second half of the twentieth century was not only remarkable for the bipolar structure of its international system, but also for the institutionalization of multilateralism in international relations. In terms of its geographic location, as well as its economic and cultural orientation, Switzerland was clearly situated within the Western bloc. Yet neutrality barred the Swiss from formally adhering to the bloc, as was the case for most permanent neutrals. Unlike other permanent neutrals, however, it also barred Switzerland from participating in the collective security mechanism of the UN.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce Switzerland's Cold War dilemmas of neutrality and solidarity, as well as to define these two concepts in detail. It will then use these concepts to explain how the Swiss solidified their own understanding of Switzerland's role in the Cold War international system during the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s – having been unable to join the UN in 1946. As discussed previously, in 1947, Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre, the foreign minister, introduced the so-called policy of Neutrality and Solidarity. This policy had two dimensions. The first dimension was bilateral and it forms the main focus of the present chapter. Swiss diplomacy was supposed to compensate for Switzerland's absence from the UN by providing neutral good offices in situations of international tension. The second dimension was multilateral and the reasoning behind it was that in order to further demonstrate its solidarity with the international community, Switzerland could also join intergovernmental organizations other than the UN. However, there was a caveat to this dimension of policy. In 1954, the so-called Bindschedler Doctrine explicitly barred the Swiss government from membership of any politically-oriented intergovernmental organizations for reasons of neutrality.

In this way, the Bindschedler Doctrine became the first explicit formulation of Swiss neutrality policy. It also differentiated the Swiss interpretation of neutrality substantially from that of other neutrals. Challenges to the Swiss interpretation of the relationship between neutrality and multilateralism will remain a running theme throughout this thesis, as they also tie in with the overarching question of change versus continuity in foreign policy. As Thomas Fischer has pointed out, during the period leading up to Switzerland's referendum on UN membership in 1986, there were intense discussions about its strict interpretation of permanent neutrality, yet ultimately the doctrine itself was not revised until the post-Cold War period. In fact, throughout the Cold War, Switzerland remained the only neutral outside of the UN and as a result of the Bindschedler Doctrine, it maintained by far the strictest interpretation of neutrality of all the neutrals.

As the present chapter will show, Switzerland also began to institutionalize the provision of neutral good offices to a degree that was unmatched by any of the other neutrals, in the hope of overcoming the dilemma of diplomatic isolation inherent in its Swiss neutrality. This chapter first defines what is meant by neutrality and how Switzerland's interpretation differed from that of other neutrals, especially during the early Cold War period. It then introduces the concept of Swiss good offices, their function in demonstrating solidarity in the international system, as well as the overarching concept of Neutrality and Solidarity in Swiss Cold War foreign policy. Ultimately, it argues that the Swiss government's understanding of these concepts and of the role they played in relation to Switzerland's perceived role in the Cold War international system – though formulated at the beginning of the Cold War – became critically important for Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War.

## Neutrality

As discussed in the introduction, permanent neutrality is a foreign policy choice that few states make. Apart from Switzerland, other permanent neutrals include Austria, Finland, Sweden and Ireland. Each of these will be discussed in turn in order to explain the concept of permanent neutrality itself, as well as to provide a clearer understanding of those aspects of Swiss neutrality that were unique. This thesis remains a single – as opposed to a comparative – study of neutral foreign policy and its focus will be on how Swiss neutrality increasingly came under pressure to change at the end of the Cold War. However, comparing Switzerland's interpretation of neutrality to the interpretations of other neutrals ought to clarify the significance of addressing change versus continuity as an in-case study in the context of Swiss foreign policy. In contrast to other neutrals, Swiss foreign policy has tended to be perceived both as comparatively strict as well as comparatively static. Yet as the present thesis will argue, these assumptions require some revision.

Part of the reason why neutral states interpret the meaning and practice of neutrality differently is that neutrality is a legal as well as a political concept. According to Boleslaw Boczek, neutrality is primarily an "art and institution of traditional international law," which "refers to the status of a state during an ongoing war between other states, whereby that state adopts an attitude of impartiality towards the belligerents."[97] According to Harto Hakovirta, on the other hand, "In an international conflict, a policy is the more neutral the less it interferes in the conflict, the more equally it benefits or harms the parties concerned and the less it affects the outcome of the conflict."[98] There are two fundamental differences between these two definitions. First, whereas the former interprets neutrality or the absence thereof as binary, the latter interprets it as a continuum ranging from complete to partial neutrality. Second, whereas the former primarily understands neutrality as a

[97] Boleslaw Boczek, 'Introduction: The Conceptual and Legal Framework of Neutrality and Nonalignment in Europe,' in *Europe's Neutral and Non-Aligned States: Between NATO and the Warsaw Pact*, edited by S. Victor Papacosma and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1989), 3.
[98] Harto Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 8.

concept of international law, the latter understands it as a matter of individual state policy. Where the two definitions converge is that neutrality primarily applies to situations of armed conflict.

Christine Agius and Karen Devine have traced intellectual debates about neutrality to the origins of just war theory during the Middle Ages.[99] Maritime trade and colonial expansion especially by the British, the Spanish and the Portuguese empires then began to raise the question of neutrality in relation to shipping and trade towards the end of the fifteenth century and in 1713, the so-called Treaty of Utrecht codified the right of neutral ships to sail through enemy territory without fear of capture.[100] Following the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna of 1815 explicitly addressed the right to territorial neutrality for the first time.[101] Yet it was not until the fifth and the thirteenth Conventions of The Hague, signed in 1907, that neutrality both at sea and on land, became catalogued as staples of international law. More specifically, the fifth convention of The Hague specified the laws of neutrality pertaining to war on land. According to the convention, neutral territory was deemed inviolable and neutral states barred from assisting the belligerents.[102] The thirteenth convention of the Hague, on the other hand, pertained to naval conflicts. It similarly emphasized the right of neutral states to territorial integrity, their duty not to assist the belligerents, as well as the duty of neutral sates to treat all belligerents impartially.[103] In practice, this meant that neutral states were barred from initiating armed conflict, taking part in it once it was underway and obliged to treat the parties to an armed conflict impartially.[104]

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[99] Christine Agius and Karen Devine, '"Neutrality: A really dead concept?" A reprise,' *Cooperation and Conflict* 46(2011), 269.
[100] Ibid., 270.
[101] Ibid.
[102] n.a., 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land (Hague V),' The Avalon Project, 1907a, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague05.asp, Art. 1; 2; 4.
[103] n.a., 'Laws of War: Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War (Hague XIII),' The Avalon Project, 1907b, accessed 26 January 2021, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague13.asp, Art. 1; 2; 6; 9.
[104] Radovan Vukadinović, 'Various Conceptions of European Neutrality,' in *Between the Blocs: Problems and Prospects for Europe's Neutral and Non-Aligned States*, edited by Joseph Kruzel and Michael H. Haltzel (New York: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1989), 29; Boczek, 'Introduction,' 3.

This being said, apart from the gradual codification of neutrality in international law, customary law also became an important source of law on neutrality, especially where permanent neutrality of the kind practiced by Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Austria and Ireland was concerned.[105] This was because the Conventions of The Hague did not regulate the behaviour of neutrals in times of peace. Unlike temporary neutrals, such as for instance the United States during the early stages of both the First and the Second World Wars, permanent neutrals theoretically had to guard themselves against peacetime commitments that might inhibit them from remaining neutral in the event of a future conflict.[106] Yet because permanent neutrality was not explicitly regulated in international law, neutral behaviour in peacetime evolved as a matter of custom and policy. What was more, these customs and polcies diverged significantly among the neutrals.

This became particularly evident over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, when collective security organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations attempted to outlaw armed conflict between states.[107] Instead, article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant of 1920 and Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter of 1945 interpreted an act of aggression against a member state as a legitimate reason for collective retaliation. Adrian Schaub has argued in this context that the compatibility of neutrality and collective security appeared questionable, because collective security institutions bore a certain resemblance to alliance systems.[108] Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Austria and Switzerland all joined the League of Nations, although Switzerland asked to be excused from the collective security obligations of the League's Covenant. As will be discussed in detail below, however, the UN did not grant the Swiss government the same priviledge in 1946. As

[105] Adrian Schaub, *Neutralität und Kollektive Sicherheit: Gegenüberstellung zweier unvereinbarer Verhaltenskonzepte in bewaffneten Konflikten und These zu einem zeit- und völkerrechtsgemässem modus vivendi* (Basel: Lichtenhahn, 1995), 11.
[106] Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality*, 9.
[107] Agius and Devine, 'Neutrality: A really dead concept?', 271; Schaub, *Neutralität und Kollektive Sicherheit*, 5.
[108] Schaub, *Neutralität und Kollektive Sicherheit*, 5.

a result, while Sweden joined the UN in 1946 and Finland, Ireland and Austria joined in 1955, Switzerland did not join until 2002.

In this respect, Switzerland remained unique among the permanent neutrals throughout the Cold War. Yet Switzerland was not unique in every respect. Rather, as alluded to above, due to both the legal and political components of permanent neutrality, its practical manifestations have become inherently idiosyncratic. While Switzerland and Austria are both permanently neutral states under international law, Irish, Finnish and Swedish neutrality evolved primarily as principles of foreign policy.[109] Further, unlike Swedish and Swiss neutrality, Austrian, Finnish and Irish neutrality developed over the course of the twentieth century. Each of these cases will here be briefly discussed both to highlight the conceptual subtleties of permanent neutrality as a concept and to explain some of the specific characteristics of Swiss neutrality in contrast to other neutrals.

Austrian neutrality was arguably imposed externally. According to Hanspeter Neuhold, it was "the price Austria had to pay to regain full sovereignty" from Allied occupation in the wake of the Second World War.[110] In early 1955, the Austrian government came to an agreement with the Soviet Union, committing itself to a policy of neutrality in its future foreign affairs.[111] As a result, the four Allied powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union, agreed on Austrian independence in the so-called State Treaty on 15 May 1955.[112] In honour of its earlier commitment, the Austrian National Assembly then adopted a constitutional law of permanent neutrality in October of 1955. That same month, all foreign troops withdrew from Austrian territory and the Austrian National Council passed a Federal Constitutional Act declaring Austria permanently

[109] Hanspeter Neuhold, 'Permanent Neutrality on Contemporary International Relations: A Comparative Perspective,' *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 1(1982), 18.
[110] Ibid., 17.
[111] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'The first line of defence or a springboard for disintegration? European neutrals in American foreign and security policy, 1945–61,' *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 7(1996), 392.
[112] Andrew Cottey, 'The European Neutrals and NATO: Ambiguous Partnership,' *Contemporary Security Policy* 34(2013), 454.

neutral.[113] In other words, Austrian neutrality was a compromise result in pursuit of sovereign independence, rather than the product of ingrained national identity. It was also the product of both diplomatic negotiations and domestic legislation.

The same was not the case for Finland, whose neutrality is even more strongly associated with external influence on the part of the Soviet Union.[114] Finland had originally won its independence from the Russian Empire in 1917 and during the interwar period, Finland remained *de facto* neutral. However, Finland's physical proximity to the Soviet Union continued to exert a dominant influence over Finnish foreign policy in the long term.[115] According to Hanspeter Neuhold, the Soviet Union effectively regarded Finland "as part of its security zone."[116] Then, in 1939, the Soviet Union attacked Finland without a declaration of war and forced Finland into defeat the following year. In 1941, Finland resumed hostilities and suffered a second defeat during the so-called Continuation War from 1941 to 1944.[117] In 1947, Finland and the Soviet Union signed a peace treaty and that same year, the Finnish government of Mauno Pekkala declined to join the Marahall Plan.[118] Yet arguably the most important development with regards to Finnish neutrality was the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) that the Finnish government signed with the Soviet Union in 1948, giving rise to the term "Finlandization" coined by the contemporary Austrian Foreign Minister Karl Gruber.[119]

[113] Hanhimäki, 'The first line of defence,' 392.
[114] Jessica Beyer and Stephanie Hofmann, 'Varieties of neutrality: Norm revision and decline,' *Conflict and Cooperation* 46(2011), 299.
[115] Hanspeter Neuhold, 'The Neutral States of Europe: Similarities and Differences,' in *Neutrality: Changing Concepts and Practices*, edited by Alan T. Leonhard and Nicholas Mercuro (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 107.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality*, 101.
[119] Johanna Rainio-Niemi, 'Cold War Neutrality in Europe: Lessons to be Learned?,' *in Engaged Neutrality: An Evolved Approach to the Cold War,* edited by Heinz Gärtner (Lanham : Lexington Books, 2017), 22.

Article one of this agreement obliged Finland to defend itself in the event of an armed aggression against itself or the Soviet Union by either Germany or any of its allies.[120] The arrangement differed from that of a military alliance in that Finland alone was made responsible for the defence of its territory. It contained no obligation to assist the Soviet Union in its defence elsewhere. What was more, mutual military assistance was made conditional on mutual consent preceeded by mutual consultation.[121] In the meantime, the Soviet Union concluded a number of similar bilateral security agreements with Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland.[122] Paradoxically, Finnish neutrality is often traced back to the preamble of the Finnish FCMA with the Soviet Union, rendering this FCMA qualitatively different from others. More specifically, its preamble stresses "Finland's desire to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers."[123] It also renders Finland's neutrality qualitatively different both in form and substance from that of Austria. Both Finnish and Austrian neutrality had their origins in external intervention and took shape through diplomatic agreements with the Soviet Union during the early Cold War period. Finnish neutrality, however, was not followed up by a constitutional amendment. Neither did it suffice to shield Finland from continued Soviet influence. Rather, according to Andrew Cottey, "Reassuring the Soviet Union in order to maintain the country's territorial integrity and political independence remained the central pillar of Finnish foreign and security policy throughout the Cold War."[124] What this meant was that similarly to Austrian neutrality, Finnish neutrality never became an integral part of Finnish national identity.[125]

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[120] Juhana Aunesluoma and Johanna Rainio-Niemi, 'Neutrality as Identity? Finland's Quest for Security in the Cold War,' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18(2016), 53.
[121] Ibid., 54.
[122] Rainio-Niemi, 'Cold War Neutrality in Europe,' 21.
[123] n.a., 'The Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and The Republic of Finland,'1948, http://heninen.net/sopimus/1948_e.htm.
[124] Cottey, 'The European Neutrals and NATO,' 454.
[125] Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi, 'Neutrality as Identity?', 51.

The same cannot be said for Swedish neutrality, which has a considerably longer history than that of either Austria or Finland, dating back to the early nineteenth century.[126] What is more, unlike Austrian and Finnish neutrality, Swedish neutrality was based almost entirely on unilateral foreign policy choices, as opposed to external pressure. It has its foundation not in international treaties or domestic law, but in custom and policy.[127] Arguably as a result of this, Swedish neutrality has also evolved to become comparatively flexible. During the Second World War, for instance, the Swedish government permitted an entire *Wehrmacht* division to pass through Swedish territory on its way to the Finnish front.[128] What was more, in the wake of the announcement of the Finnish-Soviet FCMA of 1948, the Swedish government of Prime Minister Tage Erlander proposed to form a Scandinavian Defence Union with Norway and Denmark. Unlike the Finnish-Soviet FCMA, this proposal genuinely involved mutual defence, a principle that inherently conflicts with permanent neutrality.[129] The reason why this proposal did not materialize was that both Norway and Denmark chose to join NATO after it was established in 1949.

Ireland similarly pursued a mutual bilateral defence agreement with the United States after declining to join NATO in 1949.[130] Similarly to Sweden, Ireland was a so-called *de facto* neutral. Its neutrality did not have a basis in either constitutional law or in an international treaty. Similarly to Swedish neutrality, Irish neutrality was the result of unilateral policy choices taken by successive Irish governments since Irish independence from the United Kingdom in 1921. Some, such as Stanley Sloan, have argued that as a consequence, "Irish neutrality is based largely on a desire not to be caught up in Britain's wars."[131] Harto Hakovirta has even claimed that Ireland's decision not to join

[126] Neuhold, 'The Neutral States of Europe,' 105.
[127] Ibid., 100.
[128] Roderick Ogley, *The Theory and Practice of Neutrality in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 11.
[129] Cottey, 'The European Neutrals and NATO,' 455.
[130] Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality*, 105.
[131] Stanley Sloan, *NATO Enlargement and the Former European Neutrals* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 1998), 6.

NATO was based more on an unwillingness to enter an alliance with Britain rather than on the concept of neutrality.[132]

Hence, by the time of the early Cold War period, the concept of permanent neutrality had developed various practical expressions in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Ireland. While Austrian and Finnish neutrality were themselves products of the early Cold War period and came into being in part due to Soviet influence, Swedish and Irish neutrality were the result of unilateral policy choices that pre-dated the Cold War. Swiss neutrality, on the other hand, was by far the oldest. Arguably, it also became the strictest expression of permanent neutrality during the early Cold War period, as will be discussed in greater detail further on. Swiss neutrality is commonly dated back to the aftermath of the Battle of Marignano of 1515, when Swiss mercenaries were caught fighting against each other on the opposing French and Italian sides.[133] At the time, Switzerland was not yet a uniform political entity and its constituent regions autonomously entered into various different – at times conflicting – alliances with neighbouring states.[134] Not unlike Swedish neutrality, Swiss neutrality therefore initially evolved by way of custom and it did so over centuries. Its function was to prevent the complex religious, political and ethno-linguistic fabric of Swiss society from splitting up and aligning with competing European powers. It therefore also played an important part in shaping Swiss national identity. This being said, according to Edgar Bonjour, one of the most prominent commentators on the subject, at the time of its inception, Swiss neutrality was originally much more "loose, relaxed and blurred" than it is now.[135]

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[132] Hakovirta, *East-West Conflict and European Neutrality*, 105.
[133] Neuhold, 'The Neutral States of Europe,' 103.
[134] Edgar Bonjour, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität als Historisch Gewachsene Maxime im Seminar über Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Zeitalter der Weltweiten Interpendenz,"' 4-6 November 1982, E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[135] Ibid.

In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, Swiss neutrality became internationally recognized by the Treaty of Paris of 1815.[136] Yet it was not until the early Cold War period, as this chapter will discuss later on, that Swiss neutrality became as strict and unwavering so as not only to preclude the Swiss government from entering into military alliances but any non-technical international organizations as well. Further, Switzerland's non-membership of the UN became one of the defining features of Swiss foreign policy during the Cold War period. Whilst all other neutrals joined the UN between 1946 and 1955, the Swiss government interpreted permanent neutrality to mean complete abstinence not only from military alliance systems but collective security organizations as well and in this respect, Swiss neutrality remained unique throughout the Cold War period. Similarly, whilst Switzerland joined the Marshall Plan along with Sweden, Ireland and Austria and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1961, Switzerland was the only neutral not to join the European Union after the end of the Cold War. As the remainder of this thesis will show, Switzerland's strict interpretation of neutrality also created at least two fundamental dilemmas for Swiss foreign policy – dilemmas which the case study of Swiss good offices in Afghanistan highlight well. Yet as the remainder of thesis will also show, the Swiss understanding of permanent neutrality was not as static and immovable as it may appear at first glance. In fact, there were multiple instances where questions of change versus continuity presented themselves to Swiss policymakers. It is this phenomenon that the present thesis sets out to explore and it therefore takes the form of a single case study as opposed to that of a comparative case study between multiple neutral states.

## Good Offices

Having explored the definition of neutrality both conceptually and comparatively, and having highlighted the rationale for focusing on Swiss neutrality for the present study, the remainder of this chapter will now transition to the concepts of solidarity and good offices in Swiss foreign policy. After

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[136] Surya Subedi, 'Neutrality in a Changing World: European Neutral States and the European Community,' *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 42(1993), 243.

all, it is not the case that Swiss foreign policy is exclusively neutrality policy.[137] In fact, Swiss foreign policy is heavily shaped by economic policy, as well as by the complex and dynamic bilateral and multilateral ties to Switzerland's immediate European neighbourhood. Yet these lie outside the scope of the present study. What is important for the present study is that apart from permanent neutrality, Swiss foreign policy also developed a specialist capacity for good offices over time. This concept and its history will be discussed here in some detail in order to set the stage for analysing Switzerland's guiding Cold War foreign policy construct of Neutrality and Solidarity.

The relationship between the concepts of neutrality and solidarity is not perfectly straightforward. According to Swiss academic Pierre du Bois, "Active neutrality implies diverse services which are the manifestation of the Swiss desire for solidarity."[138] Like neutrality, in theory, good offices exist as an antidote to armed conflict and Switzerland is perhaps unique in the way that it has moulded both of these concepts into its foreign policy. According to Thomas Fischer, the term encompasses all measures which third parties – be they states, international organizations or private individuals – can undertake in order to induce the parties to an armed conflict to negotiate a peaceful solution.[139] These third parties do not need to be neutral. Yet as discussed previously, there are those, such as former Swiss Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Raymond Probst, who argue that neutrals have a decisive advantage in providing good offices. Probst also offers his own slightly broader definition, which includes "any step within a line of successive procedures, all of them established for [the] peaceful settlement of disputes."[140] Strictly speaking, a provider of good offices should not express

[137] Georg Kreis, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Ersten und im Zweiten Weltkrieg im Seminar über "Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Zeitalter der Weltweiten Interpendenz,"' 4-6 November 1982, E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[138] Pierre du Bois, 'Neutrality and Political Good Offices: The case of Switzerland,' in *The European Neutrals in International Affairs*, edited by Hanspeter Neuhold and Hans Thalberg (Vienna: Wilhelm Braunmüller, 1984), 7.
[139] Thomas Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981: Eine Studie zur Politik der Guten Dienste im Kalten Kr*ieg (Zürich: Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik der ETH Zürich, 2004), 17-18 ; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 75.
[140] Probst, *"Good Offices"*, 1.

their own opinion or influence the conflict parties during this process. That is why there are those who assume that neutral states such as Switzerland are ideally suited to provide them.[141]

There are a number of diplomatic tools that can qualify as good offices and some of them may overlap in both function and purpose.[142] Providers of good offices can host international conferences and organizations. They can offer legal arbitration, conciliation and judicial settlements. They can also mediate and they can engage in so-called protecting power mandates.[143] Each of these activities varies slightly with regards to the degree of influence that the provider of good offices has on the actual resolution of the conflict. Switzerland's reputation for good offices, for instance, chiefly rests on its experience as a protecting power, which entails very little direct involvement by the third party itself.[144] I will discuss this concept and the concept of mediation in detail, because they are conceptually less straightforward than the others and because they are directly relevant to Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War.

According to the definition by Daniel Trachsler, the task of a protecting power is to "maintain a minimum of diplomatic and or consular relations between two states, which, due to armed conflict or other reasons, do not maintain them."[145] The principal feature of this arrangement is that the protecting power does not act under its own name. It solely and voluntarily represents the interests of a conflict party.[146] In other words, the protecting power has no mandate to mediate between the conflict parties.[147] According to a definition by Jon A. Fanzun and Patrick Lehmann, mediation, on

[141] Konrad Walter Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz: Aktive Neutralitätspolitik zwischen Tradition, Diskussion und Integration* (Bern: Lang, 1974), 3.
[142] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 83.
[143] Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz,* 4-5; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 75; Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste,' 5.
[144] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 76.
[145] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 37, author's translation from, "Aufgabe einer Schutzmacht ist es, zwischen zwei Staaten, welche wegen kriegerischen Auseinandersetzungen oder aus anderen Gründen keine diplomatischen und/oder konsularischen Beziehungen unterhalten, ein Minimum an gegenseitigem Kontakt aufrechtzuerhalten."
[146] Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste,' 4.
[147] Ibid.

the other hand, "involves bringing conflict parties to an agreement for a peaceful settlement by actively participating in the process of negotiation."[148] This may also entail specific proposals about how to resolve any differences underlying a conflict.[149] What a mediator can and cannot do is not specifically regulated under international law. What a protecting power can do, on the other hand, is regulated. The Treaties of Vienna on diplomatic and consular relations of 1961 and 1963 respectively spell out the rights and duties of protecting powers.[150] In the absence of consular or diplomatic relations between third parties, the protecting power is responsible for the safety of the diplomatic personnel and the citizens of the state it is representing in another state. It is also responsible for their property.[151] Other responsibilities may include the internment of prisoners, the exchange of war-wounded, and the transfer of mail and other communications.[152] This aspect became particularly relevant during Switzerland's involvement in the Afghan crisis, as a small number of Soviet prisoners of war were interned on Swiss territory in exchange for ICRC access to the conflict region.

In fact, arguably on account of its neutrality, Switzerland's experience as a protecting power was extensive even prior to this particular episode. So extensive, in fact, that there were times, when Switzerland held by far the most protecting power mandates of any state. During the Franco-Prussian War from 1870 to 1871, the beaten fragments of the French forces commanded by General Bourbaki, found refuge in Switzerland and received medical support from the Red Cross movement, which had been founded in 1863.[153] Concurrently, the Swiss government accepted a protecting power mandate from the Kingdom of Bavaria and the Duchy of Baden to represent their diplomatic

[148] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 83; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 89.
[149] Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz,* 3; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 89.
[150] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 38.
[151] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 88.
[152] Kreis, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Ersten und im Zweiten Weltkrieg,' E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[153] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 19; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 120.

interests in France.[154] During the First World War, Switzerland was amongst those countries which held the most protecting power mandates, reaching a maximum of 36 in total.[155] Other states entrusted with similar mandates included the United States, the Netherlands and Spain. Yet during the Second World War, the Swiss government took on over two hundred protective power mandates between 1943 and 1944. Exact estimates vary, but most historians converge at around 219 individual mandates for a total of 35 countries.[156] That was the highest number of mandates that Switzerland ever held at any one time.[157]

Yet while the literature shows that Switzerland was remarkably successful as a protecting power during the first half of the twentieth century, it also shows that it was decisively less effective as a mediator. In 1917, Federal Councillor Hoffmann, the foreign minister, attempted to mediate a separate peace between Germany and Russia. While this may arguably have been intended to resolve the conflict as a whole, the problem was that a peace on the Eastern Front would have disadvantaged Russia's alliance partners in that it would have allowed the German high command to redirect all of its Eastern troops to the Western front.[158] In other words, here was a situation in which neutral Switzerland, in an attempt to offer its good offices, inadvertently not only would have taken sides in a conflict, but could have decidedly influenced its outcome. When it became known, Councillor Hoffmann was forced to resign.[159] Yet this did not prevent a similar affair from taking place during the Second World War, when Federal Councillor Pilet-Golaz was approached as a potential mediator by the German government. In the absence of military advances in the Soviet Union, the idea was to verify the feasibility of a separate peace agreement between Germany and the Western

[154] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 20.
[155] Ibid., 100.
[156] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 38; Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste,' 7.
[157] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 38.
[158]Kreis, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Ersten und im Zweiten Weltkrieg,' E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[159] Ibid.

allies.[160] Pilet-Golaz, perhaps having learned from his predecessor's mistake, did not directly approach the Western alliance partners, but encouraged representatives of the Vatican to do so.[161] In the end, the arrangement came to nothing, but had Pilet-Golaz been found out, he might very well have been forced to resign just like Hoffmann. In essence, their schemes were practically identical.

Overall, Switzerland's record on good offices was therefore mixed by the end of the Second World War. On the one hand, the Swiss government had repeatedly demonstrated its ability to conduct diplomatic affairs on behalf of others in times of conflict. According to Jon A. Fanzun and Patrick Lehmann, Switzerland "had been able to continuously demonstrate her reliability and experience in this domain and thereby gain the trust of different parties."[162] Yet as discussed in the literature review of this thesis, much of the literature tends to disagree with the assessment by Secretary of State Raymond Probst that, permanently neutral states are well-suited for all of the diplomatic tools that fall under the heading of good offices.[163] Instead, already by the end of the Second World War, a pattern was becoming apparent that the more actively involved the Swiss government became in resolving conflicts between third parties, the less likely the endeavour appeared to succeed. It was one thing to offer up the physical location or the diplomatic channels for conflict parties to negotiate amongst themselves. It was quite another to take the initiative and the responsibility that comes with it to resolve an armed conflict. In this domain, much of the recent literature has now concluded that Switzerland has in fact not been very successful at all.[164]

At the end of the Second World War, however, practitioners in the Swiss government drew precisely the opposite conclusion from Switzerland's existing record on good offices, despite the fact that over

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt, 101,' author's translation from, "Ihre Zuverlässigkeit und Erfahrung konnte sie immer wieder unter Beweis stellen und dadurch das Vertrauen der Parteien gewinnen."
[163] Probst, '*"Good Offices,"*' 13.
[164] Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste,' 6.

the course of the war, Switzerland's neutrality had actually become increasingly unpopular abroad.[165] Especially the Allied powers, including the United States and the Soviet Union, began to view Switzerland with suspicion. After all, by remaining neutral during the war, Switzerland had done nothing to contain the Hitler regime and there are those who suggest that it possibly even profited from the war itself by continuing to trade with both sides of the conflict.[166] Domestically, on the other hand, neutrality had become more popular than ever before. According to public opinion, neutrality had been the decisive factor that had saved the country from the scourge of war.[167]

This created a difficult situation for the Federal Council, the executive body of the Swiss government. It was compelled to hold steadfast to the course of neutrality domestically, even as it increasingly came under diplomatic pressure abroad. The government of the United States, for instance, blocked Swiss bank accounts on American soil on account of German assets held in Swiss banks. As a result of the so-called Washington Agreement of 25 May 1945, Switzerland unilaterally transferred 250 million Swiss Francs (CHF) to the American government to resolve the matter.[168] That same year, Switzerland resumed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union for the first time in 28 years – a process which the latter had slowed down considerably in light of the presence of a large number of Soviet prisoners of war, who had fled to Switzerland during the Second World War.[169]

In addition to improving its bilateral relations with the victors of the war, the Swiss government also recognized the need to become involved in the multilateralization of the post-war era. As briefly discussed above, on 16 May 1920, Switzerland had joined the League of Nations in light of the assurances of the Declaration of London. This document guaranteed Switzerland's right to perpetual

[165] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 109-110.
[166] Urs Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' in *Neues Handbuch der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik*, edited by Alois Riklin, Hans Haug and Raymond Probst, 61-78, (Bern, Haupt: 1992), 62.
[167] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 109-110.
[168] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 62.
[169] Ibid., 63.

neutrality and recognized it as compatible with the principles of the League.[170] Now, at the end of the Second World War, the Federal Council hoped that the UN, founded in October of 1945, would extend the same courtesy to the Swiss.[171] In other words, Switzerland wanted to join the UN, but to remain aloof from its collective security mechanisms on account of Swiss neutrality.[172] This was the recommendation of a special consultative committee to the Federal Council, chaired by Foreign Minister Max Petitpierre.[173] In its recommendation, the committee relied on the misguided assumption that the UN would interpret Switzerland's record on good offices as a sign that Switzerland was well-equipped to further the organization's goals of world peace and security.[174] In reality, however, many UN members deemed neutrality as an obstacle, rather than an asset in light of this goal. Consequently, no Swiss delegation was invited to San Francisco for the founding conference of the UN in June of 1945 and the French delegate at the conference even moved to explicitly condemn neutrality in international affairs.[175] In 1946, the Federal Council therefore decided not to attempt to join the UN, arguing that the organization more closely resembled an alliance of World War Two victors than a universal institution dedicated to the preservation of peace.[176]

## Neutrality and Solidarity

The fact that it was the only neutral not to join the UN originally isolated Switzerland even more than it had been during the war.[177] It also gave rise to the concept of solidarity as a component of Swiss

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[170] Georges-André Chevallaz, *Neutralité suisse et Nations Unies* (Lausanne: Editions de l'Aire, 1986), 57; Bonjour, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität als Historisch Gewachsene Maxime,' E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[171] Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz,* 195.
[172] Ibid.
[173] N.a., 'Schweizerisches Institut für Berufspädagogik, Kurs A 13: Schweizerische Innen- und Aussenpolitik aktuell – Die Mitarbeit der Schweiz im System der Vereinten Nationen,' n.d., J1.301#2002/197#39*, CH-BAR.
[174] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 63.
[175] Daniel Frei, *Neutralität - Ideal oder Kalkül? Zweihundert Jahre aussenpolitisches Denken in der Schweiz* (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1967), 82.
[176] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 63; N.a., 'Schweizerisches Institut für Berufspädagogik,' J1.301#2002/197#39*, CH-BAR; Frei, *Neutralität - Ideal oder Kalkül ?,* 83.
[177] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 24.

foreign policy. As if in response to the disapproval of the UN and as if as to legitimize Switzerland's neutrality during the war, Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre introduced the doctrine of Neutrality and Solidarity to parliament in 1947. The assumptions behind this doctrine were two-fold. First, that over the course of the war, neutrality had become an axiomatic factor in Swiss public opinion on foreign policy. Second, Petitpierre recognized that pledging to stand aside from any and all conflicts could be perceived to be both inherently passive and intrinsically isolationist from abroad. In response, Petitpierre's idea was to reposition Switzerland as an active neutral and a useful member of the international community in show of solidarity. After all, he surmised, Switzerland did not only have a long-standing history of neutrality, but a long-standing history as a provider of good offices.[178] His argument, according to Daniel Trachsler, was that "other states would only respect Swiss neutrality, if [Switzerland] could convince them that it had a purpose."[179]

Neutrality expert Konrad Walter Stamm has similarly argued that, "Switzerland had to demonstrate that her neutrality was neither an expression of indifference and selfishness, nor [of] national egoism and that she had never played the part of a passive observer of world affairs, but [rather that] of a valuable member of the family of nations."[180] In other words, the principle of Neutrality and Solidarity was the conceptual twist which explicitly argued for the first time that neutrality was important for the provision of good offices, that good offices were important for demonstrating solidarity internationally and solidarity in turn was important to legitimize Swiss neutrality abroad. On 7 October 1947, Petitpierre addressed the Council of States, the upper chamber of the Swiss parliament, to this effect, insisting that neutrality and good offices were mutually compatible and

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[178] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 75; Daniel Trachsler, 'Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey: Wiederkehrende Debatten um die Schweizer Aussenpolitik,' *Bulletin zur Schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (2011), 113.

[179] Trachsler, 'Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey,' 113, author's translation from, "Dass die schweizerische Neutralität im internationalen Umfeld nur respektiert werde, wenn es gelinge, auch die anderen Staaten von ihrem Sinn zu überzeugen."

[180] Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz,* 198, author's translation from, "Die Schweiz musste darlegen können, dass ihre Neutralität weder Ausdruck von Gleichgültigkeit und Selbstsucht noch nationaler Egoismus war und dass sie nie den teilnahmslosen Zuschauer am Weltgeschehen gespielt, sondern sich stets als wertvolles Mitglied der Familie der Nationen erwiesen habe."

complementary. By extension, as suggested previously, the idea was also to demonstrate that Swiss neutrality was capable of complementing, rather than contradicting the ideals set out in the UN Charter. As Stamm points out, overall this was incredibly bold, considering that the UN had only just denied membership to Switzerland on account of Switzerland's self-imposed isolation and apparent lack of solidarity during the Second World War.[181]

In a determined effort to demonstrate its sense of solidarity with the rest of the world, Switzerland became a permanent observer at the United Nations in 1946.[182] In 1948, it joined the Marshall Plan and the International Court of Justice.[183] It also joined a number of specialized UN organizations as a non-UN member, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).[184] A number of Swiss dignitaries also became functionaries for the UN over subsequent years and eventually took part in numerous UN peacekeeping operations. Edouard Zellweger, for instance, served as special representative of the Secretary-General in Laos from 1960 to 1961 and Ambassador Ernesto Thalmann became a special representative of the Secretary-General in Jerusalem in 1967.[185] Another important element, which inherently, although indirectly tied Switzerland to the UN, was the fact that as of 1946, the organization established its European headquarters in the former League of Nations *Palais des Nations* in Geneva.[186] Between 1946 and 1966, this attracted over 150 international and twelve other intergovernmental organizations to Geneva, totalling well over 8'000 employees.[187]

[181] Ibid., 199.
[182] Michael Gunter, 'Switzerland and the United Nations,' *International Organization* 30(1976), 140.
[183] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 63.
[184] Ibid., 64.
[185] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 110.
[186] Stamm, *Die Guten Dienste der Schweiz,* 198.
[187] Ibid.

## The Bindschedler Doctrine

Almost at the same time that good offices became a formalized component of Swiss foreign policy, however, Swiss neutrality policy also underwent an important conceptual revision. The so-called Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 was named after the director of the legal advisory service at the Federal Political Department. Recall that historian Edgar Bonjour had characterized Swiss neutrality as rather "loose, relaxed and blurred" originally.[188] The Bindschedler Doctrine now provided policy-makers with a coherent and explicit neutrality policy for the first time. What was more, in light of the fact that Switzerland had been unable to join the UN because of its staunch interpretation of neutrality and its incompatibility with the principle of collective security, the Bindschedler Doctrine became what was perhaps the strictest interpretation of neutrality held by any permanent neutral. It staunchly differentiated between so-called "technical" and "political organizations". In order to fulfil its obligations under the Conventions of The Hague of 1907 and to prevent itself from becoming in any way partial in times of peace, Switzerland would attempt to join only those intergovernmental organizations which were exclusively economic, cultural or technical in nature.[189]

The thinking behind this differentiation was that cultural and technical cooperation in peacetime would never suffice to entice Switzerland to either start a conflict or to take sides in the event of a conflict. There have been criticisms concerning Switzerland's economic relations, which, during the Cold War, were ostensibly geared towards the Western, rather than the Soviet economic bloc. According to the Bindschedler Doctrine, this was permissible, seeing as short of a customs union, economic ties would hardly entail a sufficient degree of dependency.[190] According to the doctrine, as long as a neutral state did not expressly use economic means for political purposes, such as to favour a party in a conflict, be it through sanctions or trade in arms, a neutral could engage freely in

[188] Bonjour, 'Die Schweizerische Neutralität als Historisch Gewachsene Maxime,' E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR.
[189] Bindschedler, 'La notion de la neutralité,' J1.223#2003/213#104*, CH-BAR.
[190] Ibid.

world trade.[191] This sounded straight-forward in principle, but in practice, it gave rise to heated debates, for instance as to whether the Council of Europe was an economic or a political organization. Switzerland had originally declined to join the council in 1949 and joined only in 1963. Switzerland also initially remained outside the so-called Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM), which imposed export controls on NATO alliance partners and Western countries in their relations to the Soviet Bloc. Bowing to American pressure, the Swiss government relented in the so-called Hotz-Linder Agreement of 1951 and drastically curtailed its trade relations with the Soviet bloc.[192] In practice, therefore, Switzerland clearly took positions in the economic aspects of the Cold War. This being said, the Swiss government remained careful with regards to the process of European integration on account of its political dimensions, a theme that will be revisited in chapter three and with respect to Switzerland's deepening engagement with multilateralism during the *détente* period.

In the meantime, by 1954, Switzerland had taken a series of decisive steps to overcome its initial post-war diplomatic isolation. Having failed to gain admission to the UN in 1946, the Federal Council, under the leadership of Max Petitpierre, conceptually reconfigured not only Switzerland's existing practices on good offices, but tied them closely to Switzerland's policy of permanent neutrality. The assumption behind Neutrality and Solidarity was that while passive neutrality led to diplomatic isolation, active neutrality would invite the contrary. What was more, so as not to fall foul of the Conventions of The Hague of 1907, which outlined the duties of permanently neutral states in time of war, and so as nevertheless to be able to partake somewhat in the growing multilateralization of post-war international affairs, the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 had drawn a clear distinction between political and technical organizations. Henceforth, Switzerland participated exclusively yet

[191] Ibid.
[192] Sandra Bott, Janick Marina Schaufenbuehl and Sacha Zala, 'Die internationale Schweiz in der Zeit des Kalten Krieges: Eine Zwischenbilanz,' in *Die internationale Schweiz in der Zeit des Kalten Krieges*, edited by Sandra Bott, Janick Marina Schaufenbuehl and Sacha Zala (Basel: Schwabe, 2011), 8.

extensively in the latter, and seized every possible opportunity to make itself useful – until the Suez Crisis of 1956.

## The Refinement of Switzerland's Policy on Good Offices

Already during the early decades of the twentieth century, Switzerland had earned a reputation as a host country for international conferences. In 1923, for instance, the conference on the Greco-Turkish population exchange took place in Lausanne, while in 1925, France, Germany and Great Britain signed the Locarno Pact on Lago Maggiore.[193] According to Fischer, "Switzerland's political stability, its independent position between the blocs, its lack of a colonial past, as well as its favourable geographical location [...] and infrastructure were the main factors that enabled Geneva to become a centre of international relations."[194] In 1954, the same year as the formulation of the Bindschedler Doctrine, Geneva had successfully hosted the Indochina conference, which produced an armistice agreement on the ongoing wars in Korea and Indochina. Over the course of subsequent years, Switzerland also hosted the conference on the neutralization of Laos from 1961 to 1962; various meetings of the Second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II); and the second phase of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1972 to 1975. Interestingly, Switzerland when asked, agreed to host in most of these cases. However, it was hardly ever the case that Switzerland took the initiative and extended conference invitations on its own accord.[195] What is more, in most of these cases, with the exception of the CSCE, in which Switzerland was an active participant, the Swiss government did not participate in these conferences in a mediating capacity.[196] As we shall see, this was also the case during the Geneva Talks on the Soviet-Afghan crisis between 1982 and 1988, in which the Swiss were not involved, but on whose territory the conflict parties met on neutral ground.

[193] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 101.
[194] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 81.
[195] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 103.
[196] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 46-47.

There was one notable exception to this pattern, namely the Suez Crisis of 1956. It was exceptional, because it was the first, and the only time that the Swiss government attempted to initiate a major international peace conference of its own accord.[197] Instead however, the crisis became an unexpected turning point in Swiss foreign policy. Until this point, the Swiss had done what they could to demonstrate their active neutrality and the usefulness of their good offices to the international community. This particular offer, however, was decidedly rejected, leading to a decisive reformulation of the Swiss policy on good offices.

There are those who argue that this was not exclusively the result of the Suez Crisis of 1956. Thomas Fischer, for instance, claims that it was largely "in response to negative experiences with a mandate in Korea…" that the FPD "elaborated a catalogue of conditions to be fulfilled for future mandates."[198] The war between the communist North and the American- and UN-supported South, broke out in 1950 and the following year, the United States asked the governments of Switzerland and Norway to monitor a potential ceasefire agreement.[199] This led to the formation of two distinct monitoring commissions, which eventually included Switzerland, Sweden *(sic)*, Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) oversaw the eventual ceasefire agreement of 27 July 1953. The Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), which also included India, was responsible for the repatriation of prisoners of war.[200] Initially, the Federal Council considered the NNSC and the NNRC to be ideal opportunities to demonstrate the compatibility of Neutrality and Solidarity in a UN setting. Yet the NNSC also gave rise to a number of problems for the Swiss.[201] While the NNRC discharged all prisoners by February of 1954, the NNSC was forced to withdraw its

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[197] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 105.
[198] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 90.
[199] Eric Flury-Dasein, 'Die Schweiz und Schweden vor den Herausforderungen des Kalten Krieges 1945-1970: Neutralitätspolitik, militärische Kooperation, Osthandel und Korea-Mission,' *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte = Revue suisse d'histoire = Rivista storica svizzera* 54(2004), 138.
[200] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 90.
[201] Trachsler, 'Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey,' 113-114; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 111.

inspection teams from both the North and the South of Korea in 1956.[202] From then on, its mandate was effectively reduced to preventing a renewed outbreak of hostilities at the 38th parallel.[203] Yet perhaps even more difficult for the Swiss government was the fact that the NNSC was not actually neutral at all. Poland and Czechoslovakia may have been militarily neutral with regards to the Korean conflict, but they often sided with the Korean People's Army ideologically. What was more, as a result of this, both Sweden and Switzerland were increasingly identified as "Western" rather than simply as neutrals by outside observers.[204] While the Federal Council did agree to see through its involvement in the commission, it concluded that henceforth, Switzerland would no longer agree to provide its good offices so easily. This feeling was doubtlessly reinforced after the Suez Crisis of 1956 and culminated in the new good offices criteria of 1958.

During the summer of 1956, shortly after British forces had retreated from their occupation of the Suez Canal, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Universal Maritime Suez Canal Company, which operated traffic through the canal.[205] In response, Britain and France joined forces with Israel in a war against Egypt in October of 1956 and occupied the Canal Zone.[206] On the morning of 6 November, the Swiss government issued a proposal for an international peace conference on the Suez crisis to the UN, as well as to the governments of the United States, France, Britain, the Soviet Union and India. India was invited on account of its leading position in the Non-Aligned Movement, of which Egypt was also member.[207] Ironically, however, that same day, in response to pressure from the United States, Britain and France agreed to seek a diplomatic solution through the UN.[208] The Swiss initiative was rejected by all parties, except for the Soviet Union and this in turn led

[202] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 90.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Trachsler, 'Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey,' 113-114; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 111.
[205] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 31.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Peter Hug, Thomas Gees, and Katja Dannecker, *Die Aussenpolitik der Schweiz im kurzen 20. Jahrhundert: Antibolschewismus, Deutschlandpolitik und organisierte Weltmarktintegration - Segmentierte Praxis und öffentliches Ritual* (Bern: Universität Bern, Institut für Politikwissenschaft 2000), 34.
[208] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 33.

to heavy criticism in the Swiss press, given the concurrent Soviet invasion of Hungary.[209] The Secretary-General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, even considered the Swiss initiative to be a personal insult, first, because he had not been informed beforehand and second, because the initiative stood in competition with the UN as a platform for the resolution of the conflict. The Swiss did eventually end up playing a small role in the UN Emergency Force, the first official UN peacekeeping mission in history.[210] When the Egyptian government denied several UN member states the right to land transport aircraft for UN peacekeeping troops, the Secretary-General turned to the Federal Council with a request for assistance.[211] Perhaps to rectify its relations with the UN, the Federal Council agreed immediately and between 1956 and 1957, Swissair, the Swiss national airline, transported approximately 3'800 troops from Naples to Egypt, paid for by the Swiss government.[212] Interestingly, however, well-known authors on the Suez crisis do not dwell on this contribution.[213]

Bearing this in mind, the consequences of the affair went beyond the UN peacekeeping mission in Egypt. From this point on, the Swiss government became cautious in offering its good services pro-actively.[214] Switzerland abstained, for instance, from taking any initiatives to mediate between the parties in the Berlin Crisis of 1961 or the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.[215] In 1958, Raymond Probst, the future Secretary of State, had circulated an important internal memorandum within the FPD, the predecessor of the FDFA, detailing a set of strict criteria, which would henceforth need to be met for Switzerland to provide good offices in a conflict situation. According to Fischer, these criteria were never formally adopted as an official policy by the Federal Council. Within the FDP, however, they

[209] Frei, *Neutralität - Ideal oder Kalkül?,* 84.
[210] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 94.
[211] N.a., 'The Philosophy of Neutrality,' n.d., E2010-01A#1996/396#731*, CH-BAR.
[212] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 66.
[213] Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Avi Shlaim, 'Britain's Quest for a World Role,' *International Relations* 5(1975), 838-856.
[214] Fischer and Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation,' 25; Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 85.
[215] Ibid.

quickly became accepted and treated as being on a par with the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954. According to these criteria, from then on, Switzerland would only become active if all conflict parties formally invited the Swiss government. All parties had to be in agreement over the form and the scope of the good offices that were being asked for in advance and the mandate itself needed to be clearly defined, especially in its temporal scope. It would need to be compatible with Switzerland's neutrality, yet it ought not itself to curtail the freedom of action of the Swiss government. Finally, there needed to be a reasonable chance of success.[216]

Following from this, in the wake of 1958, two trends became apparent in the way that Switzerland performed its good offices. First, the Swiss government strictly observed the 1958 criteria. Second, as a result, the number of times in which Switzerland exercised a mediatory mandate decreased dramatically. Protecting power mandates, which entailed a lesser degree of direct involvement, remained popular. Between 1950 and 1995, Switzerland in fact took on 72 such mandates.[217] The last serious Swiss mediatory mandate known to the literature, meanwhile, were the French-Algerian negotiations of 1961. These ultimately led to the Evian Accords and the independence of Algeria in 1962.[218] In 1961, Swiss diplomat Olivier Long, who had been on friendly terms with the French Minister for Algerian Affairs, Louis Joxe, received an official mandate from Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre. A French delegation headed by future French president Georges Pompidou, subsequently met with representatives from the Algerian National Liberation front for the first time in Lucerne in February of 1961.[219] Negotiations then continued in Evian and Lugrin, on the French side of Lake Geneva. There were a number of times, however, when negotiations threatened to break down. On one such occasion in February of 1962, Olivier Long played a crucial role as an

[216] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981*, 35.
[217] Trachsler, 'Von Petitpierre bis Calmy-Rey,' 39.
[218] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 85; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 103.
[219] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 85.

intermediary in reuniting both parties around the negotiating table at Les Rousses near the French-Swiss border.[220]

That same year, the number of Swiss protecting power mandates had risen to sixteen in light of the Cuban Missile Crisis. As a result of the crisis, the United States and a number of South American countries approached the Swiss to represent their diplomatic interests in Cuba. Switzerland continued to represent the United States in Cuba throughout the rest of the Cold War and also took on the protecting power mandate for Cuban interests in the United States from Czechoslovakia in 1995. What was particularly interesting about the American mandate in Cuba, was that beginning in 1965, it also included an airlift, which eventually enabled the transfer of 260'000 Cubans to the United States.[221] What this goes to demonstrate is that the line between various forms of good offices can become blurred and individual mandates can change in nature over time. Other prominent instances in which Switzerland exercised protecting power mandates during the Cold War include the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971, the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 and the Falkland Island Crisis in 1982.

In 1971, India and Pakistan mutually severed their diplomatic relations over the secession of Bangladesh and it was the first time that two developing countries asked Switzerland to reciprocally represent their diplomatic interests.[222] This particular protecting power mandate is also interesting, because it eventually came to include the protection of 90'000 Pakistani POWs, captured by the Indian army in Bengal.[223] In light of the recent declassification of relevant archival material, Nicolas Rion has become the first to write about this development. According to Rion, this was the first time that the Third Geneva Conventions Relative to the Protection of Prisoners of War 1949 were applied

[220] Ibid., 86.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Nicolas Rion, 'Une occasion risqué pour la diplomatie Suisse: Protection des intérêts étrangers et bons offices en Inde et au Pakistan (1971-1976),' *Politorbis* 40(2006), 44.
[223] Ibid., 46.

in an armed conflict.[224] In some aspects, it was therefore an important precedent for Switzerland's protecting power mandate involving the Soviet POWs from Afghanistan, discussed in chapters five and six.

However, the Swiss were unsuccessful in attempting to mediate between India and Pakistan and played no part in the Accords of Delhi of 1973 and 1974. The same is true for the resolution of the Iranian hostage crisis and of 1979 and of the Falklands crisis of 1982. In both instances, Switzerland took on protecting power mandates for the disputing parties, yet attempts to mediate were unsuccessful. On 4 November 1979, protesters stormed the American embassy in Teheran and captured over sixty embassy staff as hostages.[225] The crisis itself did not immediately terminate diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran, but it made it impossible for the American embassy to continue to function as an embassy.[226] Under these circumstances, the Carter Administration contacted future Swiss Secretary of State, Raymond Probst, who served as the Swiss ambassador to Washington at the time, to open an informal channel of communication with the Iranian authorities.[227] This arrangement lasted until April 1980, when an attempt to rescue the hostages failed and US-Iranian diplomatic relations broke down.[228] After this, the Swiss ambassador in Teheran, Erik Lang, became the most important source of information on the ground for both the Swiss and the American governments. Lang also eventually became an important source of information for the Swiss government on the Soviet-Afghan crisis during the 1980s. That being said, it was not through this channel that the hostage crisis was resolved. The regime of Ayatollah Khomeini eventually signalled its willingness to enter into negotiations via the West German government and ultimately, it was the Algerian government which mediated between the Iranian

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[224] Ibid.
[225] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981*, 9.
[226] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 295-296.
[227] Fischer, *Die Rolle der Schweiz in der Iran-Geiselkrise, 1979-1981,* 9.
[228] Ibid.

and the American governments on the issue, leading to the release of the hostages in January of 1981.[229]

In the case of the Falkland crisis, the British government reached out to the Federal authorities on 2 April 1982 and asked them to represent British interests in Argentina. Over the course of the crisis, Switzerland took charge of the British embassy and two consulates-general, as well as of the protection of 30'000 British citizens.[230] Following a request by British Ambassador Powell Jones, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), as the FPD had been renamed in 1979, also organized an informal meeting between British and Argentinian diplomats at one point during the crisis. However, talks broke down almost immediately on the subject of whether the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands should form part of these talks.[231] This might explain why experts on the Falkland crisis, most notably Lawrence Freedman, do not dwell on Switzerland's short involvement as a mediator.[232] What these various examples show is that Switzerland's protecting powers continued to be in high demand over the course of the Cold War. Yet after the Evian Accords of 1962, Switzerland was unsuccessful as a mediating power.[233]

What was more, Switzerland was far from the only provider of good offices during this period. Between 1952 and 1991, Sweden was active as a protecting power 21 times. Austria served as a protecting power six times between 1960 and 1991.[234] Non-neutrals also took on protecting powers roles during this period. Examples include Czechoslovakia, the United Kingdom, which represented the United States in China for some time, and the Netherlands, which represented Israel in the Soviet Union and Poland.[235] What is more, where mediating mandates were concerned, most of these were

[229] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 78.
[230] Ibid., 79.
[231] Ibid., 86.
[232] Lawrence Freedman, *Signals of War: The Falklands Conflict of 1982* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
[233] Borsani, 'Die Schweiz und die Guten Dienste,' 6.
[234] Trachsler, 'Gute Dienste – Mythen, Fakten, Perspektiven,' 40.
[235] Ibid.

gradually brought before the UN rather than before an individual state. According to Fanzun and Lehmann, a quarter of all such mandates went to the UN during the Cold War.[236] Trygve Lie of Norway, the first UN Secretary-General, for instance, stepped forward as a mediator during the first Berlin crisis of 1948.[237] At the time, his proposals were not accepted by the Cold War superpowers, yet his initiative nevertheless set a precedent. As discussed above, his successor, Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden, became actively involved in the negotiations between the foreign ministers of Egypt, Britain and France during the Suez crisis of 1956 after Switzerland withdrew its initiative. The third Secretary-General, U Thant of Burma personally intervened not only in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, but also in the Yemeni civil war and during the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965.[238]

To conclude therefore, during the immediate post-war period, the FPD under the leadership of Max Petitpierre set Swiss foreign policy on a new course. To safeguard Switzerland from diplomatic isolation and to compensate for its choice to join the UN in 1946, the FPD devised the doctrine of Neutrality and Solidarity. Its purpose was to demonstrate that as a permanently neutral state, Switzerland was ideally suited as a provider of good offices and hence a valuable member of the international community. At the same time, the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 also made it clear that for the foreseeable future, Switzerland would remain outside of the UN system. In other words, the prevailing understanding of permanent neutrality that Switzerland fashioned for itself was a product of the early Cold War international system of which the UN was an important pillar.

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[236] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 99.
[237] Thomas M. Franck, *Fairness in International Law and Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198267850.001.0001/acprof-9780198267850.
[238] Rama Mani and Richard Ponzio, 'Peaceful Settlement of Disputes and Conflict Prevention,' in *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, edited by Thomas Weiss and Sam Daws (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803164.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198803164-e-22; Franck, *Fairness in International Law and Institutions*, https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198267850.001.0001/acprof-9780198267850.

However, in light of its experiences in the Korean War and especially during the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Swiss government was forced to learn that neutrality was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for successful mediation. Drawing on these experiences, the FPD reconsidered the original doctrine of Neutrality and Solidarity in 1958 and narrowed down the conditions under which it would offer its good offices in the future. Most importantly, from then on, the Swiss would only provide their good offices if asked to do so by all parties of the conflict and as subsequent events showed, this happened rarely. The last successful Swiss mediation known to the broader literature took place in the context of the Algerian war of independence in 1961. During later instances, including the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971, the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 and the Falklands War of 1982, Swiss involvement did not end the hostilities. Part of Switzerland's initially passive response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of 1979 – which will be covered in subsequent chapters – was arguably due to the fact that the FDFA continued to be absorbed by both the Iranian hostage crisis and then the Falklands War. Yet in part, one might also argue that Switzerland's hesitant approach to the Afghan crisis at first stemmed from its experience of the Suez Crisis and from the lessons that Raymond Probst drew from it in 1958.

This chapter has argued that Switzerland's mixed record as a provider of good offices, combined with the restrictions of the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 and the Probst criteria of 1958, did not resolve Switzerland's inherent post-war dilemma of neutrality and diplomatic isolation. In fact, between 1946 and 1979, successive steps curtailed Switzerland's freedom of action both in the multilateral international system and as a provider of good offices. The concept of Neutrality and Solidarity was only applied, when the terms of an engagement conformed to the Swiss criteria: when the risks were low and the chances of success were high. The problem with this approach was that over the course of the Cold War, Switzerland only selectively demonstrated its solidarity with the international community, which further enhanced, rather than resolved the issue of diplomatic isolation. Having thus introduced the problems that had developed in the relationship between Switzerland and the United Nations during the early Cold War period, the following chapter will introduce the Afghan

strand of the narrative. As will become evident, throughout the period leading up to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Swiss-Afghan relations were barely existent. Yet the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had important consequences for the international system, in which the Swiss government was trying to carve out a role for itself as a neutral provider of good offices.

# Chapter 2: From *Détente* to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1973-1979

The Afghan war did not begin with the Soviet invasion of December 1979. By that time, a civil war was already well underway and in fact constituted the main reason for the Soviet intervention in the first place. What was more, even prior to the invasion, the war became increasingly transnational with the large-scale cross-border movement of refugees to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, as well as with the large-scale cross-border movement of resistance fighters and arms. In a sense, therefore, the Afghan war developed a number of characteristics, which tend to be associated with post-Cold War conflicts. As is well-known, the Afghan war survived the Cold War and in some form continues to this day. It therefore raises a number of questions about periodization, as well as about power asymmetry in the international system and multilateral conflict resolution. After all, neither the Cold War superpowers, nor the United Nations, nor NATO's post-Cold War International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have succeeded in restoring peace to Afghanistan. In tracing Switzerland's growing involvement in Afghanistan up until 1992, this thesis introduces a hitherto scarcely known attempt at peace-making in the Afghan context. The purpose of the present chapter is to introduce the origins of the Afghan crisis, so as to accurately portray the underlying national, regional and global complexities of the conflict that the Swiss gradually became involved in as providers of good offices.

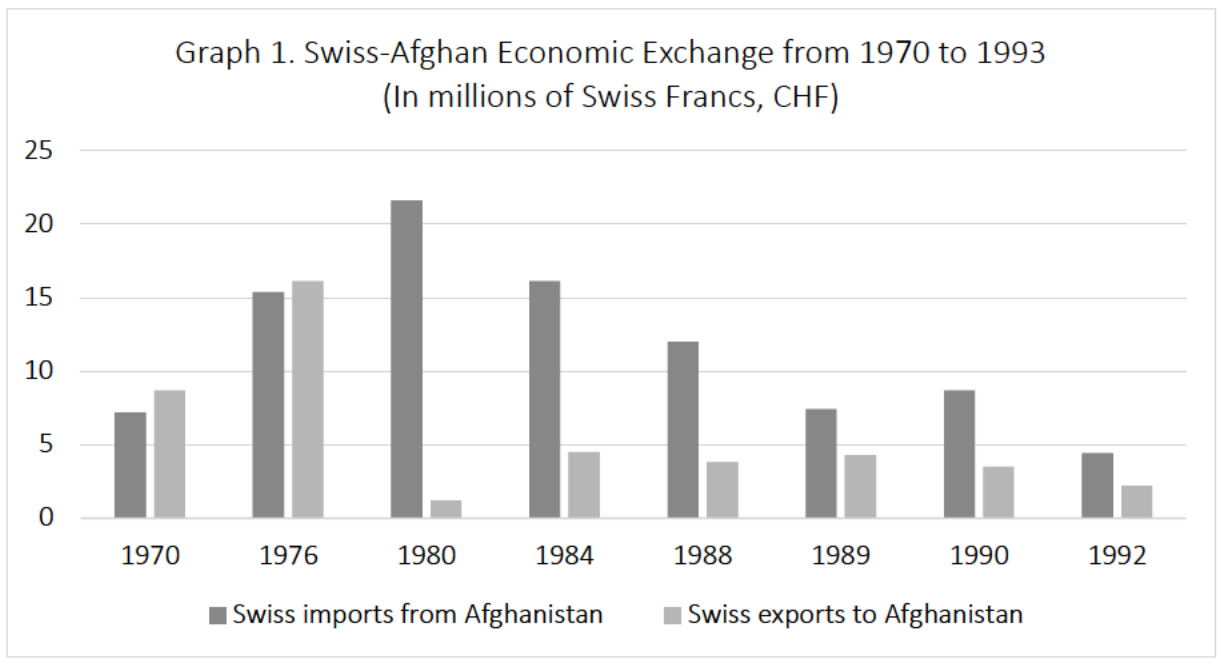
Switzerland and Afghanistan entertained scarcely any bilateral ties prior to the Soviet invasion on account of the distance that existed between the two. According to former Swiss diplomat Christoph Bubb, most of Switzerland's long-distance bilateral relationships tended to be less intensive.[239] Modest diplomatic relations between the two countries began on 12 March 1929, when Switzerland recognized the Kingdom of Afghanistan, as it was called at the time.[240] Until the mid-1970s, the only two bilateral treaties that existed between them related to citizen travel. The so-called Friendship

[239] Christoph Bubb, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 14 August 2019.
[240] N.a., 'Relations bilatérales Suisse-Afghanistan,' 21 September 1992, E2200.141-03#2000/235#2*, CH-BAR.

Agreement of 1928 gave citizens of both countries the right to travel to the other and the Aviation Agreement of 1961 regulated air travel between both states.[241] Switzerland never established an embassy in Afghanistan. Instead, in February 1954, the Swiss ambassador to Iran became accredited in Afghanistan and subsequently established a consular agency in Kabul.[242] The agency was closed in light of the Soviet invasion in 1979, however, after which the Austrian embassy took on a protective power mandate for Swiss interests in Afghanistan.[243] In theory, the Swiss ambassador to Iran – who also became intimately involved in the Iranian hostage crisis on behalf of the Swiss government – remained accredited in Kabul and eventually became an important source of information on events in Afghanistan for the Swiss government.[244]

In terms of economic relations, these had been modest between both countries prior to the Soviet invasion and decreased even more thereafter. As depicted in graph 1 below, Swiss exports to Afghanistan, which consisted mainly of machinery and pharmaceuticals, dropped from approximately CHF 16.1 million in value in 1976 to CHF 1.2 million in 1980 and did not recover over the entire duration of the Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989. Imports from Afghanistan, on the other hand reached a peak in 1980 at CHF 21.6 million in value and subsequently declined to CHF 16.1 million by 1984. These mainly included textiles and tapestries.[245]

[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.




One might conclude from this that Switzerland and Afghanistan were two fairly unconnected countries by the mid-1970s, but there were actually several important characteristics that they both shared. Both territories were land-locked and highly mountainous. This is part of the reason why – with the arguable exception Napoleon's brief occupation of Switzerland during the late eighteenth century and of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s – neither has ever been directly ruled by a foreign power. Then again, it is questionable as to whether the Soviet occupation was successful enough as to establish an effective form of government across Afghanistan. More important, up until the Soviet invasion, both countries remained outside the traditional spheres of influence of a Cold War superpower. To use the words of Schaufenbuehl, Bott, Hanhimäki and Wyss, they were "on the margins of the Eastern and Western blocs."[246] As discussed in the previous chapter, Switzerland has consistently been neutral for much of its history. Afghanistan, on the other hand, was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).[247] This was to become highly significant, because the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan signified the first overt Soviet invasion not only of a country outside of the traditional sphere of influence of the Warsaw Pact, but also of a non-aligned state. As later chapters will show, this caused Swiss policy-makers to worry

[246] Schaufenbuehl et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting,' 901-902.
[247] Richard Smith, 'The UK response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Proposals for a Neutral and Non-aligned Afghanistan, 1980-1981,' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26 (2013), 360.

considerably for the safety of other neutral and non-aligned states in Europe.

Founded in the Indonesian city of Bandung in 1955, the NAM was the first – but not exclusive – association of many newly independent Asian and African states.[248] Other prominent founding members included India, Pakistan, Ghana, Egypt and Yugoslavia. At a conference in Belgrade in 1961, the NAM formulated its unifying principles, including the pursuit of national independence based on peaceful coexistence, the support for national liberation movements across the world and crucially, the abstention from joining multilateral military alliances.[249] The last of these principles is strongly reminiscent of the kind of Swiss neutrality described earlier in this thesis, but there are also important differences. The most important is that the NAM were committed to ideological, rather than to strict military neutrality. In the context of the Cold War, the NAM pledged to remain aloof from the Cold War confrontation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact. Yet the NAM did not invoke the Conventions of The Hague of 1907, which forbade neutral states from entering into hostilities in the first place. China and India, for instance, went to war in 1962, as did Pakistan and India, repeatedly, over Kashmir since 1947.[250] Unlike Swiss neutrality, which is rooted in international law and conducted unilaterally by each neutral, non-alignment was a political movement explicitly intended to form a negative space between the rivalling Cold War alliance systems. As Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru explained at the Bandung Conference of 1955, "Every step that takes place in reducing that area of the world which may be called the 'unaligned area' is a dangerous step and leads to war. It reduces that objectivity that balance, that outlook which other countries without military might can perhaps exercise."[251]

This being said, according to Jussi Hanhimäki, "For many of the countries of the NAM, remaining outside the Cold War was hardly the sole determinant in their respective foreign policies. Avoiding

[248] Robert Mortimer, *The Third World Coalition in International Politics* (New York: Prager, 1984), 6.
[249] Ibid., 12.
[250] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 107.
[251] Ibid., 101.

dependency – military, economic or otherwise – was more the point."[252] Either way, this had tangible repercussions. Over the course of the 1960s and the 1970s, the NAM had become an important voting bloc at the UN. Afghanistan itself had joined the organization in 1946, together with Iceland, Sweden and Thailand.[253] Pakistan, Yemen and current-day Myanmar became members in 1947 and as Hanhimäki has also shown, UN membership became an important symbol of international recognition for many newly independent states at the time.[254] By 1962, the UN already had 102 members, many of whom were former African and Asian colonies. In addition to this, several members of the NAM – including Yugoslavia and Cyprus – also formed the so-called neutral and non-aligned (N+N) group together with Switzerland, Sweden, Austria and Finland at the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) from 1972 to 1975 and beyond. Members of the NAM almost unanimously condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the CSCE and at the UN General Assembly in January of 1980. At the time, both states from within and outside of the NAM feared precisely what Jawaharlal Nehru had predicted at the Bandung Conference of 1955, that the violation of non-aligned territory might eventually escalate to an armed superpower confrontation.

This vehement response may have come as somewhat of a surprise to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), chaired by General Secretary Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. The Soviet Union had maintained close relations with Afghanistan throughout its history. During the late 1920s and following its formation in 1924, the Soviet Politburo, the governing body of the CPSU, began to channel non-military aid to Afghanistan with the intention of creating an isolating buffer on the Soviet Union's southern border.[255] This strategy changed very little under subsequent General Secretaries of the CPSU. Following the Second World War, the Soviet Union then extended a series

[252] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Non-Aligned to what?,' https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.
[253] Jussi Hanhimäki, *The United Nations: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.
[254] Ibid., 21.
[255] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 300.

of loans to the Afghan government for the construction of a national road network.[256] Amongst other projects, Soviet investment also led to the construction of the so-called "Ring Road," the principal highway in Afghanistan, which connected the major population centres of Kandahar to the South, Herat to the West, Mazar-i-Sharif to the North and Kabul to the East.[257] An important strategic feature of this road was the so-called Salang Tunnel in the mountainous region between Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif. It runs beneath the Salang Pass near Charikar at the entrance to the nearby Panjshir Valley. As map 1 below shows, most of Afghanistan's Ring Road circumvented the Hindu Kush, whose highest peaks rise up to 3'000 metres above sea level in the North-East of the country and which gradually fans out towards the Southwest.[258] The Soviet involvement in constructing the Afghan road network would eventually prove to be an important strategic asset for the Red Army at the time of the Soviet ground invasion in 1979. However, it also proved ill-fated for the purpose of the ensuing Soviet occupation, because while the Ring Road facilitated transport between major population centres, it left vast expanses of mountainous territory virtually inaccessible for large-scale troop movements. Another strategically vulnerable aspect of Afghan geography turned out to be its borders. With a territorial expanse of approximately 655'000 square kilometres, Afghanistan is the size of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark combined.[259] According to a retrospective analysis by the Russian General Staff, published in English by the University Press of Kansas in 2002, it shares a border of 1'348 kilometres with the Soviet Union, 820 kilometres with Iran, 2'180 kilometres with Pakistan and 73 kilometres with China.[260]

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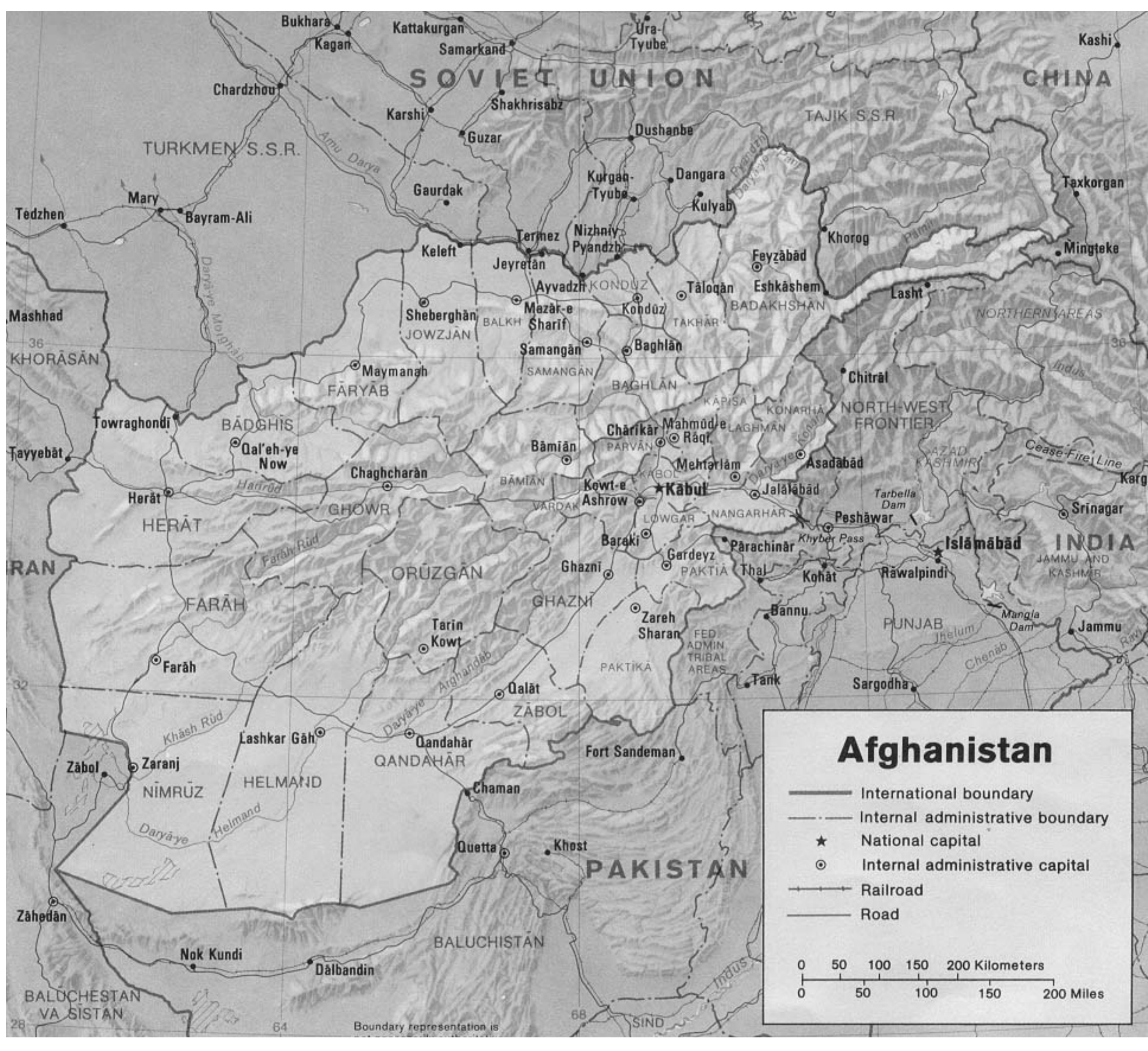
[256] Andrei Dörre and Tobias Kraudzun, 'Persistence and Change in Soviet and Russian Relations with Afghanistan,' *Central Asian Survey* 2012(31), 427.
[257] Ibid., 428.
[258] The Russian General Staff, editors, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, translated by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Cress (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 1.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.




Map 1. Topographic Map of Afghanistan, 1983[261]

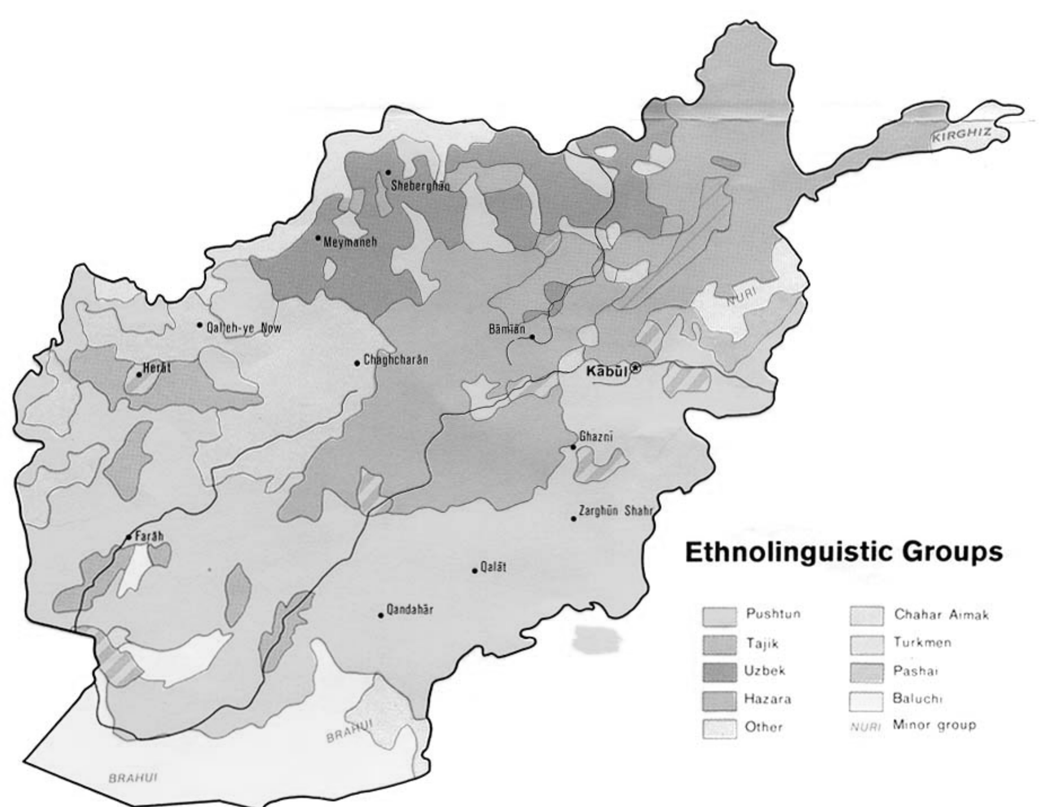
Over the course of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union not only invested consistently in Afghan road infrastructure, but also in the training of the Afghan armed forces. By 1972, approximately 100 Soviet technical specialists and consultants were in Afghanistan for this purpose.[262] Similar conditions applied to the Afghan natural gas sector – particularly in extraction installations and pipeline networks.[263] Most of the component parts for the latter were imported directly from the Soviet Union, leading to a high degree of Afghan dependency on Soviet technology and technical training

[261] University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' accessed 16 December 2019, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_rel83.jpg.
[262] The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War,* 10.
[263] Dörre and Kraudzun, 'Persistence and Change in Soviet and Russian Relations with Afghanistan,' 432.

in this sector of the struggling economy.[264] What this amounted to in practice, therefore, was that, although Afghanistan remained a non-aligned state throughout this period, economically, it was becoming heavily dependent on the Soviet Union.

Neither the Afghan economy nor the Afghan state had historically been either strong or stable and this also played an important role as the Afghan war unfolded. According to Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolynec from the Canadian Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, "Social cleavages in Afghanistan have made it difficult for the idea of the modern nation-state to take hold, and have created an environment where the very existence of state institutions remains problematic."[265] Traditionally, Afghanistan had been governed by what Barnett Rubin has called a "tribally based monarchy," which oversaw a heavily decentralized administration – so decentralized according to Rubin that in fact many Afghans were not integrated either "into a common economy or nationality."[266] In retrospect, the Russian General Staff have reckoned that Afghanistan has over 20 distinct nationalities belonging to various ethnolinguistic groups.[267] Map 2 below, which dates from 1972, roughly illustrates the diversity of the ethnolinguistic make-up of the Afghan population prior to the invasion. Traditionally, the dominant ethnolinguistic group were the Pushtuns and from 1947 to 1973, the Durrani tribes of this group dominated the Afghan monarchy.[268] Persian-speaking Tajiks and Hazaras, as well as Turkic-speaking Uzbek and Turkmen groups also inhabited various parts of the country, especially in the North.[269]

[264] Ibid.
[265] Anton Minkov and Gregory Smolynec, '4-D Soviet Style: Defence, Development, Diplomacy and Disengagement in Afghanistan During the Soviet Period Part I: State Building,' *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 2010(23), 311.
[266] Barnett Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,' *Foreign Affairs* 1989(68), 151.
[267] The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War,* 5.
[268] Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,' 150.
[269] Ibid., 150-151.




Map 2. Afghan Ethnolinguistic Groups, 1972[270]

Then, in 1973, Prime Minister Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan deposed his own cousin, the ruling monarch, Mohammad Zaher Shah. Together with the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Daoud toppled the monarchy and turned Afghanistan into a republic.[271] Under his presidency, the Republic of Afghanistan underwent two fundamental shifts in foreign policy that proved detrimental for later developments. In light of Daoud's reliance on the PDPA in coming to power, the first was Afghanistan's ostensible political rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Up until this point, Afghanistan's ties to the Soviet Union, although extensive, had been primarily economic. The second was Daoud's revival of an old idea called Pushtunistan. Map 2 above does not show this, but in fact, the Pushtun ethnolinguistic group had established itself on both sides of the border

[270] University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethno72.jpg.
[271] Agnes Bresselau von Bressensdorf, 'Die Unterschätzte Herausforderung: Afghanistan 1979, das Krisenmanagement der NATO-Staaten und der Islam als Faktor der Internationalen Beziehungen,' *VfZ* 64 (2016), 672; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 302; Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 31.

between Afghanistan and Pakistan – the so-called Durand Line, drawn by Sir Mortimer Durand, a secretary to the British Raj, in 1893.[272] To the strong dislike of the Pakistani government of President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, what Daoud proposed was the unification of the Pushtun ethnolinguistic group in one state. The reasoning behind this demand was that according to the Afghan perspective, not only was the Durand Line created to mark the boundaries of the British empire on the Indian subcontinent, but with the collapse of the British Raj and with the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the line had ceased to exist.[273] On these grounds, Afghanistan had in fact been the only delegation to dissent Pakistan's admission to the United Nations in 1947.[274]

As early as 1973, in response to Daoud's coup against Zaher Shah, the Bhutto government in Pakistan established a high-level working group on Afghanistan, which included the prime minister, the foreign minister, the Inspector General of the Frontier Corps and the Director General of military intelligence, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).[275] This working group decided to support the budding Islamic resistance movements, some of whom had crossed the border into Pakistan to seek shelter from repression.[276] According to Ahmad Siddiqi, who completed his DPhil on Afghan-Pakistani relations at St. Antony's College in 2013, the fact that the Soviet Union had supported India its 1971 conflict with Pakistan and the fact that a communist government had come to power in Afghanistan in 1973 "revived old concerns of a two-front war" in Pakistan.[277] What was more, Pakistan's own ethnolinguistic make-up was almost equally diverse as that of Afghanistan and a steady trickle of refugees and political dissidents, who began to leave Afghanistan for Pakistan in the wake of the 1973 coup threatened to destabilize the situation in the long term.[278]

[272] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 67.
[273] Ahmad M. Siddiqi, 'From Bilateralism to Cold War Conflict: Pakistan's Engagement with State and Non-State Actors on its Afghan Frontier, 1947-1989' (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2013), 72.
[274] Ibid., 81 ; Rubin, *Afghanistan from the Cold War through the War on Terror*, 32.
[275] Siddiqi, 'From Bilateralism to Cold War Conflict,' 138.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid., 167-168.
[278] Helga Baitenmann, 'NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid,' *Third World Quarterly* 12(1990), 63.

Concurrently, the Daoud government also began to experience problems of its own. Chief among them was factional infighting within the government. Ever since its inception in 1965, the PDPA had been prone to factionalism to such a degree that the party split into two factions in 1967. *Khalq*, meaning “the masses”, became the faction of the communist party associated closely with the Pushtun tribes. During the late 1970s it was headed by a man called Nur Mohammad Taraki and by his deputy, Hafizullah Amin. Parcham, the second faction, called itself “the banner” and it was headed by a man called Babrak Karmal. Unlike *Khalq*, *Parcham* closely aligned itself with the idea of Soviet-style communism, rather than with the politics of a particular ethnolinguistic group in Afghanistan itself. Until the coup of 1973, the Soviet Union had done little to advance the cause of either faction.[279] Whilst the Soviet Union had shown interest in Afghanistan as a whole over the course of the twentieth century, it had shown little interest in the PDPA. This changed during the spring of 1978, when, over the course of the so-called “Saur Revolution,” the PDPA itself overthrew President Daoud, killed him and changed the name of the republic to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).[280] Nur Mohammad Taraki of the *Khalq* faction became the new president and Hafizullah Amin became both prime and defence minister, while approximately half a million more Afghans – some of them members of the Islamic resistance – fled to Pakistan as refugees.[281]

In May of 1978, the *Khalq* leadership at the head of the new government introduced a series of highly unpopular communist reforms, including the abolition of feudal relationships, the enhancement of state control over the economy and equal rights for women.[282] Two months later,

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[279] Rodric Braithwaite, ‘The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,’ in *At the end of Military Intervention: Historical, Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Transition, Handover and Withdrawal*, edited by Robert Johnson and Timothy Clack (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2015), https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[280] Rubin, ‘The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,’ 152; Panagiotis Dimitrakis, ‘The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: International Reactions, Military Intelligence and British Diplomacy,’ *Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (2012), 511.
[281] Baitenmann, ‘NGOs and the Afghan War,’ 63.
[282] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 42.

the new leadership purged the government of the most notable remaining *Parcham* ministers. Six of them, including Babrak Karmal, who later played an important role during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, were dispatched abroad as ambassadors.[283] Karmal, for instance was made ambassador to Prague.[284] According to Rodric Braithwaite, as a result of both the 1978 coup and the ensuing purge, "the Russians had no choice but to recognize them [the PDPA]."[285] Yet, "they were [in turn] rejected by the Afghan people" as "insurgency spread in the countryside and mutiny spread in the armed forces."[286] As it had done with Finland in 1948, the Soviet Union concluded a so-called Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation (FCMA) with Afghanistan on 5 December 1978, formalizing the Soviet commitment to Afghanistan and to its new and overtly communist government. Yet unlike the FCMA concluded with Finland, the Afghan FCMA included a clause to the effect that either party would lend assistance – including of the military kind – to the other in times of need. This technically called into serious question Afghanistan's status as a member of the non-aligned movement, as it contained the essential characteristic of a military alliance.

What was more, armed resistance to the PDPA regime made it appear increasingly likely that the treaty would be invoked. By the winter of 1978 to 1979, the resistance had already spread to 28 of 34 provinces and according to Odd Arne Westad it gradually became apparent that the armed Islamist groups, which had been launching sporadic guerrilla attacks on Afghan territory with Pakistani government support since 1973 "could become a serious military threat."[287] Collectively, these resistance movements became known as the *mujahideen*. This is somewhat misleading, because the *mujahideen* were anything but a unified resistance movement. Whilst they were unified in their opposition to the communist Afghan government, they were not unified in their political and

[283] Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1984), 988.
[284] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 304.
[285] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation,* 990; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 306.

military goals. Neither did they share a uniform interpretation of Islam – being both Sunni and Shi'a – a common ideology, or a clear vision as to the form of government they wished to see in Afghanistan.

Olivier Roy contends that there were no leading Afghan political thinkers in Afghanistan, the likes of Sayyid Qutb in Egypt or Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran.[288] According to the contemporary American journalist Edward Girardet, the movement basically consisted of "a broad patchwork of guerrilla fronts, perhaps as many as 300 of varying effectiveness."[289] Many of them had a diverse array of foreign sponsors and their allegiances and internal alliances shifted constantly. Further, William Maley argues that the resistance ranged from formal political parties with headquarters outside of Afghanistan to forces organized on a regional basis and to "scattered groups of fighters with local interests."[290] At the local level, the resistance usually consisted of an armed group of fighters led by a commander, who may have had ties to the exiled political resistance parties in Pakistan. Some commanders even emerged as regional political leaders themselves, ruling over small portions of the population, according to Barnett Rubin, as well as "presiding over rudimentary local administrations."[291] The Pakistani military government of Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, which had come to power in a military coup in 1977, also continued to support the *mujahideen* informally. As of 1980 it began to provide both weapons and training through ISI in Peshawar and Quetta on the border to Afghanistan.[292]

[288] Roy, *Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War*, 31.
[289] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 54.
[290] William Maley, 'Introduction: Interpreting the Taliban,' in *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban,* edited by William Maley (London: Hurst, 1998), 9.
[291] Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,' 153.
[292] Kevin Baker, *War in Afghanistan: A Short History of 80 Wars and Conflicts in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier*, 1839 to 2011 (Dural: Rosenberg Publishing, 2011), 197.

Six major Afghan resistance parties had established themselves on Pakistani soil by 1979.[293] Most of these are worth introducing in some detail, because many leading figures of these parties went on to play important roles with regards to the Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan during the early 1990s. *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* (the Islamic Society), led by Burhanuddin Rabbani was a moderately Islamist party made up mainly of Tajik and Uzbek fighters from northern Afghanistan. Rabbani himself had been a professor at Kabul University, where he had presided over an underground section of *Sazman-e Javanan-e Musulman* (the Organization of Muslim Youth). He had been one of the first to flee Kabul after the 1973 coup to settle in Pakistan. One of Rabbani's best-known commanders was a university-educated engineer called Ahmad Shah Massoud. Nick-named the Lion of Panjshir, Massoud controlled much of the Panjshir Valley in close strategic proximity both to Kabul and to the Salang Tunnel.

Other resistance groups included *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami* (the Revolutionary Islamic Movement), which also operated in northern Afghanistan and was led by a man called Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, as well as *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami-yi Afghanistan* (the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan).[294] The latter was led by Pir Sayyid Ahmed Gailani and like *Harakat*, *Mahaz* was a largely Pushtun-based resistance group. Yet unlike *Harakat*, *Mahaz* had strong ties to the former royal family and advocated for the return of the deposed king, Mohammad Zaher Shah, who now lived in exile in Rome.[295] Similarly to a fourth resistance group, *Jebha-i-Nejat-i-Milli-Afghanistan* (the Afghan National Liberation Front), led by Mujadiddi Sibghat Allah, *Mahaz* also promoted a Sufi interpretation of Islam.[296]

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[293] Abdul Rashid, 'The Afghan Resistance: Its Background, Its Nature and the Problem of Unity,' in *Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited*, edited by Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1987), 213.
[294] Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 181.
[295] Graham E. Fuller, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Afghanistan: Its Character and Prospects* (Santa Monica: RAND National Defence Research Institute, 1991), 53.
[296] Ibid., 52.

*Hezb-i-Islami* (Islamic Party), the final major resistance group, split into two separate parties with the same name shortly before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, thus bringing the number of major resistance parties to six. Both were more radically Islamist in orientation than *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami*. This eventually became most evident during the period immediately after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, when it came to the question of forming a new government. *Hezb-i-Islami/ Hekmatyar* was led by a man called Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Kabul during the 1970s. A former student of Burhanuddin Rabbani, Hekmatyar broke with his mentor between 1976 and 1977 to found his own party, majority Pushtun in membership and sponsored heavily by the Pakistani government.[297] *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis*, on the other hand, was led by a man called Mawlawi Yunis Khalis and was more moderately Islamist than Hekmatyar but less so than Rabbani. This group primarily concentrated its resistance efforts on the Kabul-Jalalabad route (see map 1 above) in close proximity to the Durand Line and fielded some of the resistance's most effective commanders by the names of Abdul Haqq and Jallaluddin Haqani.[298]

In March of 1979, a *mujahideen* insurgency in Herat in western Afghanistan led to a mutiny amongst the seventeenth division of the Afghan army.[299] In fact, desertions became fairly common throughout the period of the Soviet occupation and many deserters went over to the *mujahideen*. The mutiny of Herat became an important tipping point in this respect, but also in respect to Afghan-Soviet relations. The entire seventeenth Division defected to the *mujahideen* at the same time, causing the Afghan government to lose control over the city entirely.[300] What was more, over the course of the insurgency, dozens of Soviet military advisers, who had been routinely stationed in Herat as part of the ongoing Soviet military aid to Afghanistan, were killed alongside their families.[301]

[297] Ibid., 49.
[298] Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 181; Gilles Dorronsoro, 'Afghanistan's Civil War,' *Current History* (1995), 38; Fuller, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Afghanistan,* 51.
[299] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 511.

The response of the communist Afghan government was to ask the Soviet Union for armed assistance in light of the 1978 FCMA. Yet the Politburo initially refused.[302]

At the height of the crisis in Herat, from 17-19 March, its members deliberated on the subject on a daily basis but decided against intervention. According to Alexei Kosygin, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, "If our troops were introduced, the situation… would not improve but would worsen."[303] These words would prove to be telling as events in Afghanistan unfolded over the course of the 1980s. Rodric Braithwaite has commented that the Soviet Union initially "feared getting mixed up in someone else's civil war, and they had no desire to support a regime which could only survive with Russian bayonets."[304] On 1 April, KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defence Minister Dmitry Ustinov and Boris Ponomarev, Head of the International Department of the Central Committee, drafted a policy document, which argued that Afghanistan had not been ready for a socialist revolution to begin with and that if anything was to be accomplished, the PDPA would first need to widen its political base.[305]

The Afghan government gradually suppressed the Herat uprising on its own, yet this did not prevent other revolts, uprisings and mutinies from taking place in other parts of the country.[306] In May, popular uprisings occurred in six provinces, including Kabul and in July, rebels attempted to occupy Gardeyz, near the border to Pakistan (see map 1 above).[307] In response, the Taraki government filed a string of requests for military support with the Politburo. These included requests for helicopters

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[302] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[303] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 512.
[304] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[305] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 52.
[306] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[307] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 53.

in April, armoured troops in June and special forces in July.[308] In August, Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin asked for Soviet troops to be introduced directly into Kabul.[309] Yet at the same time, dramatic infighting also continued to undermine the ruling PDPA from within. During the fall of 1979, President Taraki went to Moscow on an official state visit after having attended a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana.[310] In his absence, several of his government ministers planned a coup against Prime Minister Amin. They included Colonel Mohammad Aslam Watanjar, the Minister of the Interior, and Major Sherjan Mazdoryar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as Colonel Seid Muhammad Gulabzoi, the Minister of Communication, and Assadullah Sarwari, the director of the notorious *Khadamat-e Aetela'at-e Dawlati* (KHAD), the domestic intelligence service.[311] Their plan was to assassinate Amin on his way to the airport, where he was meant to greet Taraki upon his return from Moscow.[312] Amin, however, found out about the plot and confronted Taraki about it upon his arrival. Yet instead of sacking the other four ministers as Amin demanded, Taraki asked Amin to resign instead.[313] In fact, he met with the four of them later that day and participated directly in a second plot to assassinate Amin. This time, they planned to do so on 14 September, when Amin was scheduled to have another meeting with Taraki at the presidential residence, the Arg Palace.

As Amin made his way into the building that day, the president's guards opened fire and killed two of Amin's personal assistants. Amin escaped unharmed and fled to the Ministry of Defence.[314] From there, he launched his own coup against Taraki, which succeeded, owing to the full force of the armed forces that he controlled as minister of defence.[315] On 16 September, Amin replaced Taraki as General Secretary of the PDPA and on 9 October, Taraki was executed despite repeated Soviet

[308] Ibid., 54; The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War,* 10.
[309] Ivan Pavlovskii, 'Report from Soviet Deputy Defense Minister Army Gen. Ivan Pavlovskii, during visit to Afghanistan,' 25 August, 1979, CWIHIP, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111559.
[310] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 62.
[311] Hafizullah Emandi, *State, Revolution, and Superpowers in Afghanistan* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 85.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid., 86.
[314] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 313; Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 513.
[315] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 513; Bresselau von Bressensdorf, 'Die Unterschätzte Herausforderung,' 673; Emandi, *State, Revolution, and Superpowers in Afghanistan,* 86.

appeals for his life.[316] At least since the uprising in Herat that same year, the Politburo had been following the internal strife within the PDPA as much as it had been following developments related to the *mujahideen* insurgency. The Politburo was particularly concerned about Amin on account of speculations about his potential ties to the United States.[317] Amin had studied in New York and the Soviet KGB, the Committee for State Security, claimed that he had ties to the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).[318]

Unable to repair the rift within the PDPA that his coup had caused, Amin did in fact reach out both to the Kremlin and to the American government at the same time.[319] He repeatedly held meetings with American officials in Kabul in late October.[320] These in turn were monitored closely by the KGB, which, according to Westad, suspected the Carter Administration of looking for "a replacement for its lost positions in Iran."[321] After all, in February of that year, the pro-American Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had been toppled by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, depriving the United States of its accustomed sphere of influence in the region. According to General Leonid Vladimirowitch Shebarshin, a KGB operative stationed in Iran at the time, the Soviet Union suspected Amin of "doing a Sadat on us," referring to the current Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and meaning wholesale defection from the Soviet camp and turning to the United States for arms imports.[322] In the background, tensions between both superpower camps had increased markedly during the fall and winter of that year. A case in point was the so-called NATO "double track decision" of 12 December. While proposing mutual limitations on both medium and intermediate-range nuclear

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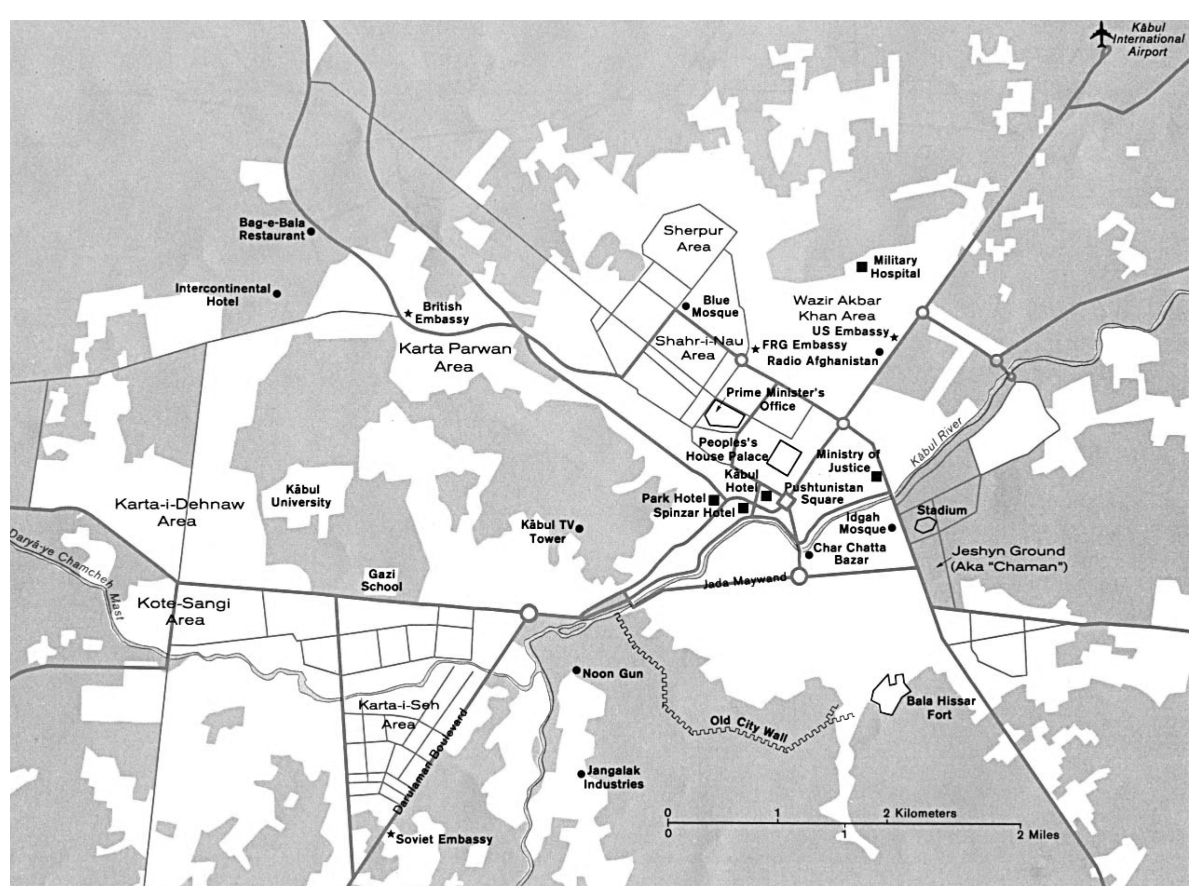
[316] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 313.
[317] Emandi, *State, Revolution, and Superpowers in Afghanistan*, 88.
[318] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[319] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 315.
[320] US Embassy Kabul, 'Correspondence to Secretary of State: Meeting with President Amin,' October 1979, National Security Archive, George Washington University (NSA-GWU), https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5696254-Document-2-AmEmbassy-Kabul-cable-7726-to.
[321] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 316.
[322] Ibid.

missiles, it also threatened to deploy 572 American Pershing II and Cruise missiles across Europe, should the negotiations fail.[323]

At the same time, Amin issued repeated requests for Soviet military assistance to Moscow on 2, 3, 12, and 17 December, which arguably tipped the balance in favour of the Soviet invasion.[324] According to Braithwaite, "the process by which they [the Politburo] reached their final decision is not well documented, however it is known that the decision was taken by the politicians against the advice of the military."[325] On 6 December, the first units of the Soviet armed forces began to deploy to Afghanistan and on 8 December, KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defence Minister Dmitry Ustinov and Second Secretary of the Communist Party, Mikhail Suslov met with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev to discuss the merits of an invasion.[326] On 12 December, despite previous intentions to the contrary, the Politburo decided to intervene in Afghanistan.[327] More specifically, several key members of the Politburo, including Brezhnev, Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov and Suslov, met again and decided unanimously to depose Amin, as well as to introduce limited armed forces into Afghanistan.[328] By this time, the KGB had already begun to infiltrate Kabul with Special Forces (Spetznaz) under "Operation Agat."[329] One Spetznaz unit was positioned at

[323] Raymond Probst, 'Einführungsreferat: Die Europäische Sicherheit,' 24 August 1983, E7001C#1994/105#269*, CH-BAR.
[324] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 513.
[325] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[326] Alexander Lyakhovsky, 'The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan *(sic),'* translated by Anna Melyakova, 1995, NSA-GWU, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5696257-Document-5-Soviet-Decisions-in-December-1979.
[327] Leonid Brezhnev, 'Concerning the situation in "A,"' 12 December 1979, NSA-GWU, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5696258-Document-6-On-the-Situation-in-A-December-12-1979.
[328] Ibid.; Lyakhovsky, 'The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan,' https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5696257-Document-5-Soviet-Decisions-in-December-1979; According to Tom Blanton and Svetlana Savranskaya of the National Security Archive, Russian President Boris Yeltsin declassified the memo of the Politburo decision to intervene in 1992 as part of his own struggle against the legacy of the communist party. (Tom Blanton and Svetlana Savranskaya, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979: Not Trump's Terrorists, Nor Zbig's Warm Water Ports,' 29 January 2019, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/afghanistan-russia-programs/2019-01-29/soviet-invasion-afghanistan-1979-not-trumps-terrorists-nor-zbigs-warm-water-ports).
[329] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 321.

Bagram air base outside Kabul. Others were positioned near the Arg Palace (labelled People's House Palace in map 3 below), the PDPA headquarters and the main radio station.[330]




Map 3. City Map of Kabul, 1980[331]

On 25 December, 80'000 Soviet troops and 1'800 tanks of the 40th Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan.[332] In addition, units from the 40th Army's 105th and 108th Motorized Rifle Divisions crossed the Afghan border at Termez and airborne troops from the 103rd and the 105th Air Divisions descended on Kabul and on Shindand near Herat (see map 1 above).[333] On 27 December, Spetznaz forces attacked the Tajbeg Palace on the outskirts of Kabul, where Amin had sought refuge in the

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330 Ibid.
331 University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_cities/kabul_80.jpg.
332 Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 172; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 321.
333 Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 321.

aftermath of the initial invasion.[334] They executed the president along with several of his relatives and aides.[335] Radio Kabul announced the execution at 2:55 am the following morning.[336] In a spectacular twist of actual events, the broadcast claimed that the government had "requested the USSR to render urgent political, moral and economic assistance, including military aid, and that the Soviet government had agreed to do so."[337] An internal government dispatch to the Soviet ambassadorial network on 27 December further justified the invasion as a response to "the intervention from without and the terror unleashed by Amin within the country," which had "created a threat to liquidate what the April Revolution [of 1978] brought Afghanistan *(sic)*."[338] Meanwhile, Babrak Karmal, who had been serving as the Afghan ambassador to Prague since the purge of 1978, was flown into Kabul together with a KGB unit and proclaimed himself the new president and General Secretary of the PDPA on 28 December.[339]

In sum, despite the initial indecisiveness of the Politburo, the first stage of the invasion of Afghanistan – the regime-change from Amin to Karmal – was successful.[340] To most observers, it had come as a complete surprize. Sir John Birch, who was stationed at the British Embassy in Kabul at the time, recalled in a 2004 interview that there had been no MI6 presence in Afghanistan and while the CIA had a sizeable presence, they were expecting a military coup but no full-scale invasion.[341] Paul Dibb, asserts that in the aftermath of the regime-change, the Soviet objective became "to stabilize the situation, strengthen the Afghan army, and then withdraw the bulk of Soviet forces within three

[334] Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 172.
[335] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 321.
[336] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 514.
[337] Ibid.
[338]N.a., 'Message to Soviet Ambassadors on the Invasion of Afghanistan, Attachment to CPSU Politburo Decree #177,' CWIHP, translated by Gary Goldberg, 27 December 1979, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113048.
[339] Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 172; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 321.
[340] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[341] John Birch, 'Interview of John Birch by Virginia Crowe,' British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, 23 March 2004, https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Birch.pdf, 13.

years."[342] This next stage proved to be decisively more difficult than the first. In fact, there are some who argue that this strategy was fundamentally flawed to begin with, because it entailed the sort of involvement that the Politburo had intended to avoid during the Herat Uprising in the spring of 1979.

I would argue that it also misjudged the causes and the complexities of the ongoing Afghan civil war. After all, by this time, not only had the Afghan resistance begun to develop numerous different factions, but the Afghan government itself had fallen victim to factional in-fighting within the PDPA. What was more, the transnational flows of refugees, resistance fighters and military aid did not begin with with the Soviet invasion. Already underway, it began to accelerate. In other words, instead of being rooted in the Cold War struggle for ideological supremacy between the Eastern and Western blocs, the origins of the Afghan crisis lay in the weakness of Afghanistan's central government, in the absence of a unified alternative, as well as in the prevalence of a strong, religiously minded sense of self-determination amongst a highly ethnically diverse population. Having thus traced the origins of the Afghan crisis, the following chapter will address its immediate consequences both for the international system and the prevailing climate of Cold War *détente*, as well as for Swiss Cold War foreign policy more specifically. Whilst the present chapter has initially shown that diplomatic and economic relations between Switzerland and Afghanistan were both scarce prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the next chapter will show that Switzerland was not immune to the global repercussions of the Soviet invasion.

[342] Paul Dibb, 'The Soviet Experience in Afghanistan: Lessons to be Learned?' *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 2010(64), 496.

# Chapter 3: Switzerland's Initial Response to the Invasion, 1979-1982

The collapse of *détente* arguably called into question the role of the neutral mediator that Switzerland successfully began to establish for itself in a multilateral setting at the CSCE during the 1970s. Switzerland continued to participate actively in the CSCE-follow up process and according to Thomas Fischer, it also played an important part in keeping this process alive.[343] Yet the Swiss initially saw no role for themselves in the Afghan crisis. Neither did the CSCE. Chapter one has already laid out how, in the wake of the Suez Crisis, the FDFA restricted its good offices only to cases which promised a realistic chance of success. Chapter two has added to this by explaining that the Swiss entertained minimal bilateral relations with Afghanistan prior to the Soviet invasion. The present chapter will now address the impact of the invasion on the prevailing Cold War climate of *détente* and by implication, on Switzerland's gradual foray into *détente* multilateralism. The first part will explore the background and the significance of *détente* for Swiss foreign policy, while the second part will address the significance of the collapse of *détente* in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the Swiss government's puzzling initial assessment that it was likely to remain unaffected.

## Switzerland's Role in the International System of the *Détente* Period

As discussed, the strategy of Neutrality and Solidarity entailed the provision of good offices, yet it also implied membership of intergovernmental organizations – technical intergovernmental organizations as laid out in the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954. During the mid-1960s, Switzerland continued to join a number of these organizations. The European Monetary Union of 1951 and the European Economic Community (EEC) of 1957 were both deemed to be inherently political and therefore off limits, as was the Council of Europe, founded in 1949.[344] In 1961, however, Switzerland

[343] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 372.
[344] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 65; Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 228.

joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Unlike the EEC, EFTA did not include a customs union or any other supranational structures of any kind. It was therefore deemed sufficiently apolitical for the Swiss to join and its headquarters were established in Geneva.[345] That same year, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway and Denmark submitted an application for EEC membership and Switzerland, Sweden and Austria applied for associate membership the year after.[346] In 1963, the Swiss parliament consented to revise its initial judgment of 1949 and to join the Council of Europe. In 1966, it also ratified the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). However, in most of these fora, Switzerland played a passive, rather than an active, and a marginal rather than a central role. This began to change with the advent of *détente* and with the onset of the CSCE in 1972.

In fact, the onset of the *détente* period roughly coincided with Switzerland's embrace of multilateralism and it is therefore worth recounting in some detail. After a period of rising tensions between the Cold War superpowers and their respective camps during the 1940s and the 1950s, tensions began to lessen somewhat during this period. The events that eased the climate of Cold War tension especially from the mid-1960s onwards have given rise to some debate in the literature on small and neutral states. There are many who stress the important role of the neutrals as mediators during the *détente* period, especially in the European context.[347] As mentioned earlier, Hanhimäki even wrote that, "It would not be a stretch to argue that the neutrals acted as midwives to *détente*."[348] However, in the same vein, he also cautioned that, "In general, the neutrals of Europe were much more 'tied' to the dominant Cold War narrative after the Second World War."[349] This observation is important, because in fact, there is little evidence to suggest that the neutrals – including Switzerland – played a leading role in initiating the climate of *détente*. Overall, the Cold

[345] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 68.
[346] Ibid., 72.
[347] Ruggenthaler and Makko, 'Introduction,' 6.
[348] Hanhimäki, 'Non-Aligned to what?,' https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.
[349] Hanhimäki, 'Neutrality and Non-Alignment During and Beyond the Cold War,' https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.

War climate was still shaped primarily by the Cold War superpowers and – in the case of *détente* – by some of their allies.[350] The neutrals, I would argue, only established a role for themselves during the 1970s, once the spirit of *détente* had already taken hold.

Between the Cold War superpowers, the spirit of *détente* arguably already began to develop as early as 1954. That year, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov had proposed a security conference to address the unresolved issue of post-war European borders.[351] Following the Second Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962, the Warsaw Pact repeated these calls, culminating in the so-called Budapest Appeal in the summer of 1966.[352] In December of that year, at a NATO Foreign Ministers conference, Pierre Harmel, the foreign minister of Belgium, similarly introduced a motion that advised the alliance to re-evaluate its political landscape and to consider the benefits of reaching out to the Eastern bloc diplomatically.[353] Concurrently, in the European theatre, the French government of Charles de Gaulle had begun to approach the Soviet Union bilaterally on the subjects of trade and technology in 1965.[354] De Gaulle visited Moscow in 1966 to discuss the Oder-Neisse border between the German Democratic Republic and Poland.[355] Three years later, Willy Brandt, the newly-elected Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany introduced his foreign policy of *Wandel Durch Annäherung* – change through rapprochement – in an attempt to address the inter-German border arrangement.[356] Hanhimäki has argued that many European governments became enthusiastic proponents of *détente* during this period, because the twin crises of Berlin of 1961 and Cuba of 1962 made them aware of their own powerlessness in the face of superpower bipolarity.[357]

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[350] Jussi Hanhimäki, '*Détente* in Europe, 1962-1975,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume III)*, eds Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),198.
[351] Wilfried Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War: A History of Détente, 1950-1991* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 1.
[352] Ibid., 1-2.
[353] Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart,' Introduction,' in *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*, edited by Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 3; Peter Savigear, *Cold War or Détente in the 1980s: The International Politics of American-Soviet Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987), 27.
[354] Hanhimäki, '*Détente* in Europe, 1962-1975,' 208.
[355] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 62.
[356] Ibid., 63.
[357] Hanhimäki, '*Détente* in Europe, 1962-1975,' 198.

In an attempt to promote their interests despite the ideological and geostrategic divide between the Cold War blocs, they therefore turned to diplomacy – first on a bilateral but increasingly also on a multilateral level.

Not even the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia of 1968 halted this trend. Leonid Brezhnev, the Secretary General of the Soviet Union at the time, justified sending in Soviet troops to quell the protests of the so-called Prague Spring by arguing that, "The weakening of any of the links in the world system of socialism directly affects all the socialist countries. We cannot look indifferently upon this."[358] This logic subsequently became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine, which legitimized Soviet armed intervention within the Eastern bloc in the event that a government threatened to abandon its socialist orientation.[359] As this chapter will later show, the Brezhnev Doctrine featured prominently in the Swiss government's initial assessment of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which also took place under Brezhnev's leadership.

Yet in the meantime, following the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the diplomatic fallout that ensued, the Soviet Politburo appeared to recognize the need for diplomatic outreach. For this purpose, the Politburo reached out to neutral Finland to repeat the Warsaw Pact call for a European security conference.[360] The Finnish government obliged in a public memorandum in May of 1969 and invited all European states, the Soviet Union, the United States and Canada to participate in such a conference.[361] Concurrently, Brezhnev signed three important treaties relating to the post-war status quo on European borders: The 1970 treaties of Moscow and Warsaw with the Federal Republic and the 1971 settlement of Berlin. In striking contrast to the Brezhnev Doctrine, the first

[358] International Relations and Security Network (ISN), 'Brezhnev Doctrine: Speech by First Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev,' Zurich: International Relations and Security Network (ISN), 1968, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125400/1162_brezhnevdoctrine.pdf.
[359] Jiri Valenta, 'From Prague to Kabul: The Soviet Style of Invasion,' *International Security* 5(1980), 119.
[360] Thomas Fischer, *Neutral Power in the CSCE: The N+N States and the Making of the Helsinki Accords 1975* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009), 360; Benjamin Gilde, 'Thomas Fischer: Neutral Power in the CSCE,' accessed 22 May 2016, http://www.sehepunkte.de/2009/10/16246.html.
[361] Fischer, *Neutral Power in the CSCE*, 360.

two banned the use of force and recognized the inviolability of existing borders in Europe. The third secured the legal status of West Berlin as a territorially inviolable enclave in the German Democratic Republic.[362] Then, in November of 1972, the CSCE finally began in Dipoli, Finland.

The CSCE was unique outside of the UN context both because of the number of states that attended and because of the diversity of issues that it addressed. As such, it also became an unprecedented venue for neutral mediation in a multilateral context, as well as for the neutrals to work together as a group. The issues discussed at the CSCE between 1972 and 1975 were divided into three so-called "baskets." The first concerned security issues. The second encapsulated economic, scientific, technological and environmental issues, while the third basket was devoted to humanitarian issues.[363] These were all deemed to be sufficiently apolitical to allow Swiss participation in line with the Bindschedler Doctrine. As a result, the CSCE became the first forum at which Switzerland was represented alongside both Cold War superpowers and their respective blocs. What was more, as the conference progressed, Switzerland became both a host country and a prominent mediator at the CSCE.[364] In her doctoral thesis of 1999, Elizabeth Glas argued that at the CSCE, Switzerland was pro-active to such a degree that "she *(sic)* caused quite a stir."[365] There were multiple instances where Switzerland, together with neutral Finland, Austria, Sweden and non-aligned Yugoslavia, managed to extract a compromise solution to a difficult problem from the opposing Cold War factions at the conference. During the preparatory conference in Dipoli from 1972 to 1973, for instance, the N+N, as the neutral and non-aligned states became known, dominated the procedural debates and eventually devised an agenda for subsequent proceedings.[366] In 1974, they resolved a deadlock over the preamble to the so-called third basket on human rights and the catalogue of

[362] Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War*, 2.
[363] Kostas Ifantis and Sotiris Serbos, 'OSCE: A Natural Home for Europe's Neutrals?' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3(2013), 213; A. Bloed, 'Institutional Aspects of the Helsinki Process After the Follow-Up Meeting of Vienna,' *Netherlands International Law Review* 36 (1989), 343.
[364] Elisabeth Glas, 'Aufbruch der Schweiz in die multilaterale Welt: Die schweizerische Aussenpolitik 1965-1977' (PhD diss., University of Zurich, 1999), 103.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Fischer, *Neutral Power in the CSCE*, 363.

principles of the first basket on security issues.[367] Eventually, the N+N even succeeded in including a reference to a states' right to be neutral in the Helsinki Final Act, which concluded the CSCE in 1975.[368] This was a significant achievement for the neutrals, as the UN Charter contained no such reference.

It should also be mentioned that against the backdrop of the CSCE, American President Richard Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger also began to opt for *détente* in their relations with the Soviet Union.[369] According to Olav Njølstad, what was new about this was that "instead of using the threat of US countermeasures to compel Soviet restraint, Nixon and Kissinger tried to encourage Moscow to commit itself to preserving the status quo in international affairs."[370] In May of 1972, Brezhnev and Nixon signed the so-called Basic Principles Agreement, which limited each superpower to no more than 100 anti-ballistic missiles, designed to intercept incoming enemy intercontinental missiles. Since November of 1969, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the two superpowers had been held in neutral Finland and Austria and had contributed substantially to the *détente* between the two superpowers. In 1973, they also signed the Prevention of Nuclear War Agreement and in 1974, they began to prepare a second round of SALT talks, known as SALT II.[371] Hence, while initial Soviet initiatives in the spirit of *détente* revolved around the territorial status quo of Europe from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, American initiatives during the mid-1970s revolved mainly around arms control. Both contributed to a climate of *détente*, although researchers have since begun to differentiate between European and superpower *détente*.

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[367] Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad, 'Introduction: The Secrets of European *Détente*,' in *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations and the Cold War, 1965-1985*, edited by Poul Villaume and Odd Arne Westad, 7-17, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2010), 8.
[368] Fanzun and Lehmann, 'Die Schweiz und die Welt,' 230; Glas, 'Aufbruch der Schweiz in die multilaterale Welt,' 111.
[369] Olav Njølstad, 'The collapse of superpower *détente*, 1975-1980,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume III)*, edited by Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Conservative Goals, Revolutionary Outcomes: The Paradox of *Détente*,' *Cold War History* 8(2008), 507.

As this two-dimensional distinction already implies, however, the term *détente* arguably had little impact on the rest of the world. In fact, while the European powers and the superpowers actively sought to dispel the tensions in their mutual relations during this period, especially the superpowers exercised scant restraint in the so-called Third World, where, according to Hanhimäki, "the Cold War continued, even intensified."[372] By the 1970s, most European colonial empires had expired. The Cold War superpowers, on the other hand, had begun to support opposing independence movements and to take sides in ensuing power struggles, most notably in Ethiopia after 1974, Angola after 1975 and in the Ogaden conflict from 1977 to 1978.[373] Between 1955 and 1975, the United States even set a precedent for large-scale military intervention in Vietnam. Concurrently, according to Vladislav Zubok, the Soviet Union delivered $9.2 billion in military assistance to "developing countries" between 1966 and 1975.[374] Between 1978 and 1982, this amount had increased to $35.4 billion.[375] The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a culmination of this trend, which already began during the *détente* period. It also arguably led to the collapse of *détente* between the two superpowers. According to Odd Arne Westad, it was "the issue that toppled *détente* and plunged Soviet-American relations to their lowest level since the Cuban missile crisis."[376]

The second part of this chapter will now explore Westad's assertion in detail, particularly from the perspective of the Swiss government. Having established that the *détente* period was a fruitful and important period for the neutrals, especially in the context of the CSCE, it will proceed to discuss the impact that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had on the Cold War international system and what challenges this entailed for small neutral states such as Switzerland. As will become evident, the rapid deterioration of the Cold War climate – from one of *détente* to what Raymond Garthoff has

[372] Ibid., 509.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Zubok, 'Soviet foreign policy from *détente* to Gorbachev, 1975-1985,' 101.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Odd Arne Westad, 'The Fall of *Détente* and the Turning Tides of History,' in *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years*, edited by Odd Arne Westad (Stockholm: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 23.

called "confrontation" – caught many, although not all, by surprize.[377] It also left many within the Swiss government uncertain as to the role that Switzerland could play in its much-changed international environment in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Unlike previous chapters, which have necessarily featured a substantial number of secondary source materials, the remainder of this chapter is based almost exclusively on recently declassified primary source materials from the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne. These include diplomatic cables, government memoranda and meeting minutes, as well as newspaper articles.

## Switzerland's Reactions to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Collapse of *Détente*

The Swiss press initially reacted to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan with incredulity, although newspapers such as *Der Bund* and the *Tages-Anzeiger* were swift to speculate about the collapse of *détente* and its implications.[378] The conservative newspaper *Weltwoche* and the daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* both called the Soviet Union "imperialist."[379] This was significant, because it was a charge that the Soviet press usually tended to level at the United States and at the Western Cold War bloc. What is more, according to *Der Bund*, "What is happening in Afghanistan at the moment is no less threatening for world peace than what happened in Europe in 1956 and 1968."[380] In other words, the Afghan crisis had the potential of becoming a systemic crisis with a substantial impact on the Cold War climate.

The Swiss government's first public reaction came from the Federal Council on 9 January 1980. The so-called "Declaration of the Federal Council on Incidents in Afghanistan" revealed genuine concern,

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[377] Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1.
[378] Der Bund, 'Ende der Entspannung?' 12 January 1980, E1110A#1988/121#12*, CH-BAR; *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Rückkehr zur Machtpolitik,' 12 January 1980, E1110A#1988/121#12*, CH-BAR.
[379] *Weltwoche*, 'Moskaus Imperialisten,' 3 January 1980, E1110A#1988/121#12*, CH-BAR; *NZZ*, 'Moskaus Griff in den Süden,' 6/5 January 1980, E1110A#1988/121#12*, CH-BAR.
[380] *Der Bund*,' Ausgerechnet Afghanistan,' 11 January 1980, E1110A#1988/121#12*, CH-BAR.

but it was noncommittal. The Council condemned the invasion but did not condemn the Soviet Union by name. It committed the Swiss government to nothing except to further observe the developments in the region. The Federal Council had no intention yet of becoming involved in the Afghan crisis. However, there is no doubt that the Council was genuinely concerned for the same reasons as *Der Bund* was. Following the Council's statement, Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert, who had become foreign minister in 1978, also sent out a circular note to all embassies, consulates and missions in the Swiss diplomatic network the following day. Contradicting a Soviet communiqué that the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) had received immediately after the invasion on 28 December 1979, Aubert argued that the invasion had violated the Charter of the UN and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, both of which the Soviet Union had signed.[381] He also advised all embassies that, "If the occasion presents itself – without, however, needing to take the initiative – make it known that we are concerned about the behaviour of the Soviet Union" and especially "about the danger that it might entail as a precedent in inter-European relations."[382] What he arguably meant by this was that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan might develop not just into a regional crisis in South Asia or a superpower crisis far away, but that it might set a new precedent for the conduct of Cold War international relations. It might mean that violations of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act, which both protected the inviolability of sovereign borders, could repeat themselves. It might also mean that neutral and non-aligned states could no longer rely on their neutral and non-aligned status as protection from superpower intervention. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was qualitatively different from preceding superpower proxy wars in Angola, Ethiopia and Somalia in this respect, because Afghanistan was non-aligned. What was more, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a surprize, full-scale and overt invasion. In this respect, it even differed from the American

[381] Pierre Aubert, 'Correspondence to Select Embassies,' 10 January 1980, E2200.157-04#1992/114#57*, CH-BAR.

[382] Ibid., author's translation from, "Il faut donc lorsque l'occasion se présente, sans toutefois prendre l'initiative des démarches faire état de notre inquiétude face au comportement de l'URSS et du danger qu'il pourrait constituer en tant que précédent dans les relations intereuropéennes."

military campaign in Vietnam, which gradually evolved out of America's covert engagement in the country over the course of twenty years.

As a first response to the invasion, as was common practice in the event of an international incident, the FDFA formed an ad-hoc working group on Afghanistan. It was led by Ambassador Edouard Brunner, future Secretary of State and head of the Political Directorate on Europe and North America at the FDFA at the time. His task was to prepare briefing points for Federal Councillor Aubert to present to the Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs of both parliamentary chambers in February.[383] This was also a fairly standard procedure. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, prior to debating most issues in parliament, each parliamentary chamber set the agenda and discussed it in detail behind closed doors with the relevant Federal Councillor. In the case of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Brunner's team confirmed many of Aubert's initial suspicions. According to one of their working papers, it was the first time that the Soviet Union had attacked a non-aligned state, doubtlessly, it argued, in light of a reviewed and expansionist Brezhnev Doctrine.[384] As discussed, the original doctrine of 1968 had reasoned that if socialism came under threat in a socialist country, this would represent a problem for all socialist countries and therefore justified military intervention. Because Afghanistan was non-aligned, however, the working group feared that the Soviet Union might expand the Brezhnev Doctrine to include states outside of its traditional sphere of influence.

This worried Brunner and his working group for two reasons. First, because there were a number neutral and non-aligned states in Europe, some of which were also close to the Soviet Union. Second, because they were unsure as to whether the Western bloc would come to the aid of any of these states in the event of a Soviet invasion. The working group worried particularly about Yugoslavia,

[383] N.a., 'Les événements d'Afghanistan et leurs conséquences,' n.d., E2010-01A#1991/18#4*, CH-BAR.
[384] Ibid.

Finland, Austria and Albania.[385] Should the Western bloc fail to respond vehemently to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the working group feared that it might become a "dress rehearsal for further cases" of direct armed intervention in neutral and non-aligned states.[386] Note, in this respect, how there was no mention of an attempt to coordinate either intelligence-gathering or policy-making with other neutral or non-aligned states. This represented a notable contrast to the cooperative spirit of *détente*, which prevailed amongst the N+N in the context of the CSCE. It also indicated that despite their common experience as mediators at the CSCE, the neutrals remained a fragmented, rather than a coordinated group of states in the Cold War international system and that many of them – Switzerland included – essentially relied on the benevolence of the Cold War blocs for their security.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan presented a challenge in this respect. On 25 January 1980, the FDFA lamented that , "The Soviet leadership is probably not very impressed by the lack of Western consensus on any countermeasures that have been proposed so far."[387] These countermeasures did indeed vary widely at first, a fact which was not lost on the Soviet Politburo either.[388] President Jimmy Carter of the United States had reacted most strongly, having won the presidential election of 1976 against Gerald Ford as an open critic of *détente*.[389] On 4 January 1980, Carter announced a series of unilateral sanctions on the Soviet Union, including the denial of 17 million metric tons of grain, the curtailment of Soviet fishing privileges in American waters, the potential withdrawal of the United States from the Moscow Summer Olympics of 1980, delays in opening new consular facilities, deferment of cultural and economic exchanges, as well as the provision of military assistance to Pakistan.[390] Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher almost immediately declared that the United

[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.
[387] J. Zwahlen, 'Sowjetinvasion in Afghanistan: Erster Überblick über Gegenmassnahmen des Westens,' 25 January 1980, E2200.157-04#1992/114#57*, CH-BAR.
[388] N.a., 'CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt),' 17 January 1980, CWIHP, translated by M. Doctoroff, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111583.
[389] Njølstad, 'The collapse of superpower *détente*, 1975-1980,' 141.
[390] Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 198.

Kingdom would sympathize with the American condemnation of the invasion, as well as with its sanctions.[391] Yet while most other West European governments did criticize the Soviet Union along similar lines as Switzerland had done on 9 January, most were also similarly reluctant to do anything else.[392] A meeting at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office between American, Canadian, French, German, Italian and British secretaries of state on 31 December 1979, for instance, had concluded without agreeing on a common course of action.[393] As a result, during a Soviet Politburo meeting on 17 January, Foreign Minister Gromyko surmised that "In NATO there is no unity regarding measures towards the Soviet Union" and not all Western countries are "in agreement with the sanctions which the USA is applying."[394]

What the Politburo did not expect, however, was the reaction of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). On 8 January 1980, the non-aligned members of the UN Security Council submitted a resolution condemning the Soviet invasion of non-aligned Afghanistan. The vote was 13 in favour and two – the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic – against.[395] As a permanent member of the council, the veto power of the Soviet Union meant that the resolution did not pass. Yet two days later, the Philippines and Mexico initiated a resolution under the Uniting for Peace procedure, which allowed the General Assembly to convene on matters that were blocked in the Security Council.[396] Resolutions passed in the General Assembly were non-binding, but they were nevertheless strongly indicative of the general mood within the international community. Meeting in an emergency session on the Afghan crisis from 10 to 14 January, the General Assembly finally adopted Resolution ES-6/2, which condemned the Soviet invasion and demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Red

[391] Bresselau von Bressensdorf, 'Die Unterschätzte Herausforderung,' 678.
[392] Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*, 199; Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 529.
[393] Dimitrakis, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' 518.
[394] N.a., 'CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt),' CWIHP, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111583.
[395] K.P. Saskena, 'Afghanistan Conflict and the United Nations,' *International Studies* 1980(19), 666.
[396] Ibid.

Army.[397] 104 delegations voted for the resolution and only 18 voted against it. In the absence of a peaceful solution to the Soviet-Afghan crisis, this process actually repeated itself annually, with almost identical voting records, until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Yet as will become clear later on, this initial resolution was particularly important in two respects. First, it provided the legal basis for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide assistance to Afghan refugees. Second, it called for the appointment of a UN special representative on Afghanistan to find a diplomatic solution.[398]

As a non-member, Switzerland was not a part of these proceedings, but they were significant for the Swiss government's understanding both of ongoing events and for the impact that they had on *détente*. According to former Swiss military officer Armin Bachofen, the Afghan crisis was at the back of most people's minds at the time.[399] The Swiss Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Council of States met on Afghanistan on 14 February. Relying on the briefing materials provided by Edouard Brunner's ad hoc working group, Federal Councillor Aubert provided the parliamentary committee members from the Council of States with a so-called *tour d'horizon*, a wide-ranging geopolitical briefing, on 14 February. "I do not think," he began, "that we are directly and physically threatened at present."[400] "We need time for reflection, but we also need to be extremely vigilant with respect to our national security and to any possible reactions by the Soviet Union." He recommended that at the upcoming CSCE follow-up conference in Madrid in November, Switzerland should point out that the Soviet Union had signed the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, hence pledging itself to respect the integrity of sovereign borders. As to bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, Aubert

[397] UN General Assembly, ES-6/2 – 'The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security,' 14 January 1980, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Afgh%20ARESES6%202.pdf.
[398] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 182.
[399] Armin Bachofen, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 27 March 2019.
[400] Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Ständerat), 'Hauptprotokoll der Sitzung vom 14. Februar 1980, 09:00-12:30 Uhr in Bern, Parlamentsgebäude, Zimmer 4,' February 1980, E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Je ne pense pas que nous soyons directement, dans le temps, menacés nous mêmes physiquement."

argued in favour of maintaining the status quo. In light of its neutrality, Switzerland should not participate in the international sanctions regime that the United States were setting up, yet neither should Switzerland permit any attempts to circumnavigate the sanctions regime through its territory. The only direct measure that Aubert offered to take himself was to decline an invitation to visit the Soviet Union for the time being. In other words, where Switzerland's traditional stance on Neutrality and Solidarity was concerned, Aubert settled decisively in favour of neutrality, yet at the expense of solidarity with regards to the deteriorating climate in the international system. [401]

Neither was he alone in adopting this stance. Councillor of State Paul Bürgi even argued that "In situations such as these, Switzerland tends to be an interested observer."[402] Only when the provision of raw materials or petrol were to become an issue would Switzerland be affected. His colleague, René Meylan added that, "In the present circumstances, our country should remain true to its neutrality and should not contribute to the return of a Cold War climate."[403] In other words, he advised that Switzerland remain aloof of the current crisis. In the end, the committee published a press release to the effect that – like the Federal Council – it condemned the invasion and was generally concerned about further developments in Afghanistan. There was no indication whatsoever, that Switzerland would become diplomatically or otherwise involved in Afghanistan at all.

The Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly – the lower house of parliament – met a week later on 21 February. Once again, Aubert was in attendance and held the floor for most of the discussions, repeating much of what he had presented to the previous committee. The committee of the National Assembly, however, was more critical than that of the Council of States, as it became apparent that beyond observing the ongoing developments in

[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.

Afghanistan, the Federal Council lacked a clearly thought-out policy on how to proceed from its initially passive stance. The president of this committee, Josi Meier, therefore argued that the committee should submit a public interpellation to the Federal Council – a procedure similar the Prime Minister's Questions in the United Kingdom. In this particular instance, Meier, together with two colleagues from her committee, submitted an interpellation that same day, asking: First, what measures will the Federal Council take in preparation for the upcoming follow-up conference in Madrid? Second, what would be done in light of upcoming contacts between Switzerland and the Soviet Union on issues of political, economic, and cultural relations? And finally, what plans did the Federal Council have for the provision Swiss national security and for the plight of Afghan refugees?[404]

One of the most telling moments in the early Swiss foreign policy-making process on the Afghanistan crisis was Federal Councillor Aubert's public response to Meier in parliament. "It is out of the question," he argued, "that Switzerland, whose neutrality demands great reticence, should play a leading role in this matter."[405] This might have been expected in light of the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 and of Secretary of State Raymond Probst's criteria for good offices of 1958. It did not coincide entirely with Switzerland's post-war policy of Neutrality and Solidarity however, and neither did it align with Pierre Aubert's personal record as a policy-maker. Ever since having taken office in 1978, Aubert had actually pursued what he himself referred to as the "Dynamization of Foreign Policy."[406] In line with the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity, Aubert had consistently advocated the ostensible defence of international solidarity and human rights, especially in foreign policy domains such as development aid and good offices.[407] In addressing the parliamentary interpellations on

[404] Josi Meier, 'Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten – Afghanistan: Besetzung durch die UDSSR,' 21 February 1980, E5001G#1993/174#17*, CH-BAR.
[405] Pierre Aubert, 'Rapport du Conseil Fédéral,' n.d., E5001G#1993/174#17*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Il est exclu que la Suisse, que a neutralité oblige à une grande réserve, joue un rôle pilote en l'occurrence."
[406] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 269.
[407] Ibid., 284.

Afghanistan, however, he made it clear that, "It is not incumbent upon Switzerland" to "take initiatives to bring about a solution to the crisis and a dialogue between the superpowers."[408] Further, "Our availability to exercise good offices is well known, but it is governed by strict rules," meaning those devised by Raymond Probst in 1958.[409]

The only window of opportunity he could personally fathom at all in this regard was the upcoming CSCE follow-up conference in Madrid. Yet British archival materials reveal that up until as late as November of 1980, some members of the Federal Council actually considered withdrawing from the conference until such time as the Soviets had retreated from Afghanistan.[410] In order to rally support in favour of attending nevertheless, Aubert urged parliament to think of the CSCE as the one place where Switzerland had hitherto been able to participate in the "political life of the entire continent and in the company of the superpowers, all while enjoying complete respect for its neutrality."[411] Where Switzerland's bilateral relations with the Soviet Union were concerned, Aubert stressed that in keeping with its neutrality, Switzerland would show neither its approval nor disapproval of the invasion of Afghanistan by attending the conference in Madrid. Lastly, he announced that the Federal Council would leave it up to the Swiss Olympic Committee to decide, whether or not to attend the 1980 summer Olympic Games in Moscow.[412]

Aubert's discourse was well-received in parliament. Councillors of State Jost Dillier and Peter Hefti both agreed with Aubert's attitude to remain aloof of the crisis, but to attend the CSCE follow-up conference in Madrid at the same time. Hefti was one of the first to argue that the very concept of

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[408] Aubert, 'Rapport du Conseil Fédéral,' E5001G#1993/174#17*, CH-BAR.
[409] Ibid.
[410] N.a., 'Record ofa Conversation between PUS and the Swiss State Secretary,' 10 July 1980, FCO 28 4278, The National Archives, (UK-TNA), London, United Kingdom.
[411] Aubert, 'Rapport du Conseil Fédéral,' E5001G#1993/174#17*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Je voudrais encore vous rappeler que ce forum représente le seul lieu ou la Suisse peut participer à la vie politique de notre continent tout entier, en présence des superpuissances et dans le plein respect de sa neutralité."
[412] Aubert, 'Rapport du Conseil Fédéral,' E5001G#1993/174#17*, CH-BAR; N.a., 'Dringliche Einfache Anfrage Steiner vom 5 März 1980,' 5 March 1980, E5001G#1993/174#21*, CH-BAR.

*détente* had finally been destroyed in Afghanistan. Yet “we ourselves cannot restore it,” he concluded, “and it would be dangerous to formulate Swiss foreign policy on the basis of an illusion.”[413] Councillor of State Odilio Guntern added that the National Council, the lower chamber of the Swiss parliament, as a whole ought to support the Federal Council by publicly condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as well. Yet interestingly, Guntern also proposed that Switzerland should offer its good offices, for the purpose of an international conference on Afghanistan.[414] This suggestion initially fell on deaf ears, both in parliament and in the Federal Council. In other words, it was not the beginning of Switzerland’s diplomatic involvement in the Afghan crisis. Yet Guntern nevertheless showed that there were some who thought that Switzerland had the potential to play a role of some kind.

In the military intelligence community, the Afghan crisis and of the collapse of *détente* initially led to concern and speculation of a different kind. On 5 May 1980, Major General Richard Ochsner, head of the military intelligence unit *Unterabteilung Nachrichtendienst und Abwehr* (UNA), delivered a report to the National Assembly’s Military Committee. He speculated that the strategic aim of the Soviets in invading Afghanistan might have been to reach the Persian Gulf, to threaten Europe’s oil supply and to then to launch a military attack upon a weakened Europe. As a second possibility, he also entertained the notion of a likely superpower confrontation in the Gulf region, in light of American security interests there. In addition to the sanctions regime that the United States had announced on 4 January, President Carter also introduced the so-called Carter Doctrine, which argued that the defence of the Persian Gulf and its oil reserves were an absolute priority for the United States. In fact, Ochsner’s initial assessment on the Soviet motivations behind the invasion had not been far off from Carter Administration’s own assessment. On 26 December 1979, National

[413] N.a., ‘Dringliche Interpellation Guntern – Afghanistan: Besetzung durch die UdSSR,’ 18 March 1980, E4260D- 01#1995/257#101*, CH-BAR, author’s translation from, “Von uns aus können wir ihn in der heutigen Situation nicht wiederherstellen, und es wäre gefährlich, auf Illusionen eine schweizerische Aussenpolitik aufzubauen.”
[414] Ibid.

Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski had written to Carter that the Iranian Revolution and the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in February of that year may have "led to the collapse of the balance of power in Southwest Asia, and it could produce a Soviet presence right down on the edge of the Arabian and Oman Gulfs."[415] As Conor Tobin has recently shown, however, it has not been convincingly proven that Brzezinski had a plan to lead the Soviet Union into a so-called "Afghan Trap."[416] Rather, it was not until the Soviet Union became bogged down in a costly stalemate with the *mujahideen* that most observers – including the Swiss authorities – began to fully realize that over 400 kilometres and almost the entire Pakistani province of Baluchistan lay between Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf and that Baluchistan lacked a feasible warm-water port for the Soviet Navy to use.[417] As a result of this realization, the threat of a superpower confrontation over the Persian Gulf appeared to subside during the early 1980s, yet it did not quite disappear.

In the meantime, Ochsner reported to the National Assembly's Military Committee that the situation was becoming "diffuse, stagnant and marked by an entire series of separate conflicts, all of which look like they will be difficult to resolve, especially in light of the strategic location of the war zone."[418] During the initial stages of the Soviet occupation, the Red Army been unable to consolidate its hold on the country to the extent that it could have used it as a base from which to possibly conduct further operations against either Iran or Pakistan. "It can [therefore] not yet be determined for certain, whether the Soviet Union will advance to the Persian Gulf," in order to "take the decisive step to control the oil fields" and then deliver a "crucial blow against NATO-Europe."[419] The decisive

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[415] Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Correspondence to Jimmy Carter,' 26 December 1979, NSA-GWU, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=5696260-Document-8-Georgy-Kornienko-was-the-top-deputy.
[416] Conor Tobin, 'The Myth of the "Afghan Trap": Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan, 1978-1979,' *Diplomatic History* 44(2020), 239.
[417] Secretariat Politique, 'Conférence des Ambassadeurs du 23 au 25 août 1983: Tour d'horizon de la situation internationale,' 5 August 1983, J1.301#2002/197#754*, CH-BAR.
[418] H.H. Frischknecht, 'Nationalrat – Militärkommission: Protokoll der Sitzung vom 5. Mai 1980, 10:00-14:20, in Bern, Parlamentsgebäude, Zimmer 3,' 20 Mai 1980, E1070#1995/104#104*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Die Situation ist diffus, verfahren, gekennzeichnet durch eine ganze Reihe von Einzelkonflikten, die auf absehbare Zeit schwer lösbar erscheinen, insbesondere aber durch Ansammlung von Zündstoff in einem globalstrategisch hochbedeutsamen Krisengebiet."
[419] Ibid.

factor for Switzerland in this regard, he reiterated, was be the question of Western military cohesion.[420]

George-André Chevallaz, the Federal Councillor for Defence, retrospectively confirmed these suspicions in November of 1980 when, after several months of monitoring Switzerland's European neighbourhood, he concluded that, "Europe in particular is arming with minimal zeal, despite various NATO decisions, American rebukes and the evident superiority of the Soviet Union."[421] Most NATO members with the exception of France, the United Kingdom and the United States had failed to comply with a previously agreed-upon three percent increase in annual military budgets and in a diplomatic cable dated April 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig stressed the ongoing need to mobilize European public opinion in against Soviet expansionism.[422] In other words, the unresolved crisis in Afghanistan gave rise to a continuously high level of uncertainty not only in the region, but in Switzerland's immediate security environment. At the meeting of the National Assembly's Military Committee back in May, Chevallaz had announced that the Federal Council would increase the Swiss defence budget by 4.7 percent for the ongoing legislative period.[423]

He also argued that, in reality, whilst Switzerland's political environment had shifted from *détente* to renewed Cold War tension, essentially, its security environment had seen no strategic change at all.[424] Ever since the end of the Second World War, the fundamental Swiss security posture had been determined by the fact that Switzerland was immediately surrounded by NATO countries with the exception of neutral Austria and Liechtenstein. Further, where Afghanistan was concerned, the Soviet Union had been enhancing its influence there for some time now, so that was not new either.

[420] Ibid.
[421] Georges-André Chevallaz, 'Discours de Monsieur G.-A. Chevallaz, Président de la Confédération, Chef du Département Militaire,' 28 November 1980, E5803#1985/5#1*, CH-BAR.
[422] Ibid.; Alexander Haig, 'To all European Diplomatic Posts Immediate: Shaping European Attitudes,' Kraemer, Sven – 1981-1987 – Files, Box 90/03, Ronald Reagan Archive (RRA-USA), Simi Valley, USA.
[423] H.H. Frischknecht, 'Nationalrat – Militärkommission,' E1070#1995/104#104*, CH-BAR.
[424] Ibid.

Accordingly, there was no need for a fundamental overhaul of Switzerland's defence posture aside from increasing the defence budget. Finally, he stressed that, "We should not disregard the strength and solidity of the Swiss infrastructure and its natural terrain, which after all serve as fortifications."[425] The army was well-trained and well-armed, prepared to mobilize more rapidly than any armed forces in the vicinity. To close, he said, "I believe I can say that nowhere else in central Europe, there is defensive front that is as dense."[426] The Swiss army was one of the largest armed forces per capita in Europe with approximately 625'000 soldiers. This amounted to about 10 percent of the population.[427] The main reason for its size was that the Swiss army was and continues to be a militia force, meaning that most troops are not professional soldiers, but ordinary citizens, who can be mobilized swiftly in the event of an armed attack.[428]

Ultimately, it increasingly became apparent to Swiss observers that the Soviet military campaign in Afghanistan was not going well.[429] According to Richard Ochsner, by August of 1980, the Red Army had neither managed to consolidate its political influence in Afghanistan, nor to extend its influence towards the Persian Gulf via Iran or Pakistan.[430] This assessment of the situation persisted into the mid-1980s with a 1983 report from the political secretariat of the FDFA claiming that the "heroic Afghan combatants, who had managed to resist the invading troops despite mediocre arms, had managed to create a military stalemate."[431] Even Pierre Aubert was forced to rectify his earlier assessment, claiming in his 1984 welcome address to the annual Conference of Swiss Ambassadors that, "Nothing about the present situation reminds us of the Berlin Crisis, the Korean War or even the Vietnam War, all of which might have served as the pretext for a direct confrontation between

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[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Kurt R. Spillmann, 'Beyond Soldiers and Arms: The Swiss Model of Comprehensive Security Policy,' *Zürcher Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik und Konfliktforschung* 2(1987), 12.
[428] H.H. Frischknecht, 'Nationalrat – Militärkommission,' E1070#1995/104#104*, CH-BAR.
[429] Hans Wegmüller, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 26 March 2019.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Secrétariat politique, 'Département fédéral des affaires étrangères, Exposé – Conférences des Ambassadeurs (1980): Problèmes de sécurité,' August 1980, E7113A#1991/174#9*, CH-BAR.

the two blocs."[432] Rather, "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has marked the end of any illusions about *détente*."[433] Perhaps Rudolf Bindschedler himself offered the most striking remark about the relationship between the Afghan crisis and the end of *détente*, when he argued in 1981 that the decisive moment in Afghanistan was not the invasion itself, but the communist coup of 1978. The latter was significant, he stressed, because the West "didn't raise a finger" and that was why the Soviet Union could assume that the West would not intervene in the event of a Soviet military takeover.[434]

What was more, with *détente* having collapsed, some observers began to argue that the Soviet Union had been exploiting it all along. At the 1981 conference of ambassadors, an annual gathering of Swiss diplomats in Berne, Pierre Aubert stressed that during the *détente* period, the Soviet Union had not only gained parity in arms with the United States, but that the Warsaw Pact had in fact overtaken the West in multiple weapon categories.[435] Richard Ochsner had also made a similar case one year before.[436] In addition to its progress on intermediate range ballistic missiles, the Soviet Union had developed a new tank model called the T-72, new combat helicopters and a series of large-scale titanium-coated submarines.[437] Combined with the deployment of SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe, this gave the Soviet Union a decisive strategic advantage. What was more, Swiss observers began to lament that over the course of the mid- to late 1970s, the Soviet Union had lent political and military support to left-leaning conflict parties not only in Angola since 1975, but in the Ogaden crisis

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[432] Pierre Aubert, 'Exposé liminaire de Monsieur Pierre Aubert, Chef du Département fédéral des affaires étrangères, à la Conférence des Ambassadeurs,' 28 August 1984, E7001C#1995/311#250*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Il n'y a rien actuellement qui rappelle ce que nous avons connu au moment de la crise de Berlin, de la guerre de Corée ou même encore de la guerre du Vietnam, toutes occasions où, à certains moments, un affrontement direct entre les deux blocs…"
[433] Ibid., author's translation from, "L'invasion de l'Afghanistan a marqué la fin des illusions de la détente."
[434] Rudolf Bindschedler, 'Sicherheit und Entspannung,' 27 June 1981, J2.336-01#2015/282#338*, CH-BAR.
[435] Aubert, 'Exposé liminaire du Chef du Département,' E7001C#1992/9#190*, CH-BAR.
[436] Richard Ochsner, 'Blick auf die Bedrohungslage der Nächsten Zwei bis Drei Jahre aus Sicht des Militärischen Nachrichtendienstes: Referat von Herrn Divisionär R. Ochsner, Unterstabschef Nachrichtendienst und Abwehr EMD,' August 1980, J1.301#2002/197#523*, CH-BAR.
[437] Ibid.

beginning in 1977 and in South Yemen.[438] In the meantime, the United States continued to grapple with the military setback of Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and, until the end of 1980, a mostly hesitant foreign policy leadership under President Jimmy Carter.[439] In other words, in retrospect, the Western bloc's hesitation to confront the Soviet Union appeared to have been in the making for some time, had possibly been an enabling factor for the Soviet Union's audacious invasion of Afghanistan, and bode ill for the prospect of Western unity and solidarity after the collapse of *détente*. With Switzerland located at the centre of Western Europe, it was speculated that this lack of solidarity could have security implications for Switzerland's immediate environment.

As discussed, the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan began to stall during the early 1980s in the face of determined *mujahideen* resistance. However, aside from alleviating concerns of an imminent invasion of Western Europe, the absence of military progress also enhanced the already drastic refugee crisis in the region. The next chapter will discuss how the Swiss government contributed to the alleviation of this aspect of the Afghan crisis. As the current chapter has shown, despite the fact that the Swiss authorities recognized the seismic impact that the Soviet invasion had on superpower *détente*, they initially chose to do nothing either in the military or the diplomatic domain apart from raising the defence budget and continuing to attend the CSCE follow-up process. These measures may seem to have been standard practice, yet this chapter has actually shown that they conflicted with Switzerland's long-term foreign policy goals. As rehearsed, these were to balance permanent neutrality and the inherent threat of diplomatic isolation with demonstrations of solidarity both bilaterally through the provision of good offices and multilaterally by participating in apolitical intergovernmental organizations. With their decision to remain aloof from the Afghan crisis, the Swiss authorities therefore initially showed little solidarity with the international community and if

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438 Aubert, 'Exposé liminaire du Chef du Département,' E7001C#1992/9#190*, CH-BAR; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 250 ; 259.

439 Aubert, 'Exposé liminaire du Chef du Département,' E7001C#1992/9#190*, CH-BAR.

anything, this was a sign that in fact, they were continuing to struggle for a role in the Cold War international system.

The remaining chapters of this thesis will show how this began to change as Switzerland gradually did become ever more deeply involved in Afghanistan as a provider of good offices. They will cover the various foreign policy tools that the Swiss employed to this effect, including humanitarian aid, protective powers and mediation. Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Swiss had arguably made steady progress both as a protective power, as well as in the domain of multilateral diplomacy. As an active member of the N+N at the CSCE, the Swiss had even begun to demonstrate the merits of neutral mediation in a multilateral setting.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan destabilized the parameters of *détente*, to which the Swiss had arguably become accustomed since the mid-1960s, so the renewed climate of Cold War tension initially challenged Swiss foreign policy thinking on Neutrality and Solidarity. Both members of government and of parliament argued that Switzerland traditionally remained aloof of international crises, when in reality these were the sorts of reactions that the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity had been intended to prevent. This is not to argue that the Swiss ought to have responded the way they did to the Suez crisis. Rather, it is to point out that they did not originally see the crisis as an opportunity to engage. The only notable exception to this was Switzerland's provision of humanitarian aid to the conflict region. As chapter four will show, the Swiss initially interpreted humanitarian aid as an opportunity in line with Switzerland's long-standing humanitarian tradition. However, Switzerland's conventional provision of humanitarian aid ultimately evolved not only into a protective power mandate involving Soviet prisoners of war, but into a mediatory mandate from the ICRC concerning the provision of humanitarian aid to the Afghan interior. As with this chapter, the following chapter is largely based on declassified archival material from the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne.

# Chapter 4: The Afghan Humanitarian Crisis and Swiss Humanitarian Aid, 1979-1982

An estimated 4.3 million refugees and an unrecorded number of internally displaced persons were forced to flee their homes as a result of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.[440] According to the UNHCR it became the highest number of refugees worldwide by the time of the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. It involved almost a third of Afghanistan's pre-war population of 15 million and turned the Soviet-Afghan war into a regional humanitarian catastrophe.[441] Throughout the duration of the Soviet occupation, Switzerland provided humanitarian aid to the conflict region. In fact, this is how Switzerland originally became directly involved in the Afghan crisis. In other words, what this chapter will argue is that Switzerland became involved in Afghanistan not as a provider of good offices and according to the logic of Neutrality and Solidarity, but rather in light of Switzerland's age-old tradition of humanitarianism. As chapter three has shown, after some confusion, the onset of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the collapse of *détente* paradoxically persuaded both government and parliament that Switzerland had no role to play in the crisis. Chapter three also implicitly revealed that humanitarian aid featured little in these initial discussions. The present chapter will discuss how Swiss humanitarian aid to the conflict region went ahead in spite of this – in other words, without an overarching Swiss plan or strategy in Afghanistan. It will also engage with the secondary

[440] Susan Goodwillie, 'Refugees in the Developing World: A Challenge to the International Community,' 5 August 1983, E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR.
[441] Ibid.

literature on humanitarianism in Afghanistan and specifically with the work of Timothy Nunan, as well as with the literature on Swiss humanitarianism and the ongoing debate on the relationship between the Swiss government and the ICRC.

As discussed in the literature review of this thesis, there is considerable debate about the interdependence of the Swiss government and the ICRC, because at the root of Switzerland's humanitarian tradition were the Red Cross Movement and the original Geneva convention of 1864. The Red Cross Movement was founded in 1863 at the initiative of the Swiss businessman Henry Dunant and it was the principal agent behind this very first codification of international humanitarian law – the body of law that governs conduct in war.[442] Switzerland, which hosted both the movement and the signing of the convention, became not only a signatory, but a depository state of the convention itself.[443] As such, the Swiss government was obliged to inform other signatories of any obligations on their part under international humanitarian law, of changes to the convention and of any new ratifications.[444] These changes occurred frequently in response to the changing nature of warfare, and most notably in the form of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Protocols. This close conceptual association between Switzerland, the Red Cross Movement and the evolution of international humanitarian law, has often led to confusion. The Red Cross Movement is not a Swiss organization but is made up of multiple organizations. It includes the ICRC, whose main task is to safeguard international humanitarian law, as well as national societies, which deliver humanitarian aid in their respective countries, and the International Federation of the Red Cross, which oversees their activities.

[442] Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners,' 616.
[443] Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz,' 28.
[444] Ibid., 33.

Overall, the mission of the ICRC was – and continues to be – to protect any and all victims of war.[445] This includes receiving demands for assistance from conflict victims and facilitating the establishment of safe zones, as well as the provision of medical aid.[446] It also includes securing safe passage out of occupied territories for civilians and tracing family members that have become separated in war zones.[447] Finally, the conventions mandate for the ICRC to maintain correspondence and conduct one-on-one visits to prisoners of war in their place of detention.[448] There is a case to be made that overall, the Red Cross Movement is financially and organizationally independent from the Swiss government.[449] Like most other countries, Switzerland also has a Red Cross Society and like many other governments, the Swiss government contributes financially to the budget of the ICRC. Some point to the close historic association between the ICRC and the Swiss government. J.D. Armstrong, for instance, has argued that "Switzerland has given the ICRC something approaching to diplomatic status" and in this respect, the ICRC is unique among non-governmental international organizations.[450] Former ICRC director, Cornelio Sommaruga, relativized this argument in a 1992 contribution to the *International Review of the Red Cross*. He wrote that, "The historical ties between the ICRC and the Confederation helped to create a situation whereby, for a long time, it is true, the ICRC's neutrality was identified with Swiss neutrality."[451] The difference between the two, however, he argued was that Swiss neutrality is based on its conduct towards states, while the neutrality of the ICRC rests on its conduct towards individuals – towards victims of conflict.[452] Over time, the Swiss government and the ICRC came to benefit from each other's neutrality. Their relationship was symbiotic but not interdependent. The ICRC gained diplomatic

[445] Alexandre Hay, 'Discours du Président du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, M. Alexandre Hay, prononcé devant la Commission indépendante sur les questions humanitaires internationales à New York, le 12 novembre 1983,' 12 November 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Cornelio Sommaruga, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 12 July 2018.
[450] Armstrong, 'The International Committee of the Red Cross and Political Prisoners,' 641.
[451] Sommaruga, 'Swiss neutrality, ICRC neutrality,' 266.
[452] Ibid., 267.

status and Switzerland gained a reputation for humanitarianism long before it began to systematically provide humanitarian aid.

Jean Freymond argues that Switzerland only began to systematically provide humanitarian aid in conflict situations after the Second World War, at the same time as it developed the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity.[453] The Federal Council eventually created an official policy on humanitarian aid in March 1973, which subsequently became a core element of the 1976 federal law on international development and humanitarian aid.[454] Also in 1973, the Federal Council founded the so-called Swiss Disaster Relief Corps, a voluntary aid organization of technicians, medical professionals and logistics experts, financed and dispatched by the federal government in emergency situations.[455] As a result, Swiss humanitarian aid took on two distinct forms from then on. The first included direct humanitarian aid through the disaster relief corps. The second involved financial and material contributions to internationally recognized humanitarian aid organizations such as the ICRC and the UNHCR, both of which were conveniently headquartered in Geneva.[456]

Coincidentally, the first Afghan refugees also began to trickle across the Pakistani border in 1973 as Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrew King Mohammed Zahir Shah and caused his family and many of his supporters to flee the country.[457] By the time that Daoud was himself overthrown in 1978, the gradual trickle of refugees had risen to a flood of half a million people.[458] The Pakistani government actively accommodated these refugees despite the fact that it had signed neither the 1951 United

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[453] Freymond, 'Der Humanitäre Bereich in der Aussenpolitik der Schweiz,' 27.
[454] Ibid., 28.
[455] Institut d'hautes études internationales et du développement, 'Entwicklungsusammenarbeit und humanitäre Hilfe,' *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik* 17(1998), 328.
[456] Bundesrat, 'Botschaft über die Weiterführung der internationalen humanitären Hilfe der Eidgenossnschaft,' 27 Mai 1981, https://www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?id=10048384; Gérard Perroulaz, 'Entwicklung der Humanitären Hilfe des Bundes und der schweizerischen Hilfswerke (1990-1997),' *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik* 18(1999), https://journals.openedition.org/sjep/626.
[457] Helga Baitenmann, 'NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid,' *Third World Quarterly* 12(1990), 62-63.
[458] Ibid., 63.

Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 protocol. Helga Baitenmann argues that the reason for this benevolence was that the government of Mohammad Zia Ul-Haq feared losing its already minimal influence in the so-called tribal areas on the Afghan-Pakistani border.[459] Depicted in map 4 below, these regions had historically been difficult to govern on account of their separatist Pushtun population. Now, with the influx of thousands of mostly Pushtun refugees, the government did not appear to want to risk upsetting the Pushtunwali tradition of welcoming especially ethnic kin, for fear of destabilizing and alienating the region.

By April of 1979, the Pakistani government had already appealed to the UNHCR for outside support on account of the ever-rising number of incoming refugees.[460] Back in 1950, the UNHCR had actually been founded with a mandate to provide only for refugees from the Second World War and that for a period of only three years. Its first major operations concerned refugee crises in Western Berlin in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956.[461] The 1967 protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention, however, recognized the fact that refugee flows continued to be on the increase – not on the decrease – and that this was happening on a global scale.[462] It therefore discarded the original geographical and temporal limits from the UNHCR's mandate. This allowed the UNHCR to be the first major humanitarian aid organization on location in Pakistan by May of 1979 – six months before the Soviet invasion.[463]

The invasion itself, exponentially increased the already massive number of Afghan refugees. By January of 1980, Hasim Utkan, the UNHCR's *chargé de mission* in Pakistan reported 402'000

[459] Ibid.
[460] N.a, 'UNHCR Humanitarian Assistance Programme to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Extracts of UNHCR report No. 9 – 1980 Calendar Year,' July/ August 1981, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[461] Jérome Elie, 'The UNHCR and the Cold War: A Documented Reflection on the UN Refugee Agency's Activities in the Bipolar Context,' June 2007, https://graduateinstitute.ch//sites/default/files/2018-12/UNHCR_and_CW_Work-P.pdf.
[462] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees,' 16 December 1966, https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.
[463] Rüdiger Schöch, 'UNHCR and the Afghan Refugees in the Early 1980s, Between Humanitarian Action and Cold War Politics,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27(2008), 47.

registered refugees. Only eleven days later, Paul Stauffer, the Swiss ambassador in Islamabad reported over 430'000.[464] The UNHCR, which had originally pledged only US$ 190'000 in August of 1979 now estimated its financial expenditures in Pakistan to amount to US$ 55 million for the period of January to December of 1980 alone.[465]

In addition to that, Stauffer relayed to the FDFA in Berne that Hasim Utkan had personally approached him to ask not for financial contributions, but for urgent material aid for women and children.[466] "Tents, woollen blankets and warm children's attire," were needed fast – if possible even via charter flight – in light of the cold January temperatures.[467] According to UNHCR statistics for the year 1980, 45.9 percent of all refugees registered in Pakistan were children, while 27.2 percent were women and only 26.8 percent were adult men.[468] A British aid airlift had already taken place by that point and an Italian one was being planned.[469] In addition to the UNHCR, organizations such as *Terre des Hommes* and the ICRC were also beginning to plan their missions to the country.[470] According to the UK-based *Business Recorder* the ICRC was especially sought-after. On 23 January 1980, the paper quoted Dr. Nawal Khan, the principal administrator of the Peshawar-Khyber Hospital in Peshawar, saying that a network of field hospitals was urgently needed in the refugee camps.[471] At his own hospital in Peshawar, he described how the patient load had increased by a full third since the invasion and the medical care that was required was anything but routine work.[472] "We have gunshot, shrapnel and bomb-blast wounds," on a regular basis, he explained.[473]

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[464] Hasim Utkan, 'Communication to Paul Stauffer,' 5 January 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR; Paul Stauffer, 'Communication to Abteilung Humanitäre Hilfe, Kopie auch an Politische Abteilung II und III,' 16 January 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[465] N.a., 'UNHCR Humanitarian Assistance Programme to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[466] Stauffer, 'Communication to Abteilung Humanitäre Hilfe,' E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[467] Ibid.
[468] N.a., 'UNHCR Humanitarian Assistance Programme to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[469] Stauffer, 'Communication to Abteilung Humanitäre Hilfe, E2023A#1991/39#921*,' CH-BAR.
[470] Ibid.
[471] *Business Recorder*, 'ICRC approached for field hospitals: Afghan refugees,' 23 January 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Ibid.

By February 1980, a number of foreign governments and international aid organizations had begun their operations in Pakistan, yet none had become firmly established. The provision of medical and material aid remained patchy. Meanwhile, overwhelming numbers of refugees continued to pour into the country. The number of registered refugees had now risen to 600'000, with 500'000 in the loosely-governed North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and another 100'000 distributed across Baluchistan, both labelled in map 4 below.[474]

Map 4. The Administrative Regions of Pakistan[475]

There was also, at least initially, an element of confusion surrounding the logistics of the distribution of aid. According to Serge Chapatte, the development *attaché* at the Swiss embassy in Islamabad, apart from the UNHCR, the ICRC and the various national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, there arrived a plethora of other organizations.[476] These included the Austrian Relief Committee, the

[474] Serge Chapatte, 'Réfugies afghans au Pakistan: Etat de la situation à fin févier 1980,' 27 February 1980, E2023A#1991 39#921*, CH-BAR; N.a., 'UNHCR Humanitarian Asistance Programme to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[475] Human Rights Watch, 'Soiled Hands: The Pakistan Army's Repression of the Punjab Farmers' Movement,' accessed on 20 May 2019, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/pakistan0704/index.htm.
[476] Chappatte, 'Réfugiés afghans au Pakistan,' E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.

Church World Service, the Afghan Inter-Aid Committee, the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and the Union Aid for Afghan Refugees, among others.[477] Initially, they largely operated without directives from the Pakistani authorities. The Pakistani Federal Coordination Committee for Afghan Refugees had recently been created under the supervision of the Secretary of the Frontier Regions Division in order to coordinate the influx of refugees to various camps. The Ministry of Health, on the other hand, was technically responsible for coordinating the influx of medical aid, yet the process of registering foreign aid organizations – and especially foreign aid workers – proved to be tedious.[478] Other forms of humanitarian aid, including food, domestic utensils, clothing, shelter and drinking water, were distributed more quickly.[479]

On 9 February 1980, a chartered Transvaal aircraft arrived in Peshawar from Sion in Switzerland, carrying CHF 236’000 worth of tents, blankets and milk powder.[480] It also carried five tons of second-hand children’s clothing, donated by *Terre des Hommes (Lausanne)* and the Swiss Red Cross Society.[481] By that time, one British, one West German, one Italian and two American aid flights had already arrived in Peshawar. Nevertheless, the Swiss donation received considerable coverage in the press.[482] One of the main Pakistani newspapers, *Dawn*, reported on 9 February that Switzerland had delivered 26 tons of aid.[483] The UK-based *Business Recorder*, on the other hand, reported 21 tons that same day, giving rise to confusion and media speculation.[484] On 11 February, the Federal Council further dispatched two volunteers from the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps. Erwin Georg Heinzmann and Hans-Peter Bührer arrived in Islamabad on 17 February and assisted the World Food Programme in

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[477] S.D. Bazeley, ‘Minutes of the Third Voluntary Organizations Meeting,’ 9 December 1980, J2.233-01#1999/248#129*, CH-BAR.
[478] Chappatte, ‘Réfugiés afghans au Pakistan,’ E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[479] Oikoumene, ‘The Afghan Refugee Situation in Pakistan,’ *Refugees, Refugiés, Flüchtlinge, Refugiados*, No. 51, April 1983, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[480] Eugen Klöti, ‘Refugiés Afghans: Transport matériel de secours par vol charter,’ 29 January 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[481] Ibid.
[482] Paul Stauffer, ‘Charterflug mit Hilfsgütern für die afghanischen Flüchtlinge in Pakistan,’ 10 February 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[483] *Dawn*, ‘Swiss Aid for Afghan Refugees,’ 9 February 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[484] Ibid.

its distribution of food among refugees until April 1981.[485] Five further volunteers joined them over the course of this period on the account of their heavy work load.[486] In addition, the Federal Council donated CHF 800’000 to the UNHCR and CHF 100’000 to *Enfants du Monde*, bringing the total of Swiss humanitarian aid to Pakistan to CHF 1.8 million by mid-March of 1980.[487]

Note that Switzerland had not yet tried to supply humanitarian aid to Iran or Afghanistan and neither had a large number of aid organizations. Some were barred from doing so by their mandates. The UNHCR, for instance, could only work with refugees, meaning those who were displaced outside of their home countries.[488] One of few organizations to attempt to reach Afghanistan at this early stage had been the ICRC. It had made several offers of assistance to the authorities in Kabul, beginning in 1978. On 10 January 1980, the Soviet-installed Karmal regime briefly granted the organization access to Afghan territory.[489] From January to June of 1980, the ICRC therefore dispatched a delegation to Kabul, which carried out repeated visits to the massive prison facilities of Pul-i-Charkhi, depicted in image 1 below.[490] They took note of approximately 57 political prisoners and delivered about two tonnes of emergency medical supplies to surrounding hospitals via the local Afghan Red Crescent Society.[491] Yet in June of 1980, the Afghan authorities refused to renew the ICRC delegates’ visas, forcing them to interrupt their mission and leave the country unexpectedly.[492]

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[485] Arthur Bill, ‘Afghanische Flüchtlinge, IKRK-Aktion in Pakistan?,’ 11 February 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR; Chappatte, ‘Réfugiés afghans au Pakistan,’ E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[486] N.a., ‘Einfache Anfrage Friedrich vom 16. März 1981: Flüchtlinge aus Afghanistan,’ 16 March 1981, E2023A#1991 39#921*, CH-BAR.
[487] Ibid.; N.a., ‘C.P.S, Aide aux réfugiés afghans,’ 20 May 1981, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[488] Girardet, *Afghaistan,* 210.
[489] ICRC Department of Operations, ‘Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3 (1 January – 32 December 1983),’ January 1983, E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR; ICRC, ‘Communiqué de Presse no. 1386,’ 25 January 1980, E2023A#1991/39#921*, CH-BAR.
[490] ICRC, ‘Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No. 7,’ January 1987, E2023A#1998/212#976*, CH-BAR.
[491] Ibid.
[492] ICRC Department of Operations, ‘Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,’ E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.

The ICRC complied with the Karmal regime's request that it leave Afghan territory, because its statutes allow it to operate only with permission of the host government.[494] The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued to operate in Afghanistan, but were restricted to the government-controlled areas.[495] According to Edward Girardet, this meant that they came under considerable pressure from the Soviet and Afghan authorities to serve the interests of the PDPA regime. There were some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that evaded the government-controlled zones wherever possible. *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), for instance, conducted cross-border medical operations into Afghanistan from Pakistan.[496] Writing in 1985, Girardet reported that since the early summer of

[494] Girardet, *Afghanistan*, 224.
[495] Ibid., 146.
[496] Wesley Attewell, '"From Factory to Field": USAID and the Logistics of Foreign Aid in Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26(2018), 725; Daniel von Muralt, 'Reisebericht über Feldbesuch in Pakistan: UNHCR Afghan Flüchtlingslager un NWFP und Belutschistan, Bedürfnisse und Kanäle humanitärer Hilfeleistung in Afghanistan, IKRK-Tätigkeit in Peshawar und Quetta, SRK ophthalmologisches Programm in Mardan (NWFP),' 10 June 1985, E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.

1980, *Aide Médicale Internationale*, MSF and *Médecins du Monde* had collectively sent over 400 French, Belgian and Swiss doctors and nurses to the country.[497] Other, smaller organizations that operated sporadically on Afghan territory to provide medical assistance included the French International Bureau for Afghanistan, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) and the Afghanistan Relief Committee of New York.[498] NGOs such as the Dignity of Man Foundation and the Americans for Afghanistan Committee also organized funds for educational and social projects and delivered clothing where possible.[499] Finally, as part of the US government's growing support for the Afghan *mujahideen* over the course of the 1980s, the United States Agency for International Development, launched a government-sponsored Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid Programme in 1985.[500]

On the whole, however, the issue of cross-border humanitarian aid has hitherto received comparatively little attention in the literature on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, Timothy Nunan from the *Freie Universität Berlin* has made several valuable contributions on this subject, showing that in fact, the Afghan crisis was a critical turning point for the history of global NGO activity.[501] Focusing primarily on MSF and on the SCA, Nunan argues that the Afghan crisis confronted these originally left-leaning organizations with a manifestation of socialism that was incompatible with their humanitarian ideals. MSF actually originated as a French splinter movement from the Red Cross movement during the Biafra crisis of 1967 to 1970, as the ICRC withdrew from the region on account of its neutrality.[502] As a result, a small group of former members from the French Red Cross including Bernard Kouchner, Max Récamier and Jacques Bérès founded MSF in 1971.[503] Unlike the ICRC, which operated in conflict

[497] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 215.
[498] Ibid., 211 ; Von Muralt, 'Reisebericht über Feldbesuch in Pakistan,' E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.
[499] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 211.
[500] Attewell, '"From Factory to Field,"' 725.
[501] Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development?,223.
[502] Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion*, 133.
[503] Ibid.

regions only with the consent of host governments, MSF took the view that as long as they did not comment on the conflicts themselves, doctors should be able to operate anywhere.[504] In Afghanistan, MSF did exactly that beginning in 1981, after the Pakistani authorities refused permission for the organization to operate from camps on the Pakistani side of the border.[505] According to Nunan, MSF soon "embraced an antitotalitarian stance that viewed authoritarian borders as meaningless."[506] This represents a remarkable difference from the work of the ICRC.

Nunan's analysis of the SCA, similarly shows that the founders of the SCA also intended "affected civilian populations in Afghanistan as the tatget audience, not the Afghan refugees in Pakistan."[507] During the fall of 1982, the SCA therefore equipped a group of Afghan doctors in the Pakistani border regions to deliver medical supplies to a clinic in the Ghazni province and on 11 January 1983, they received a dispatch claiming that "Sweden is the first country in the world to have used public funds to assist the war-affected Afghan people."[508] Interestingly, however, it appears as though while the SCA openly identified with its Swedish heritage and its close ties to the Swedish International Development Authority, it did not premise its operations on Swedish neutrality.

This poses two questions for this thesis: How does the work of the ICRC compare to Nunan's conceptual analysis of humanitarianism in Afghanistan and how does it compare to the actions of other NGOs, particularly those from neutral countries? First of all, Nunan is doubtlessly correct in his analysis that the humanitarian operations of French and Swedish NGOs such as MSF and the SCA challenged the ideological premises of Soviet socialism in Afghanistan. By ignoring Afghan borders both MSF and the SCA essentially ignored the authority and legitimacy of the Soviet-installed Afghan government. Nunan also documents how the SCA organized a so-called Permanent International

[504] Ibid., 134.
[505] Ibid. 139.
[506] Ibid., 12.
[507] Ibid., 142.
[508] Ibid., 146.

People's Tribunal to assess the human rights violations perpetuated against Afghan citizens under Soviet occupation.[509] By refraining from operating in Afghanistan without permission from the Afghan authorities, the ICRC on the other hand appeared to prioritize its own neutrality over the humanitarian needs of the Afghan population. What is more, by refraining from operating within Afghan borders without government approval, the ICRC defied Nunan's analysis that while "the new Soviet global project destroyed states *within* borders; humanitarian actors *crossed* borders in order to challenge illiberal state functions altogether *(sic)*."[510]

The work of the ICRC was also different from MSF and from the SCA in other respects. First, as established earlier in this chapter, despite being located in neutral Switzerland, the ICRC does not have the governmental affiliation that the SCA has with Sweden.[511] At no point did the Swiss parliament equate the work of the ICRC with a "Swiss model," the way the Swedish *Riksdag* equated the SCA's success in the Ghazni province as a "Swedish model" in January of 1983.[512] In fact, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the ICRC differentiated staunchly between Swiss neutrality and its own neutrality and as subsequent chapters will show, this eventually allowed the ICRC to approach the Swiss authorities with explicit demands for assistance on the matter of prisoners of war.

Part of the reason why the ICRC both lacks affiliation with a particular government, why it insists on being neutral in an armed conflict and why it refuses to engage in cross-border humanitarian operations without the consent of the government concerned is that unlike the SCA and MSF, the ICRC has a unique mandate to protect and promote compliance with international humanitarian law among conflict parties. Its ethos therefore rests on a different assumption from that of either of these two organizations. Nunan's analysis rightfully indicates that the humanitarianism that these two organizations represented was no longer a form of "'politics among nations,' but politics in spite

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[509] Ibid., 143-144.
[510] Ibid., 120.
[511] Nunan, 'Graveyard of Development?, 222.
[512] Nunan, *Humanitarian Invasion*, 146.

of nations."[513] The ICRC, on the other hand, operated on the basis of the assumption that states were the principal actors responsible for the implementation of international humanitarian law and it therefore required their explicit cooperation for the provision of humanitarian aid. As subsequent chapters will show, working with prisoners of war was an aspect of the ICRC's work which rested implicitly on this assumption. Admittedly, the ICRC's approach to return to Afghanistan turned out to take much longer than the cross-border approach taken by MSF and the SCA, yet eventually, the ICRC did manage to return with the consent of the Afghan authorities.

In the meantime, cross-border operations of the type conducted by MSF and the SCA continued to remain difficult. Being illegal in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, this meant that in practice, NGOS not only had to defy but often to bribe police and government officials in order to be able to work.[514] What was more, they were also dangerous as a consequence of ongoing hostilities. In October and November of 1981, the Red Army began to crack down on NGO hospitals and after 1981, hospitals were regularly bombed in the *mujahideen*-controlled areas.[515] On 5 November, for instance, three Soviet helicopters descended onto the main health centre of the Panshjir Valley and whilst the medical staff managed to evacuate all of the patients, two Soviet fighter jets obliterated the buildings thirty minutes after the evacuation.[516]

Across Afghanistan, attacks such as these led to an exodus not only of the general population, but also of medical workers. At the time of the Soviet invasion, there had already been few doctors in Afghanistan's rural areas. According to estimates by the SCA, out of approximately 1'000 doctors who had been registered in Afghanistan in 1978, only 200 remained in 1985 and most of them worked in government-controlled areas.[517] The German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ)

[513] Ibid., 120.
[514] Attewell, '"From Factory to Field," 725.
[515] Sir Frederic Bennett, 'Exposé de Motifs,' n.d., E2023A#1998/212#439*, CH-BAR.
[516] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 220.
[517] Von Muralt, 'Reisebericht über Feldbesuch in Pakistan,' E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.

concluded that as a result most of the medical staff that operated in the *mujahideen*-controlled areas were actually foreigners.[518] Many were French, as the medical faculty at the University of Kabul had had a fairly high number of French teaching staff in medicine prior to the Soviet invasion.[519] In absence of a functioning medical system, however, the Swiss regional daily *Oltener Tagblatt* reported in 1984 that medical provision in Afghanistan was in a "catastrophic state."[520] Diseases such as tuberculosis, whooping cough and measles became widespread especially among children and the child mortality rate rose above forty percent.[521] What was more, the civilian population was exposed to the incessant hostilities between the Red Army and the Afghan army on one side and the *mujahideen* on the other.

In November of 1986, for instance, the prestigious Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, reported the story of a man named Chirin Mah'mad. Mah'mad was a 25-year-old teacher and father of five children. During the summer of 1985, the Soviet army had mined the border crossings of the Kunar Valley in Kunarha province. In an attempt to clear the *mujahideen* supply lines across the border of mines, an explosion tore off his cousin's foot. His brother tried to carry him to the nearest village in nearby Pakistan, but his cousin bled to death on the Afghan side of the border.[522] Mines such as these and air raids such as the one described above also prevented many farmers from cultivating their land and selling their produce.[523] This affected both the civilian population and the *mujahideen*, who relied heavily on food from the Afghan interior. What was more, both sides of the conflict strategically targeted the supply lines of the other, as Mah'mad's story showed. What his story also implicitly reveals is how blurry the lines between the *mujahideen* and the civilian population became

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[518] Bennett, 'Exposé de Motifs,' E2023A#1998/212#439*, CH-BAR; *FAZ*, 'Viele Afghanen ohne ärtztliche Hilfe: Nur wenige Ausländer versorgen Bevölkerung in befreiten Gebieten,' 9 January 1985, Press Collection, *Bibliotheca Afghanica* (CH-SBA), Bubendorf, Switzerland.
[519] Ibid.
[520] *Oltener Tagblatt*, 'Vier Monate im Land der Mujahidins: "OT" Gespräch mit Dr. Andreas Biedermann,' 5 June 1984, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[521] Ibid.
[522] Ulrich Schmid, *NZZ*, 'Unterwegs mit den afghanischen Mujahedin,' 28 November 1986, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[523] Bennett, 'Exposé de Motifs,' E2023A#1998/212#439*, CH-BAR.

over time and how difficult they became to tell apart. This particular issue has become an integral part of post-Cold War security studies, yet as the case of Afghanistan makes clear, instances of civilian participation in war and examples of the blurry divide between civilians, armed groups and official armed forces prevailed well before the end of the Cold War.

The permeability of this divide also had direct consequences for those taken prisoner. Under the prevailing conditions, civilians, resistance fighters, deserters and spies were difficult to tell apart. According to an investigation carried out by the Austrian professor Feilx Ermacora on behalf of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, dozens of thousands of political prisoners – many of them civilians – were being kept in Afghan jails by 1985.[524] Many were tortured.[525] Like the ICRC, however, Ermacora was barred from entering Afghan territory throughout the early 1980s. In order to nevertheless conduct his research on behalf of the UN, Ermacora turned to the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* in Switzerland, which ultimately also went on to play an important role in arranging Switzerland's mediatory mandate in Afghanistan during the early 1990s. Others, such as Walter Rueb of the German newspaper *Die Welt*, relied directly on contacts within Afghanistan itself for their reporting. In December of 1985, for instance, Rueb wrote that "In Kabul alone, the Afghan secret service, KHAD, had ten locations in which political prisoners were tortured, court-martialled and executed."[526] Since the April coup of 1978, he reckoned that there had been approximately 90'000 prisoners and 50'000 executions.[527] Students, teachers, professors, soldiers and military officers, but also physical labourers, peasants and farmers were among them and as many as 20'000, Rueb guessed, were incarcerated at *Pul-i-Charkhi* prison (see image 1) – a prison so large that American satellites could identify it from space.[528]

[524] Ibid.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Walter Rueb, *Die Welt*, '"Fünf Jahre erlitt ich die Hölle von Pole Charkhi": Das Schicksal eines politischen Häftlings in Afghanistan,' 27 December 1985, Press Collection, CH-SBA, author's translation from, "Allein in Kabul hat der afghanische Geheimdienst KHAD zehn Stellen, an denen politische Gefangene gefoltert und viele zum Tode verurteilt und erschossen werden."
[527] Ibid.
[528] Ibid.

This was the prison that the ICRC originally had access to, prior to its expulsion from Afghanistan in 1980. Unlike MSF and the SCA, having been expelled from the scene of the conflict itself, the ICRC had since turned its attention exclusively towards the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. It assumed responsibility for the provision of health care to ten refugee camps in Pakistan and deployed four mobile medical units, which rotated among these camps.[529] In March 1981, the Pakistani government transferred these responsibilities over to a series of government medical teams under the supervision of the UNHCR.[530] Freed of these responsibilities, the ICRC subsequently began to install a war surgery hospital in Peshawar, near the Afghan-Pakistani border.[531] Its presence there ultimately became important for Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan, for two reasons. First, because through its presence in Peshawar, the ICRC came into contact with a large number of *mujahideen* resistance groups who were based there as well – some of whom held prisoners of war. Second, because it created a substantial amount of goodwill amongst the Afghan population. According to Paul Bucherer of the *Bibliotheca Afghanica*, "Almost every family had someone in their family who had been treated by the ICRC either in the form of medical treatment or prosthetics."[532] By June 1981, the ICRC had received more than 1'500 war-wounded and performed over 3'500 operations under anaesthesia, most of which were amputations.[533] Like Chirin Mah'mad's cousin, whose story was reported in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the vast majority of these war-wounded were victims of mines. According to *Refugees Magazine*, the magazine of the UNHCR, what made these injuries particularly difficult to treat was the fact that in the absence of medical care in the Afghan border regions, most war-wounded first had to reach the Peshawar clinic in Pakistan.[534] Even if

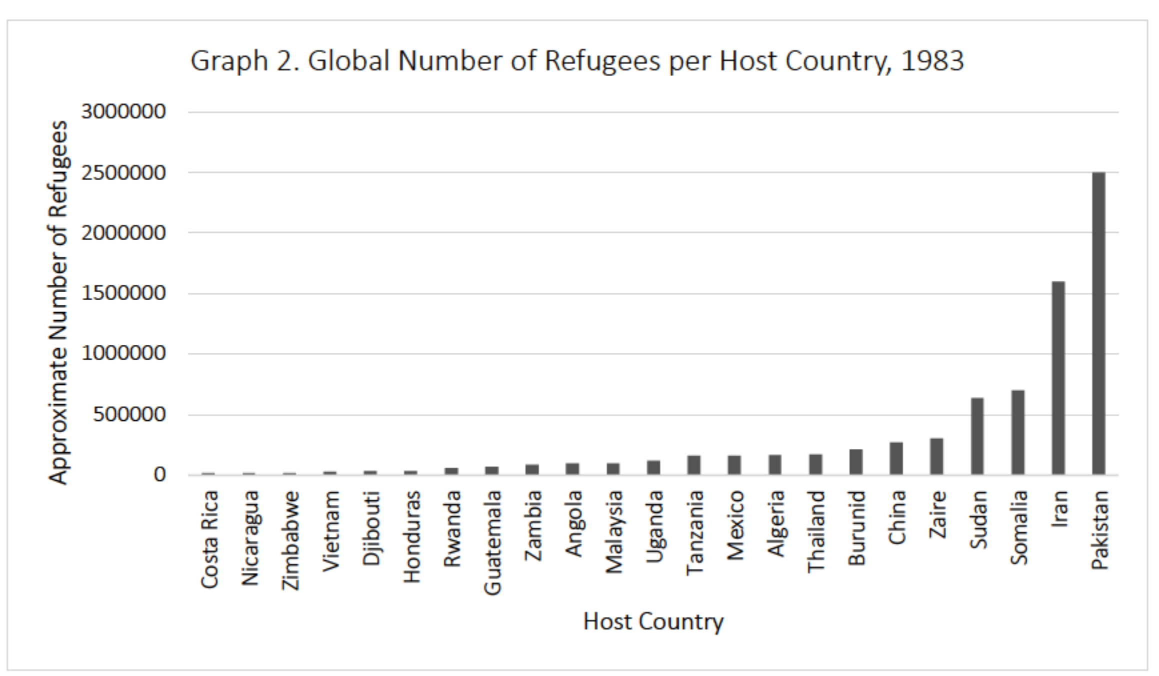
[529] ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[530] Ibid.; ICRC, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No. 7,' E2023A#1998/212#976*, CH-BAR.
[531] ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[532] Paul Bucherer, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 16 October 2018.
[533] *Refugees Magazine*, 'The ICRC Hospital at Peshawar,' January 1983, E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR.
[534] ICRC, 'Afghan Sitrep No. 1: Action en faveur des réfugiés Afghans au Pakistan,' 9 November 1981, E2010A#1995/313#2833*, CH-BAR.

motorized transport was available, this journey could take several days on account of the poor road infrastructure. As a result, injuries commonly became seriously infected and eventually required not only multiple surgical interventions but also amputations.[535] According to David Delapraz, the head of the ICRC delegation in Peshawar at the time, these conditions were abnormal even for a war zone, where on average, most wounded had access to medical facilities within about two hours.[536] In light of the ongoing violence, poor local medical infrastructure and the Karmal regime's expulsion of the ICRC from Afghanistan in 1980, that was not possible for most Afghan conflict victims.

Image 2. A boy, fitted with an upper-knee prothesis, doing walking exercises with the help of a Danish ICRC Orthopaedist[537]

[535] Ibid.
[536] N.a., 'The ICRC Hospital at Peshawar,' E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR.
[537] *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA.

Throughout this time, the refugee situation in Pakistan continued to deteriorate. By December of 1981, the total population of registered refugees in Pakistan had increased to a stunning 2.3 million. In December of 1982, it stood at 2.7 million.[538] While over-reporting and multiple-registration may have played a role in determining these figures, Pakistan had undeniably become host to the largest single refugee population in the world.[539] Iran, which hosted 1.6 million Afghan refugees at the time, ranked in second place. The following graph is adapted from a 1983 report by Susan Goodwillie, a consultant to the UNHCR. The report was prepared for a meeting of experts on global refugee aid and development on Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland, from 29-31 August 1983. It shows that combined, the Afghan refugee populations in Pakistan and Iran made up roughly 4.3 million. That was over half of the global refugee population of 7.7 million at the time and six times the size of the next-largest refugee population in Somalia.[540]




[538] Oikoumene, 'The Afghan Refugee Situation in Pakistan,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[539] Goodwillie, 'Refugees in the Developing World,' E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR.
[540] Ibid.

What was more, those at the conference at Mont Pèlerin remarked that the refugee situation in both countries was becoming increasingly permanent. According to Susan Goodwillie, there was a trend among governments that moved away from integrating refugees economically into their own societies. The main reason for this, as the graph above also shows, was that refugee populations became concentrated in developing countries, many of which lacked the economic means to generate income opportunities for refugees in the first place.[541] Pakistan, whose 88 million inhabitants earned a per capita income of only US$ 320 in 1982, was a case in point.[542] What was more, the Pakistani government openly opposed the permanent integration of Afghan refugees into Pakistani society.[543]

Yet the UNHCR drew an entirely different conclusion from this data. The concluding report of the Mont Pèlerin conference, written by Mohamed Sahnoun and J. Burke Knapp argued that, "What is needed… are development-oriented programmes which provide such opportunities for the refugees and some [sic] local population, including activities which create assets of continuing economic value to areas where refugees live."[544] Hence, instead of encouraging the Pakistani authorities to integrate the Afghan refugees, it launched a large-scale income-generation project for the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan in 1983. This so-called income-generating project was actually a pilot study for the global operations of the UNHCR.

Originally, Sudan, Somalia and Pakistan had all been considered for the project on account of their relatively dry climates and of their considerable refugee populations.[545] According to François-

[541] Ibid.
[542] Fritz Rudolf Staehelin, 'Pakistan: Contribution au financement de travaux préparatoires pour un projet de création d'emplois et de protection de l'environnement dans les régions occupées par les réfugiés afghans (Proposition No 200/83),' 5 October 1983, E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR.
[543] N.a., 'Projet-Pilote au Pakistan, mis au pied par la Banque Mondials: Autosuffisance des Réfugiés,' 3 January 1983, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[544] Mohamed Sahnoun and J. Burke Knapp, 'Report: Meeting of Experts on Refugee Aid and Development, Mont Pèlerin, Switzerland,' 29 – 31 August 1983, E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR.
[545] N.a., 'Projet-Pilote au Pakistan,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.

Charles Pictet, the permanent Swiss observer to the United Nations in Geneva, the UNHCR chose Pakistan for three reasons. First, refugees in Pakistan were free to travel and free to work. Second, Pakistan and the UNHCR had worked relatively well together up until this point yet, third, the government had been opposed to formally integrating the Afghan refugee population itself.[546] The selling pitch that the UNHCR therefore proposed to the Pakistani government was that if the Afghan refugees could earn higher incomes, they could contribute to the economic development of the areas in which they were living, with a view to eventually returning home.[547] The money for this was to come from the UNHCR, and the beneficiaries would be the refugees, as well as their host communities.

The original plan was to employ approximately 12’000 persons for a period of two to three years.[548] The projects that they worked on included reforestation, road reparation works and irrigation system repairs. This was because especially during the early years of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, many refugees had brought their livestock with them to Pakistan. Together with the large quantities of humanitarian aid, which were transported into the refugee regions of Baluchistan and the NWFP on a daily basis, this gave rise to considerable infrastructural and environmental degradation.[549] Together with the UNHCR and the World Bank, the Pakistani government sought to rectify this damage, while, at the same time distributing an annual US$ 141 per person in exchange.[550] Considering that the annual income per capita in Pakistan was US$ 320 at the time, that was a considerable sum.[551] As will be discussed further on, this also eventually led to friction between the refugees and the local population.

[546] Ibid.
[547] UNHCR, ‘Pakistan: Income Generating Project for Refugee Areas – Project Completion Report,’ August 1989, E2025A#2002/145#2460*, CH-BAR.
[548] N.a., ‘Projet-Pilote au Pakistan,’ E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[549] Staehelin, ‘Pakistan: Contribution au financement,’ E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR; UNHCR, ‘Pakistan: Income Generating Project,’ E2025A#2002/145#2460*, CH-BAR.
[550] N.a., ‘Projet-Pilote au Pakistan,’ E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.; Staehelin, ‘Pakistan: Contribution au financement,’ E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR; UNHCR, ‘Pakistan: Income Generating Project,’ E2025A#2002/145#2460*, CH-BAR.
[551] Staehelin, ‘Pakistan: Contribution au financement,’ E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR; UNHCR, ‘Pakistan: Income Generating Project,’ E2025A#2002/145#2460*, CH-BAR.

The Swiss government initially pledged CHF 700'000 for the preparatory stage of the project in 1983 and raised its contribution to a substantial CHF 4.3 million the following year.[552] According to the Federal Council, by 1984, the Swiss government had contributed over CHF 7 million to humanitarian aid for Afghan refugees.[553] This sum was considerable, in keeping with the scale of the Afghan humanitarian crisis, and it took up a substantial amount of Switzerland's increasing foreign aid budget at the time. In 1984, the Federal Council allocated CHF 8.8 million to humanitarian aid overall, a figure which rose to CHF 12.8 million in 1985.[554] Humanitarian aid to Afghanistan included both financial and material donations such as blankets, tents and milk powder, as well as the dispatch of multiple volunteers from the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps, as displayed in table 1 below.[555] According to table 1, Switzerland's contribution to the UNHCR/ World Bank income-generating project was the Swiss government's most sizeable, as well as gradually increasing contribution towards the Afghan humanitarian crisis. There were also substantial contributions to NGOs such as *Enfants du Monde* and *Entraide Protestante*, as well as to the ICRC and to the Swiss Red Cross Society.

Table 1. Swiss Humanitarian Aid (in CHF) to Refugees in Pakistan, 1980 to December 1984

| Annual Total | Recipient Organization | Size of Donation |
|---|---|---|
| 1980: 1'333'000 | UNHCR | 236'000 (blankets, tents, milk powder, cash) |
| | *Enfants du Monde* | 100'000 (cash) |
| | World Food Programme | 381'000 (milk powder) |
| | Swiss Embassy Islamabad | 50'000 (to purchase tents) |
| | Swiss Disaster Relief Corps | 116'000 (World Food Programme logistics) |
| 1981: 2'223'000 | UNHCR | 400'000 (cash) |

[552] N.a., 'Aide Suisse en Faveur des Refugiés Afghans au Pakistan,' 9 February 1984, E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR.
[553] Longet *(sic)*, '84.930 I Longet – Lage in Afghanistan (14. Dezember 1984),' 14 December 1984, E2023A#1998/212#2473*, CH-BAR.
[554] N.a., '3. Öffentliche Entwicklungshilfe,' *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik* 6(1986), 339.
[555] N.a., 'Aide Suisse en Faveur des Refugiés Afghans au Pakistan,' E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | World Food Programme | 787'000 (flour) |
| | | 150'000 (cash) |
| | | 785’000 (milk powder) |
| | Swiss Disaster Relief Corps | 72'000 (World Food Programme logistics) |
| 1982: 2’126'000 | ICRC | 200'000 (cash) |
| | Swiss Embassy Islamabad | 65’000 (to purchase tents) |
| | *Enfants du Monde* | 91'000 (cash) |
| | *Entraide Protestante* | 100'000 (tents, medicines, blankets, clothes) |
| | UNHCR | 800'000 (cash) |
| | World Food Programme | 770'000 (milk powder) |
| 1983: 1’511'000 | Swiss Red Cross Society | 300'000 (cash) |
| | Swiss Embassy Islamabad | 11’000 (to purchase medicine) |
| | UNHCR | 500'000 (cash) |
| | UNHCR/ World Bank | 700'000 (income-generating project) |
| 1984: 4’300’000 | UNHCR/ World Bank | 4’300’000 (income-generating project) |
| | World Food Programme | Food aid planned but not recorded |

Humanitarian aid to Iran, on the other hand, never reached comparable levels to those of Pakistan. The humanitarian crisis in Iran received much less coverage in the global press, because the revolutionary regime of Ayatollah Khomeini distrusted foreign journalists.[556] The *Schweizerische Ärtztezeitung* published an editorial on the subject in January of 1985, lamenting that, “Information in Europe appears to be inversely proportional to the scale of the catastrophe.”[557] Prior to the Soviet invasion, there were already up to 600’000 Afghan workers in Iran, yet after 1979, hundreds of

[556] N.a., ‘Islamic Republic of Iran: Unnoticed Asylum Country,’ *Refugees*, November 1985, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[557] *Schweizerishe Ärtztezeitung*, ‘Medizinische Hilfe im Inneren Afghanistans,’ 9 January 1985, Press Collection CH-SBA, author’s translation from, “Information in Europa scheint umgekehrt proportional zum Ausmass dieser Katastrophe zu sein.”

thousands of Afghan refugees fled to Iran as well.[558] Unlike in Pakistan, the Afghan refugee population in Iran spread out across the entire country.[559] The cities of Birjand in the East and Zabol, across the border from Afghanistan, had perhaps the largest concentrations of Afghan refugees next to Mashhad in the North-East.[560] In Mashhad, there was an entire Afghan neighbourhood called Golshahr, which housed approximately 250'000 of the 1.2 million inhabitants of the town.[561] Yet despite the growing number of Afghan refugees on its territory, the Iranian government initially blocked interference by other states and external NGOs.[562] Since coming to power in the Iranian Revolution of early 1979, the government of Ayatollah Khomeini had anticipated foreign interference in its domestic affairs and viewed the United Nations with suspicion.[563] Only by 1983 was the UNHCR able to conduct a visit to Mashhad for the first time, followed by a second visit six months later.[564] It opened its first office in Iran in 1984, towards whose mission Switzerland initially contributed CHF 300'000.[565]

Another aspect, which appeared both lost on the newspaper-reading public around the globe, as well as the UNHCR donor countries, was this fact that the lines between refugees and resistance fighters was highly permeable in Iran, as it was elsewhere. According to Heiner Hug of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the government of Iran in fact supported several Shi'ite Afghan resistance groups. Most prominent among them were *Nasr* and *Shura*, both Islamic fundamentalist resistance groups.[566] According to an article Hug wrote in January 1987, Iranian military officers at times crossed

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[558] Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 64.
[559] N.a., 'Islamic Republic of Iran,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[560] Heiner Hug, *NZZ*, 'Khomeinisierung afghanischer Flüchtlinge in Iran: Schwindende Mittel für die Betreuung in den Auffanglagern,' 21 January 1987, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[561] N.a., 'Islamic Republic of Iran,' E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[562] Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries,* 45.
[563] Elie, 'The UNHCR and the Cold War,' https://graduateinstitute.ch//sites/default/files/2018-12/UNHCR_and_CW_Work-P.pdf; Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries,* 45.
[564] Girardet, *Afghaistan,* 209.
[565] Longet, '84.930 I Longet – Lage in Afghanistan,' E2023A#1998/212#2473*, CH-BAR.
[566] *NZZ*, 'Aggressive iranische Afghanistanpolitik: Einflussnahme auf die schiitischen Volksteile,' 2 March 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

the border into Afghanistan to coordinate *mujahideen* guerrilla attacks.[567] Many Shi'ite *mujahideen* spent several months of the year with their families in Iranian refugee camps, leaving their weapons at resistance party headquarters near the Afghan border in return for a receipt.[568] The Iranian government spent considerably less effort on Afghan resistance groups than Pakistan did, however, mainly because it was itself involved in a large-scale conflict with Iraq from 1980 to 1988.[569] As a result, the Iranian regime could neither afford to entertain large numbers of Afghan refugees on its territory, nor to endure internal disturbances on account of their presence. Had the Iranian government been less absorbed in the aftermath of its revolutionary takeover of 1979 and the hostilities with Iraq from 1980 to 1988, Iran might have been a more active supporter of the Afghan *mujahideen*.

Compared to the Iranian authorities, the Pakistani authorities had much less control over the *mujahideen* parties that were based on its territory. Consequently, tensions gradually grew between refugees, *mujahideen* fighters and the local population in Pakistan. Originally, most observers had been impressed by the hospitality with which local Pakistanis had welcomed the Afghan refugees into their midst. After all, they shared not only a common religion, but a common ethnic Pushtun background.[570] Yet by 1986, after almost six years of conflict in Afghanistan, tents had given way to permanent compounds and houses. Many male refugees had taken up work as shopkeepers, restaurateurs and construction workers.[571] What was more, refugees continued to receive aid rations from the UNHCR and many also supplemented their income through the UNHCR income-generating project.[572] This allowed them to work for less and to undercut the local Pakistani workforce.[573] At the beginning of the 1980s, this problem had been mitigated by the fact many

[567] Hug, 'Khomeinisierung afghanischer Flüchtlinge in Iran,' Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[568] Ibid.
[569] *NZZ*, 'Aggressive iranische Afghanistanpolitik,' Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[570] *Refugees*, 'The largest of all refugee populations,' February 1986, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[571] Luciano Lavizzari, 'Note on a visit to Baluchistan,' 23 March 1986, E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.
[572] Ibid.
[573] Noa Vera Zanoli, 'Report on Social Aspects,' 27 December 1986, E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.

Pakistani workers had been employed in the Persian Gulf region. Towards the mid-1980s, however, many returned in the wake of a gradual depression that plagued the Gulf economies.[574] The combination of these factors strained the relationship between the Afghan refugees and their hosts. There were a number of instances of armed violence throughout 1986. Observers reported bomb explosions, kidnappings and feuds amongst *mujahideen* groups in the border regions during the spring of 1986.[575] After a shooting at a bus station in Quetta, the authorities eventually imposed a curfew on the town in October.[576] That same month, a series of bomb blasts shook the NWFP in various locations.[577]

According to one observer, however, locals did not dare to protest openly, because unlike in Iran most Afghans were "heavily armed" and unchecked by the Pakistani authorities.[578] In fact, most refugees were either illiterate or at times unfamiliar with the dialects spoken in their Pakistani host provinces.[579] In exchange for offering assistance during the registration process with the Pakistani authorities, many *mujahideen* therefore demanded that new male arrivals join their ranks. In this way, successful recruiters also increased their relative strength vis-à-vis other groups of *mujahideen*.[580] Rudiger Schöch has argued that the government of Pakistan actively encouraged this process and made aid available only to those refugees whose families had become affiliated with one of the seven officially recognized *mujahideen* parties in Pakistan.[581] In the long term, this may have strengthened those parties that the Pakistani government preferred, but it blurred the lines between refugees and *mujahideen* even more and it meant that humanitarian aid intended for refugees sometimes wound up in the hands of the *mujahideen*.

[574] Ibid.
[575] Lavizzari, 'Note on a visit to Baluchistan,' E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.
[576] Zanoli, 'Report on Social Aspects,' E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Lavizzari, 'Note on a visit to Baluchistan,' E2025A#1997/200#1584*, CH-BAR.
[579] N.a., 'Afghanische Asylanten,' 21 January 1987, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR.
[580] Ibid.
[581] Schöch, 'Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1980s,' 9.

The UNHCR was aware of this. According to its *Report on Protection Activities in Pakistan, 1982-1983*:

> Even though the UNHCR confines its humanitarian programme to persons of its concern, there is ample evidence that the government as the operational partner is permitting, by acts of commission or omission, humanitarian assistance to flow into the hands of freedom fighters participating in the "Holy Jihad".[582]

This way according to the magazine *Réfugiés*, almost every refugee came to have "a father or a son fighting on the other side of the border."[583] This cycle also perpetuated the armed struggle between the *mujahideen* and the Soviet Union and it created a direct link between this violence, its victims and the international aid effort.

Surprisingly, this subject finds little coverage in Swiss diplomatic cables from the period. Neatly documented figures on aid spending are much more common. In fact, over the course of the 1980s, the Federal Council maintained an increasing level of humanitarian aid to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan. This trend is partially visible in table 1 above. In October of 1987, Switzerland transferred CHF 10 million to the UNHCR for the second phase of its income-generating project in Pakistan.[584] On the other hand, the FDFA repeatedly declined direct requests for humanitarian aid from the *mujahideen* themselves.[585] In April of 1983 for instance, Burhannudin Rabbani, the leader of the *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami*, had paid a visit to Switzerland as part of a fundraising tour through Europe and

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[582] Quoted in Rüdiger Schöch, 'UNHCR and the Afghan Refugees in the Early 1980s: Between Humanitarian Action and Cold War Politics,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27(2008), 53.
[583] N.a., *Réfugiés*, 'Au Baloutchistan: Un réfugié pour sept inhabitants,' May 1986, E4280A#1998/296#1306*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "ont tous un père ou un fils combattant de l'autre côté de la frontière."
[584] N.a., 'Beitrag vom Fr. 10 Mio für die zweite Phase des Weltbank/ UNHCR Projekts "Arbeitsbeschaffung für afghanische Flüchtlinge und Lokalbevölkerung in Pakistan,"' 21 October 1987, E4010A#1994/344#885*, CH-BAR.
[585] R. Vieux (Chef du protocole et d'information, République et canton de Genève), 'Correspondence to A. Hugentobler (Division politique II, Département fédéral des affaires étrangères),' 16 March 1983, E2010A#1995/313#2833*, CH-BAR.

the United States. He received no funding from the Swiss at the time.[586] However, he returned to Switzerland repeatedly in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and especially during the initial stages of the Swiss mediation attempt in Afghanistan in 1990. Rabbani also played an important role as a facilitator of Switzerland's protective power mandate for Soviet POWs. This is the subject towards which this this thesis will turn next, as it represents a departure from Switzerland's purely humanitarian role in the Afghan crisis and the beginning of Switzerland's provision of good offices in Afghanistan.

The current chapter has showcased the parameters that enabled this transition. Initially, the Swiss authorities dispatched material aid, financial support through NGOs, the ICRC and the UNHCR, as well as disaster relief specialists to the conflict region. However, there were a number of problems associated with the provision of humanitarian aid. One was the blurry divide between refugees and resistance fighters. As a result, humanitarian aid often unintentionally found its way to one of the conflict parties. Another was that during the initial stages of the Soviet occupation, Afghanistan remained off-limits to non-governmental and intergovernmental aid organizations. Only some were willing to operate in Afghanistan clandestinely. The Swiss authorities initially showed little concern for either of these issues.

The ICRC, on the other hand, was acutely aware of the latter, having been expelled from Afghanistan in 1980 and having established a war surgery in Peshawar, close to the Afghan-Pakistani border in 1981. As chapter five will show, its presence in Peshawar allowed the ICRC to come into contact with some of the Islamic resistance parties who were based there. It also made the ICRC aware of another humanitarian issue that the present chapter has hitherto mentioned only in passing, namely that of prisoners of war (POWs). The *mujahideen* were rumoured not to take prisoners, but as the following chapter will show, as a result of its presence in Peshawar, the ICRC found out that they occasionally

[586] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note d'entretien: Entrevue avec le Professeur Rabbani,' 19 April 1983, E2010A#1995/313#2833*, CH-BAR.

did. The ICRC delegates in Peshawar were swift to recognize this fact as an opportunity. According to the 1949 Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, POWs could be interned in a neutral third country for the duration of a conflict. If the ICRC were able to offer such an arrangement to the Soviet and the Afghan authorities, it might be able to negotiate its own return to the Afghan interior. As the following chapter will show, this was a highly unorthodox idea, but in the spring of 1982, having convinced the Soviet Union of its merits, the ICRC approached the Swiss government to host these prisoners as a gesture of its good offices.

# Chapter 5: The ICRC and the Transfer of Soviet POWs to Switzerland, 1982-1986

In asking the Swiss authorities to host Soviet POWs from Afghanistan, the ICRC asked for good offices that it could not itself perform. In other words, here was an example of close cooperation between the ICRC and the Swiss government, which also showed that both institutions actually operated independently of each other. What is more, it was a further instance where the Swiss did not pro-actively seek out an opportunity to provide good offices. The present chapter will show that the FDFA agreed almost immediately, despite the fact that the proposed arrangement was unprecedented and chances of its success were uncertain. It will also show that in the absence of a universally recognized legal framework among the parties to the prisoner transfer, there occurred a number of mishaps along the way. Arguably, the transfer did in the end contribute to the return of the ICRC to Afghanistan, yet not for the reasons that might be expected. The transfer ultimately had the effect that for the first time, many *mujahideen* became aware not only of Switzerland as a country, but also of its reputation for neutrality and good offices. This mattered, because at around the same time as the prisoner transfer to Switzerland began, namely in the late spring and early summer of 1982, the UN began to conduct a series of diplomatic talks on the Afghan crisis between the Soviet-installed Afghan regime of Babrak Karmal and the government of Pakistan.

As subsequent chapters of this thesis will discuss, these talks took place in Geneva, yet they did not include the Swiss authorities. Neither – to the detriment of the so-called Geneva Accords of 1988, which eventually mandated the Soviet withdrawal of 1989 – did they include the *mujahideen* or the Soviet Union, despite the fact that they were the main conflict parties. Both Switzerland’s continued absence from the UN as well as its involvement in the ICRC’s return to Afghanistan ultimately contributed to the decision of the *mujahideen* to ask for Swiss mediation in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal of 1989. The purpose of the present chapter therefore is to set out the background for these later developments and to recount how the Swiss authorities transitioned from their role as a provider of humanitarian aid to a provider of good offices. To do this, it will first define what is

commonly meant by the term prisoner of war (POW) and how POWs came to fall within the remit of the ICRC's mandate. It will then discuss how Switzerland was chosen as a neutral host state for these prisoners and how the Swiss press and the public reacted to their presence.

Prisoners of war are a social construct within international humanitarian law. They are not imprisoned because they are criminals who broke the law. Strictly speaking, they are not political prisoners either, although these two categories at times overlap. Rather, prisoners of war are armed combatants, who are imprisoned in accordance with the law governing armed conflict. Imprisonment prevents them from further engaging in hostilities, but if it is to occur within the remit of the law, it must also safeguard their basic human rights.[587] POWs, as they are known, may be detained, but they may not be harmed and must be humanely treated throughout their internment.[588] In practice, this is often difficult to ensure, as international law is inherently political both in the way it is made and in the way it is enforced. Monitoring compliance with international humanitarian law and reminding conflict parties of its existence is one of the principal tasks of the ICRC and as this chapter will show, this task is itself paradoxically a political, as well as a legal one.[589] At times, the ICRC simply has to make compromises in pursuit of its principles and for this, it has received a lot of criticism in the past.

As discussed in chapter four, there was evidence that in Afghanistan, prisoners' rights were systematically violated. The Afghan secret service, the KHAD, commonly captured resistance fighters and either executed, tortured them, or threw them into jail. Few *mujahideen* groups had prisons of their own, because their guerrilla tactics required a high degree of mobility and because their supply lines both from the Afghan interior and from their foreign bases were under incessant attack from

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[587] Silvia Sanna, 'Part II Specific Issues and Regimes, B Geneva Convention III, Ch.48 Treatment of Prisoners of War,' in *The 1949 Geneva Conventions: A Commentary*, edited by Andrew Clapham, Paola Gaeta and Marco Sassòli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.1093/law/9780199675449.001.0001.
[588] Ibid.
[589] ICRC, 'Statutes of the ICRC,' accessed 16 June 2020, https://www.icrc.org/en/document/statutes-international-committee-red-cross-0.

the Soviet and Afghan armies.[590] As a result, they gained a reputation for ruthlessly shooting POWs on the spot, which was also a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions. Because of this, the Afghan crisis became a major issue for the ICRC. Part of its mission, after all, was to promote respect for international humanitarian law. The problem for the ICRC was that without access to Afghan territory, it was impossible to verify these conditions among the conflict parties.

The literature on this issue remains scarce to this day. According to Charlotte Carr-Gregg, in an attempt to amend the situation, the ICRC initially dispatched a man named Bernard Grunenfeld, a former delegate to Cambodia and Iran, to Pakistan to meet with the *mujahideen*.[591] Carr-Gregg writes that his aim was to “negotiate the release of Soviet prisoners” from amongst the *mujahideen* and in return, to “gain the cooperation of the *mujahideen* to facilitate access for their wounded and sick to the ICRC-run hospitals near the Pakistani border.”[592] New archival materials from the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne, however, give reason to revise this existing narrative, which in reality was more complex. The remainder of this chapter describes how this transfer came about and it analyses the significance of the POW issue in terms of Switzerland’s foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, as well as in terms of its policy of Neutrality and Solidarity more generally.

On 11 March 1980, Michel Zufferey of the ICRC received word from Agence France Presse that instead of having executed them on the spot, Burhanuddin Rabbani’s *Jam’iyyat-e-Islami* had captured six Soviet soldiers the previous day.[593] Two days later, however, Zufferey received word that the prisoners had been killed in a bombardment.[594] Almost a year later, on 16 February 1981, the Pakistani government similarly approached the ICRC with news of a Soviet soldier, who had been captured by the *mujahideen* on 2 January near Ghazni, south-west of Kabul. His name was Konstantin

[590] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 226.
[591] Carr-Gregg, ‘An Extension of Humanitarian International Law,’ 99.
[592] Ibid.
[593] Michel Zufferey , ‘Pour comité de Zuffrey Islamabad,’ 12 March 1980, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*CH-BAR.
[594] Ibid.

Anatoliwich Zaiken and he was handed over directly to the Soviet Consulate General in Karachi.[595] Internal memoranda from the FDFA conclude that these developments inspired the ICRC to suggest the transfer of Soviet prisoners of war to a neutral country.[596] The idea was that it would give the *mujahideen* an incentive to keep their prisoners of war alive and to trade them against *mujahideen* captives held in Afghanistan.[597] Yet the idea received no response at first.

This changed in October of 1981, when *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis* captured Michael Akhrimof, a Soviet industrial consultant to the Afghan regime whose expertise was in land mines.[598] Arguably fearful of this expert remaining in the hands of the *mujahideen*, the Soviet authorities attempted to deal with them directly. Yet their leader, Mawlawi Yunis Khalis, rebuffed their advances and made it known that he would only treat with the ICRC.[599] In response to this, the Soviet Union agreed to open a channel of communication on the subject of prisoners of war with the ICRC both through its Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva and its embassy in Islamabad.[600] From 13-22 January 1982, five months prior to the start of the UN-mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan, the ICRC and the Soviet Union jointly produced a memorandum of understanding on prisoners of war. The memorandum repeated the ICRC's initial proposal to transfer Soviet prisoners from Afghanistan to a neutral country.[601] Initially, it suggested India for this purpose. In exchange, the ICRC demanded permission to return to Afghanistan to provide humanitarian aid both to the civilian population and to the *mujahideen* prisoners captured by the Soviet forces and the Afghan regime.

[595] Jean Courvoisier, 'Rapport de visite à un soldat soviétique "interné" au Pakistan,' 16 February 1981, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.
[596] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan – Entretien avec une délégation du CICR,' 11 May 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[597] Paul Stauffer, 'Correspondence to Politische Abteilung II,' 23 February 1981, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.
[598] Bringolf *(sic),* 'Correspondence to De Courten,' 5 October 1981, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR; ICRC archival documents diverge on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 March 2017.
[599] Ibid.
[600] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[601] ICRC, 'Protocole d'Entente donnant suite aux entretiens qui ont eu lieu à la mission permanente de l'URSS à Genève du 13 au 22 Janvier 1982,' 22 January 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.

The *mujahideen* were neither represented in these discussions nor signatories to the memorandum, but their consent was important because they were the ones who held the Soviet prisoners captive. A substantial number of them agreed with most of the terms of the memorandum, but not with all of them. The most important group to disagree was *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis*, the group that detained Akhrimof.[602] Their main grievance was that the neutral state to which prisoners would be transferred was India. Despite being a non-aligned state, India had refrained from criticizing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the UN and in fact received over 70 percent of its arms imports from the Soviet Union.[603] As such, it was politically unacceptable to the *mujahideen* and they suggested Pakistan instead.[604] The Soviet Union then rejected this option on account of the fact that Pakistan already harboured the *mujahideen* on its territory.[605] According to the records of the Swiss foreign ministry, the FDFA, it was Burhanuddin Rabbani of the *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* who finally suggested Switzerland on account of its reputation for permanent neutrality.[606]

On 10 May 1982, the ICRC contacted the FDFA about the Soviet-ICRC memorandum of understanding and of the *mujahideen* proposal to involve Switzerland.[607] Two days later, the FDFA informed the Federal Council and from 12-14 May, the ICRC and Edouard Brunner – who had in the meantime advanced to head of the Directorate for International Organizations at the FDFA – exchanged a series of letters to finalize the terms of Switzerland's role.[608] Brunner was particularly adamant to stress in these letters that Switzerland had not actually been party to the memorandum

[602] Ibid.
[603] W. Howard Wriggins, 'Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan,' *Pacific Affairs* 57(1984), 289.
[604] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[605] Ibid.; Edouard Brunner, 'Correspondence to unknown,' 2 June 1982, E2210.5#1996/373#21*, CH-BAR.
[606] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Afghanistan – Professeur Rabbani,' 19 April 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[607] Jean De Courten, 'Correspondence to Kirile L. Keline, Conseiller,' 11 May 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[608] Pierre Aubert, 'Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' 18 May 1982, J1.301#2002/197#547*, CH-BAR.

of 22 January, but that if the Soviet Union were to cover the costs of the internment, the Swiss government would carry it out as a demonstration of its good offices. It was agreed that the Swiss government would be responsible for the terms and the location of the internment and that the internment itself ought to be capped at a maximum of two years – a condition that arose from ICRC negotiations with various *mujahideen* groups.[609] As will be discussed further on, this final condition eventually gave rise to considerable debate in the press once the arrangement was made public.[610]

Overall, the Swiss authorities were incredibly fast in their decision to provide their good offices in this context. On 17 May, the FDFA, the Soviet Union and the ICRC informally agreed on the conditions above at a tripartite meeting in Geneva and on 19 May, the Federal Council approved the operation.[611] In other words, nine days passed from the ICRC's initial request to the Federal Council's approval. Moreover, the relevant documents at the Swiss Federal Archives do not appear to document any substantial discussion on the merits and applicability of Raymond Probst's 1958 criteria on the provision of good offices. This is particularly puzzling in light of the fact that Probst had since advanced to the position of Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs. Finally, unlike during Switzerland's initial response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in January 1980, neither parliament nor any of the parliamentary committees on national security or foreign affairs were involved in this process. Policy was determined at the executive and departmental level and parliament was only consulted in the aftermath. As a result, unlike back in 1980, there also ended up being considerable disagreement between parliament and the FDFA over the way that the operation was carried out.

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[609] N.a., 'No Title,' 17 September 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR; Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR; ICRC archival documents arguably diverge somewhat on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 March 2017.
[610] Ibid.
[611] Conseil Fédéral, 'Confidentiel: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' 19 May 1982, E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR.

There were also those who expressed doubt about the feasibility of the operation. Edouard Brunner, for instance, foresaw that both parliament and the public would eventually take issue with the informality of the arrangement, especially with the element of repatriation after two years. "We are aware of the difficulties that can arise for Switzerland from this operation," he wrote at the time, "especially if the Soviet transferees no longer agree to be repatriated at the end of their internment."[612] At the heart of this problem was the fact the arrangement was a political, rather than a legal one, and there were a number of problems associated with this. First of all, the memorandum of understanding between the Soviet Union and the ICRC was not legally binding. Second, it did not include either the Swiss government or the *mujahideen*. Third, according to the ICRC, the operation complied with Article 111 of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, which stipulated that it was permissible to move prisoners of war to a neutral country for their internment. However, the convention only applies to conflicts between states and the Soviet Union continued to deny its invasion of Afghanistan and thereby, the applicability of the convention. Instead, the Politburo insisted that its involvement in Afghanistan was in accordance with the 1978 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) and at the behest of the Afghan government, as well as in defence against unspecified foreign interference.

In order to get around this, the parties to the transfer operation agreed to apply the Geneva Convention only de facto rather than de jure – "by analogy" as the Swiss authorities called it.[613] This way, the prisoner transfer could go ahead during the spring of 1982, but it left both the issues of enforcement and the issue of repatriation unresolved. This was compounded by the fact that the Geneva Convention did not mandate for a limited internment period of two years. Rather, according to Article 118 of the convention, prisoners should be "released and repatriated without delay after

[612] Brunner, 'Correspondence to unknown,' E2210.5#1996/373#21*, CH-BAR.
[613] Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.

the cessation of active hostilities."[614] Whilst a proposal to make an exception to this article had been discussed at the Geneva Conference of 1949, it was not adopted.[615] It became an issue again after the Korean War, when in 1953, many North Korean prisoners refused to be repatriated. Yet at the time the Soviet Union vetoed any exceptions to the existing legal framework.[616]

Another reason why these problems were not addressed and why the operation was initiated so swiftly may have been because the ICRC was keen to return to Afghanistan as soon as possible. Its eagerness to return is paradoxically something for which it has also received criticism at the time.[617] There are those who argue that the ICRC has compromised its principles in the process.[618] By May of 1982, the ICRC knew of six Soviet soldiers detained by the *mujahideen*.[619] Out of these, one soldier chose to stay in Afghanistan and the *mujahideen* made the transfer of two dependent on the successful resumption of the ICRC's activities in Kabul.[620] This meant that only three prisoners could be transferred, but the ICRC chose to go ahead nevertheless. All three prisoners were held by a faction of *Hezb-i-Islami* and on 27 May, they were handed over to the ICRC.[621] Their names were Valeri Didienko, Yuri Povarnitsin and Viktor Sintshuk.[622] As per the ICRC's standard procedure, each of them was able to speak to an ICRC delegate in confidence and each was asked whether they agreed to be transferred to Switzerland for a two-year internment period after which they would be repatriated to the Soviet Union. According to ICRC records held at the Swiss Federal Archives in

[614] N.a., 'Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War,' 12 August 1949, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c8.html; ICRC, 'Memorandum sur l'internement en pays neutre,' 7 May 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[615] D.H. Anderson, 'Correspondence to Miss Bevan SAD,' 10 February 1984, FCO 37/3447, UK-TNA.
[616] Ibid.
[617] N.a., 'Internement de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturés en Afghanistan par les mouvements de la résistance afghane,' 18 May 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[618] Ibid.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid.
[621] ICRC archival documents diverge on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 March 2017.
[622] Ibid.; Please note that in the absence of the original Cyrillic spelling of these prisoners' names being available to this research project, it has adapted the spelling contained in the original documents held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne. As such, however, the spelling of the names of the POWs discussed in this thesis may not be consistent with international transliteration standards.

Berne, all three agreed and were thus swiftly taken to Karachi and onto a direct Swissair flight bound for Zurich-Kloten airport, where they arrived at 7:01 on the morning on 28 May.[623]

The Swiss press was initially caught off-guard by the ICRC's half-page matter-of-fact press statement, which announced their arrival and the purpose of their highly-regulated stay. The conservative weekly *Weltwoche* declared itself simply "baffled," but reckoned that "what may appear very simple to a layperson is in reality a brave diplomatic act of the finest quality."[625] What made it such was that the ICRC managed to persuade both the Soviet Union and the *mujahideen* to participate despite the fact that the former continued to deny its occupation of Afghanistan and the latter hardly ever took

[623] Brunner, 'Correspondence to unknown,' E2210.5#1996/373#21*, CH-BAR.
[624] *Schweizer Illustrierte*, '"Die Burschen erwartet Zuhause der Tod!"' *(sic)*, 2 March 1984, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.
[625] *Weltwoche*,' Irgendwo in der Schweiz: Sowjetarmisten aus Afghanistan in helvetischem Gewahrsam,' 2 June 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Was Laien höchst simpel erscheint, ist in Wirklichkeit ein diplomatischer Bravourakt erster Qualität."

prisoners prior this.[626] What was more, this was before the UN-mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan had even begun. Ueli Schmid of the daily *Berner Zeitung* similarly commended the operation as "a world premiere and a diplomatic masterpiece by the ICRC."[627] According to Charlotte Carr-Gregg, the ICRC had previously played the role of an intermediary during the transfer of Portuguese prisoners from Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau to Tanzania, Senegal, Zaire and Guinea.[628] Edouard Girardet also describes the role of the ICRC in managing a limited exchange of prisoners during the Vietnam war.[629] Yet in the same vein, Girardet recognizes that in the Soviet-Afghan case, "for the first time in its history, and in the history of any humanitarian institution, the organization has been faced with a totally new concept of prisoner responsibility, namely the proxy internment of conventional (Soviet) POWs captured by (Afghan) guerrillas" *(sic)*.[630]

There were also negative reactions to the arrival of the Soviet prisoners, both in the press and from private citizens. The day following the arrival of Valeri Didienko, Yuri Povarnitsin and Viktor Sintshuk in Zurich, the FDFA received an angry letter signed J. Hauenstein. "I think it is an impertinence towards the entire Swiss people," Hauenstein wrote, "that Switzerland will take in and care for soldiers of a foreign country, who suppress an entire nation and who have been taken prisoner there."[631] The daily newspaper *Der Bund* published a similar editorial on 10 June, which argued that, "Sadly many can no longer distinguish between those who need our help and those who persecute them."[632] What was more, as the *Weltwoche* stressed in its mostly positive coverage of recent

[626] *NZZ*, 'Die sowjetischen Gefangenen in Schweizerischer Obhut,' 19/20 June 1982, E4300C-01#1998/299#602*, CH-BAR.
[627] Ueli Schmid, *Berner Zeitung*, 'Unklarer Status der drei Russen in St. Johannsen: Weder Kriegsgefangene noch Internierte,' 5 June 1982, E4300C-01#1998/299#602*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "dürften als Weltpremiere sowie als diplomatisches Meisterstück des IKRK gelten."
[628] Carr-Gregg, 'An Extension of Humanitarian International Law,' 97.
[629] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 225.
[630] Ibid.
[631] J. Hauenstein, 'Correspondence to FDFA,' 29 May 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Ich finde es eine Zumutung für das ganze Schweizer-Volk, dass Soldaten einer fremden Nation, welche ein ganzes Volk unterdrücken und dort in Gefangenschaft geraten in der Schweiz aufgenommen und betreut werden."
[632] H. Haldemann, *Der Bund*, 'Verfolger schützen?,' 10 June 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "Leider können viele nicht mehr unterscheiden, wem man Hilfe schuldet – dem Verfolgten oder dem Verfolger."

events, the ICRC had not yet been allowed back into Afghanistan despite the arrival of the Soviet prisoners in Switzerland.[633]

The ICRC itself was more worried about the widespread discussion in the press at this stage. According to Othmar Uhl of the FDFA's public relations office, Richard Pestalozzi, the ICRC's vice president, was concerned especially about the detailed coverage that the transfer operation had been receiving. Too much of it, Pestalozzi feared, could dissuade the Soviet Union from fulfilling its side of the bargain of allowing the ICRC back into Afghanistan.[634] Mid-June 1982, the ICRC was already planning the transfer of the next – much larger – group of Soviet prisoners despite the fact that it had not received authorization from the Afghan regime to return to Afghanistan.[635] This was indicative of two prevailing aspects of the prisoner transfer scheme up until this point. The first was that the ICRC, rather than the Swiss authorities, were the driving force behind the scheme and effectively dictating the pace of the operation. The second, however, was that the operation itself was not achieving its desired effect of the ICRC's return to Afghanistan.

Having followed the lively commentary in the press, the National Assembly – the lower house of parliament – scheduled a debate on this issue on 14 June 1982. As one of the first to speak, Laurent Butty of the Christian Democratic Party asked Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert to justify why there had been no progress in the return of the ICRC to Afghanistan so far. Aubert's response was arguably revealing with respect to a number of difficulties that eventually began to plague the operation at a deeper level. "We have only been dealing with the ICRC on this matter, as we have been dealing with the ICRC concerning the *mujahideen*," he replied.[636] In other words, the Swiss government did not have a direct channel of communication, neither with the Soviet Union nor with the *mujahideen*.

[633] *Weltwoche*, 'Irgendwo in der Schweiz,' J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[634] Hans Uhl, 'Aktennotiz: Anruf von Richard Pestalozzi, Vizepräsident IKRK – Sowjetische Militärpersonen,' 11 June 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[635] Ibid.
[636] N.a., 'Butty: Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in der Schweiz (Conseil National),' 14 June 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.

This appears to be true insofar as the relevant FDFA documents at the Federal Archives in Berne contain no direct correspondence between the Swiss authorities and the *mujahideen* on this subject. It all went through the ICRC at this stage, in light of the sensitivity of the operation. However, it also led to confusion on a number of occasions and minor problems quickly became major ones in the absence of a formal agreement and a corresponding enforcement mechanism.

Especially the quick temper of many of the Soviet prisoners meant there was no shortage of problems. On the whole, their minders described Valeri Didienko, Yuri Povarnitsin and Viktor Sintshuk as rather lazy and immature.[637] In the words of Colonel Jean Rossier, their minder, their behaviour was not exactly "befitting of the military" and they had a certain disregard for the rules.[638] They were all aged between 19 and 20 at the time and they had no experienced officer amongst them. Prior to enlisting in the armed forces as a soldier, nineteen-year-old Valeri Didienko had worked as a crane operator in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).[639] Viktor Sintschuk was also nineteen years old and a native of the Ukrainian SSR, where he had worked as a driver prior to joining the army.[640] Juri Povarnitsin was twenty years old at the time of his arrival in Switzerland. He held the rank of a sergeant and had worked as a truck driver in his native Russia before the invasion of Afghanistan.[641] It is unclear from the available documents, whether they were volunteers or conscripts. Together, the three of them were assigned to the correctional facility of St. Jean in Gals in the Canton of Berne (see map 5 below). The facility was not actually a prison and that was the main reason why the Swiss authorities had selected it. Even though the Soviet Union refused to recognize the applicability of the Third Geneva Convention, the Swiss decided to apply it by analogy and according to the convention, prisoners of war should not be treated as criminals. St. Jean did not even have a fence, which turned out to be a problem.

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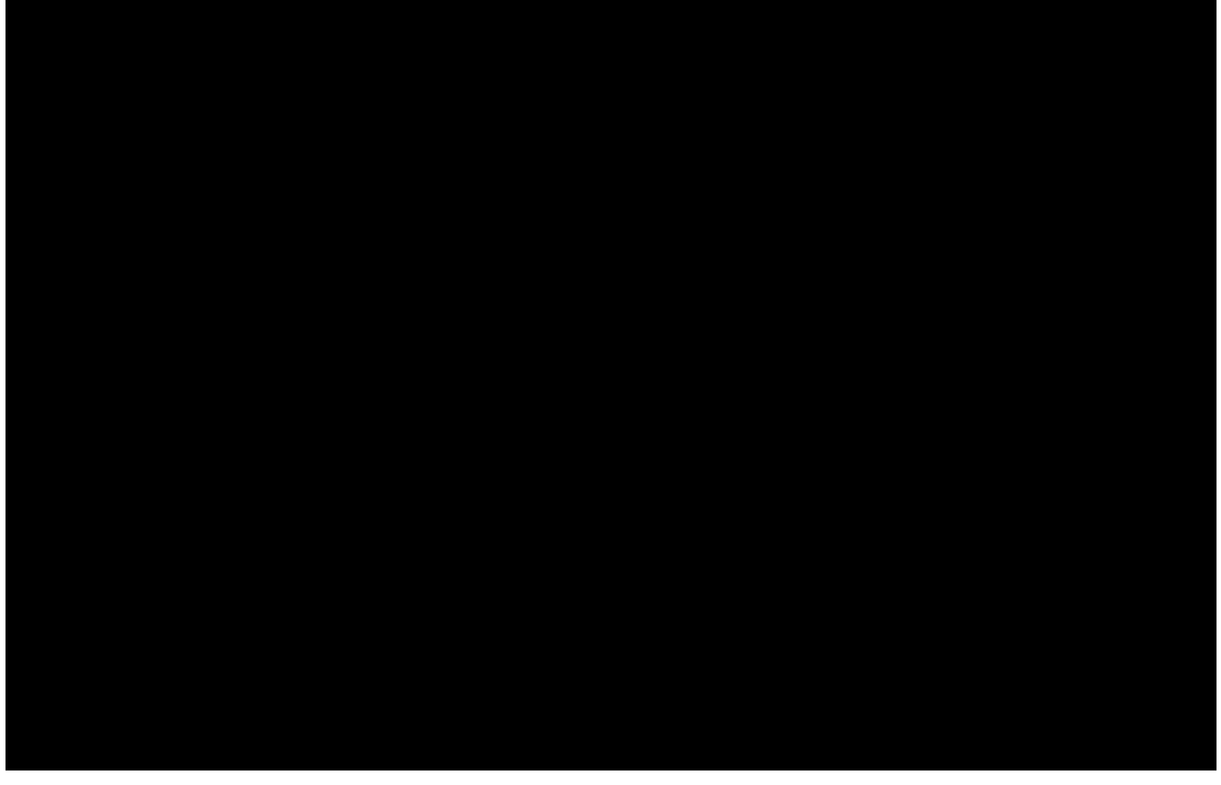
[637] Colonel Rossier, 'Kurzbericht über die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen in der Schweiz (Zeitabschnitt vom 24.12.82 bis 31.3.93),' 5 April 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[638] Ibid.
[639] n.a, 'Personalien der sowjetischen Internierten,' n.d., E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[640] Ibid.
[641] Ibid.



At midday on 8 June, Yuri Povarnitsin made the first of several unsuccessful escape attempts by tying together a series of woollen blankets and using them as a rope to climb out of a back window.[643] At 17:20 in the evening, he was sighted and shortly thereafter arrested along the nearby Canal de Thiel, the river linking the lakes of Bienne and Neuchâtel in Western Switzerland.[644] Speaking to Heidi Tagliavini, a Russian-speaking representative of the FDFA, the following day, Povarnitsin claimed that he could only see two options for himself at present: Flight or death.[645] Upon learning of this, the cantonal police immediately transferred him to a nearby hospital on 10 June for fear that he might provoke a diplomatic incident.[646] He returned to St. Jean on 14 June, but made a second escape

[642] Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 'Karten der Schweiz,' accessed 19 July 2020, https://bit.ly/2WIZNVw.
[643] B. Bigler, 'Povarnitsin, Jurij, geb. 14.4.1962, sowjetischer Staatsangehöriger Entweichungsbericht,' 9 June 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[644] Ibid.
[645] Ibid.
[646] Adrien Evéquoz,' Internés militaires soviétiques – Rapport du CICR, Visite de M. Hocké, Berne,' 17 juin 1982, 18 June 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.

attempt within less than a month. Unlike the first one, this second one was also widely reported in the Swiss press.[647]

On 7 August, a few weeks after the beginning of the UN-mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan and three days prior to the arrival of prisoners Hassan Malikovitch Agadjanov and Viktor Vladimirovitch Sapojnikov in Switzerland, there occurred a further incident at St. Jean.[648] On the evening of 6 August, Didienko, Povarnitsin and Sintschuck had threatened their translator, Linda Howard, and demanded that she begin her shift one hour earlier the following day.[649] During the night, they forced open the doors of their ward and at 11:00 the next morning, Povarnitsin made his way into the office of the ward's director, P. Ryser, demanding to be paid CHF 700 in cash.[650] Sintchuck appeared in the office shortly thereafter, accompanied by Linda Howard, whom he held hostage. They sealed themselves into the office along with Ryser and Howard, repeatedly demanding to be paid the sum of CHF 700. Fortunately for Howard and Ryser, a member of staff alerted the police.

Five police officers were dispatched from the nearby towns of Erlach and Ins. They arrived at St. Jean by 12:30, one and a half hours after the hostage situation had begun. Sintchuck eventually gave himself up to the police, but Povarnitsin made another attempt to escape. It took a guard dog, tear gas and the combined strength of several policemen to finally bring him in. After that, the directorate of St. Jean moved both him and Sintchuck to the disciplinary ward. Didienko was made to join them as well, despite the fact that there had been no proof of his involvement.[651] Once they were locked up again, the director of St. Jean wrote a flustered letter to the police directorate of the canton of Berne. He explained in detail what had come to pass and argued that it would be impossible to keep

[647] *Berner Zeitung*, 'Andere Mentalität schafft Probleme,' 11 August 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[648] n.a, 'No Title,' 17 September 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[649] B. Eichenberger, 'Sowjetische Internierte: Polizeieinsatz,' 7 August 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[650] Ibid.
[651] Ibid.

the Soviet prisoners at his facilities.[652] He requested their immediate relocation elsewhere and demanded that the FDJP "not consider any further internment of Russians in our facilities."[653] After a short spell in the disciplinary ward, Povarnitsin, Sintchuck and Didienko were therefore temporarily moved to the high-security prison of Thorberg, fifty minutes' drive from Gals in the direction of Berne (see map 5 above).[654]

In the meantime, two days after Povarnitsin's second escape attempt, two further Soviet prisoners arrived at the airport of Zurich-Kloten.[655] They too had been captives of one of the *Hezb-i-Islami* factions.[656] Viktor Sapojnikov was a twenty-year-old infantry soldier from the Ural region of Russia and Hassan Agadjanov was a twenty-one-year-old tank operator from Azerbaijan.[657] Their arrival against the backdrop of Povarnitsin's escape attempts caused the ICRC to worry about the security measures in place at St. Jean. According to Jean-Pierre Hocké, who was an ICRC delegate at the time and became the director of the UNHCR in 1985, the semi-open character of the institution, as well as the fact that the Soviet prisoners mixed with ordinary residents during working hours could cause problems.[658] The Soviet embassy in Berne was even more explicit in its criticisms. On 25 June, Vladimir Lavrov, the Soviet ambassador to Switzerland, called on Edouard Brunner, chastising him that the arrangements at St. Jean did not correspond to the verbal assurances that the Soviet Union had received in May.[659] What is more, paradoxically, the Soviet ambassador complained about the fact that after Povarnitsin's escape attempt, three Soviet prisoners had been moved to the high security prison at Thorberg, which was not in keeping with the nature of their internment as per the

[652] Ibid.
[653] Ibid., author's translation from "Bitten Internierung weiterer Russen in unserer Anstalt abzusetzen."
[654] n.a, 'No Title,' E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[655] *Berner Zeitung*, 'Andere Mentalität schafft Probleme,' J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[656] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Compte rendu de séance: Internés militaires soviétiques,' 18 August 1982, E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR.
[657] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Second transfert en Suisse de membres des forces armées soviétiques capturées par la résistance afghane – Communication du CICR (29-30 Juillet 1982),' 2 August 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2762*, CH-BAR.
[658] Evéquoz, 'Internés militaires soviétiques,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[659] Edouard Brunner, 'Internés militaires soviétiques – Intervention de l'Ambasadeur d'URSS, Berne, 25 juin 1982,' 28 June 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.

Third Geneva Convention.[660] Returning on 4 August, Lavrov handed Brunner an entire list of complaints entitled "Remarks, Wishes and Propositions from the Soviet Side."[661] Among other aspects, the Soviet Union demanded changes in the accommodation of the prisoners as well as in their daily work schedules. They asked that disciplinary measures be less strict and that visits, correspondence and telephone calls from embassy staff be more frequent. Most importantly, however, Lavrov wanted a permanent Russian translator from the Soviet embassy to be stationed with the prisoners.[662] This was out of the question for the Swiss authorities. Internal memoranda suggest that the FDFA suspected the Soviet embassy of intending to spy on its own citizens.

What the FDFA did concede was that St. Jean was not ideally suited for the internment of the Soviet prisoners under conditions laid out in the Third Geneva Convention. In mid-August, therefore, the FDFA, the FDJ and the FDMA relocated all of the current five Soviet prisoners to the military detention centre in Früebüel on the Zugerberg in the canton of Zug (see map 5 above). Früebüel was located on the south-western fringe of the Zugerberg, 1000 metres above sea level and with spectacular views both of the nearby Rigi and Pilatus mountains.[663] The facility itself consisted of a number of military barracks which served as lodgings, as well as an administrative centre and a central farm on which the internees worked during the day.[664] During the summer of 1982, seven Swiss military personnel were already interned there for disciplinary reasons. Some had tried to avoid conscription, others had tried to steal military equipment and some had violated orders whilst on duty.[665] According to a 1983 report in the German daily newspaper *Die Welt*, "The place is teeming

[660] Ibid.
[661] Edouard Brunner, 'Note d'entretien: Internés militaires soviétiques – Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur d'URSS, Berne, le 3 août 1982,' 4 August 1982, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "Remarques, souhaits et propositions de la partie soviétique."
[662] Brunner, 'Note d'entretien: Internés militaires,' J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[663] Rolf Wespe, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Rotarmisten auf dem Zugerberg,' 26 August 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR; *Die Welt*, 'Die Russen auf dem Zugerberg und die hohe Politik,' 9 August 1983, E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR.
[664] ICRC, 'Rapport de la visite du CICR au centre militaire de Zugerberg (Canton de Zoug, Suisse),' 17 August 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2762*, CH-BAR.
[665] Wespe, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Rotarmisten auf dem Zugerberg,' J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR; N.a., 'Internierung sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener in der Schweiz: Beitrag Geschäftsbericht EMD (Entwurf),' 25 November 1982, E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR.

with uniforms, camouflage, Jeeps, military trucks, barbed wire and [other] cars."[666] The same article also described a number of ominous warning signs across the Zugerberg plateau, which read, "You are entering territory guarded by the military. If you are ordered to stop moving, STOP immediately and follow the instructions of the troops. If you fail to do so, they will use their firearms."[667]

It is unlikely that the barbed wire and the heavy military guard were already in place on the Zugerberg at the time that the first five Soviet prisoners arrived there in the summer of 1982. Judging by the report of the ICRC's first official visit, "The facilities at the Zugerberg are not enclosed by barriers or walls and public access is possible across the area."[669] This lack of security originally concerned the ICRC considerably, both in light of Povarnitsin's various escape attempts, as well as the fact that

[666] *Die Welt*, 'Die Russen auf dem Zugerberg,' E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "Es wimmelt dort von Uniformen und Tarnanzügen, von Jeeps und Militärlastwagen, von Stacheldraht und Wagen."
[667] Ibid., author's translation from, "Sie betreten militärisch bewachtes Gebiet. Auf den Aufruf HALT sofort stillstehen und den Weisungen der Truppe nachkommen. Bei Missachtung der Warnung macht die Truppe von der Schusswaffe Gebrauch."
[668] Loosli *(sic)*, 'Das Militärdetachement auf dem Zugerberg,' *Der Fourier* 45(172), 428.
[669] ICRC, 'Rapport de la visite du CICR au centre militaire de Zugerberg,' E2023A#1993/129#2762*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Le complexe du Zugerberg n'est pas fermé par des barrières ou autres murs d'enceinte et la circulation publique est possible à travers le domaine."

according to the Third Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were also supposed to be shielded from outside scrutiny and intimidation.

However, at approximately the same time as the Soviet prisoners arrived on the Zugerberg, the ICRC became preoccupied with another matter. In August of 1982, the Afghan authorities finally agreed to allow ICRC delegates to return to Afghanistan. Internal memoranda at the FDFA actually indicate that the first delegation to return arrived in Kabul on 13 August.[670] In June of 1982, the ICRC had been preparing the transfer of no less than twenty Soviet soldiers to Switzerland.[671] Frustrated by the absence of progress the Afghan side, an ICRC delegation also asked to meet with Shah Mohammad Dost, the Afghan foreign minister, who had just arrived in Geneva for the UN-mediated talks with Pakistan.[672] During their meeting on 14 June, Dost appeared to understand the problem of the hold-up, as well as the significance of the prisoner transfer operation more generally and promised to personally take care of the matter upon his return to Kabul.[673]

One month later, four ICRC delegates, including one physician, arrived in Kabul. Their mission was to establish a permanent ICRC presence in the country and to develop their protection and medical assistance programmes for civilians and war victims within Afghanistan. According to ICRC documents held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne, the organization's delegates were received by Foreign Minister Dost himself and received assurances that they could visit all prisoners captured in combat.[674] The delegation visited block number one of the *Pul-i-Charkhi* prison complex depicted in chapter four and saw a total of 338 prisoners during the initial days of its stay in Kabul.[675] On 16

[670] Evéquoz, 'Compte rendu de séance,' E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR; ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[671] Evéquoz, 'Internés militaires soviétiques – Rapport du CICR,' E2023A#1993/129#2761*, CH-BAR.
[672] Ibid.
[673] Ibid.; ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[674] ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[675] Ibid.; N.a., 'Afghanistan,' 11 January 1983, E2010-01A#1994/372#42*, CH-BAR.

and 17 August, the delegation also inspected three local hospitals in Kabul and further inspections were planned.[676] Yet in total, the ICRC mission of 1982 lasted only three months and in early October of 1982, the delegation was again asked to leave .[677]

Over the course of subsequent discussions with the ICRC and with the Soviet embassy in Berne, the FDFA sought out the reasons for the sudden interruption, which, in the long term, threatened to derail the entire prisoner transfer operation. According to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Raymond Probst, despite being allowed back into Afghanistan, the ICRC had made no progress in transferring the twenty Soviet soldiers that it had known of since June of 1982.[678] According to Bernard de Riedmatten of the FDFA's Directorate for International Organizations, a second possible reason might have been that the Soviet Union was simply becoming disinterested in the entire affair. After all, the Soviet government had initially shown interest only when *Hezb-i-Islami/ Khalis* had captured Michael Akhrimof, a Soviet land mine specialist back in 1981.[679] Not only had the *mujahideen* not delivered any high-ranking officers or experts since then, they had hardly delivered any soldiers at all.

According to David Delapraz of the ICRC, a third possible reason might have been that the Karmal regime had become uneasy about what the ICRC might witness in Afghanistan, both in its prisons and on the battlefield.[680] A fourth and final reason for the ICRC's renewed expulsion from Afghanistan might also have been that the Soviet Union was upset about the internment conditions of its prisoners. In fact, this issue formed the major part of a discussion that Secretary of State

[676] ICRC, 'Communiqué de presse no 1449,' 27 August 1982, E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR.
[677] Edouard Brunner, 'Correspondence to Ambassadors,' 19 November 1982, E2210.5#1996/373#21*, CH-BAR; ICRC Department of Operations, 'Afghan Conflict Victims Emergency Appeal No 3,' E2023A#1993/129#1000*, CH-BAR.
[678] Raymond Probst, 'Correspondence to Brunner, Muheim, Riedmatten,' 20 October 1982, J1.301#2002/197#547*, CH-BAR; Bernard de Riedmatten, 'Note de dossier: Internés soviétiques: téléphone de M. Jean de Courten du CICR, le 27.10.1982,' 28 October 1982, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR; *NZZ*, 'Probst zieht Bilanz,' 23 October 1982, J1.301#2002/197#547*, CH-BAR.
[679] Bringolf *(sic)*, 'Correspondence to De Courten,' E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.
[680] Paul Wipfli, 'Correspondence to Jean-Pierre Ritter,' 19 October 1982, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.

Raymond Probst had with Anatoly Adamichin, the head of the Eastern Europe Section at the Soviet Foreign Ministry on 18 October of 1982. This visit had been scheduled far in advance in light of a Swiss industry exhibition near Moscow that month. However, on 8 October, Alexandre Hay, the president of the ICRC, personally asked Probst to intervene with the Russian authorities on behalf of the ICRC during his visit.[681] It was the first time that Switzerland established a direct channel of communication on the subject with the Soviet government. It also meant that Switzerland was taking on a mediating role between the ICRC and the Soviet Union for the first time, hence further deepening its involvement in the Afghan crisis as a provider of good offices.

At the outset of his conversation with Adamichin, which was also attended by the Soviet ambassador to Berne, Vladimir Lavrov, and legal counsellor to the foreign ministry Natchaev, Adamichin complained about the internment conditions on the Zugerberg.[682] "We are not at all satisfied with the way in which the accords between the ICRC and the USSR have been applied," he began.[683] What was more, "We are not satisfied by the living conditions offered to the Soviet citizens."[684] Curiously, he did not refer to the Soviet prisoners and to their internment conditions as such, but referred to them as Soviet citizens and their living conditions instead. Referring to Lavrov's multiple complaints in this regard, Adamichin also hoped that in the future, Switzerland would "show more understanding where our embassy's suggestions are concerned."[685]

Probst agreed with Adamichin that the situation was not ideal, but he ventured that it would be better for the Soviet embassy to communicate its concerns to the FDFA before submitting formal

[681] Edouard Brunner, 'Président CICR et Hocke ont informé 8 octobre CFA et Soussigné de ce qui suit,' 11 October 1982, E2210.5#1996/373#21*, CH-BAR.
[682] N.a., 'Entretiens du 18 octobre 1982 entre M. le Secrétaire d'Etat Probst et M. l'Ambassadeur Adamichine,' 18 October 1982, J1.301#2002/197#547*, CH-BAR.
[683] Ibid., author's translation from, "Nous ne sommes pas satisfaits non plus de la manière dont les accords entre le CICR et l'URSS sont mis en application."
[684] Ibid., author's translation from, "Nous ne sommes pas satisfaits des conditions de séjour offertes aux citoyens soviétiques."
[685] Ibid., author's translation from, "Nous espérons qu'à l'avenir la partie suisse manifestera une plus grande compréhension à l'égard des propositions de notre ambassade."

notes of protest, as it had done on numerous occasions in the past.[686] "It would be even better if we didn't have any protests to make in the first place," Lavrov growled in response.[687] Yet Probst reminded both Lavrov and Adamichin that the original accord of 22 January had been concluded without Swiss involvement and that the Swiss were merely enacting its stipulations in "analogy to the Third Geneva Conventions."[688] He then changed the subject and asked directly, why the ICRC had been expelled from Afghanistan for a second time this month.[689] The Swiss, he said, had received information from the Soviet embassy in Berne that a certain group of *mujahideen* had promised to liberate several Soviet prisoners but had not done so. That being said, the ICRC could not be blamed for this. It would be a shame, he argued, for the ICRC's mission in Afghanistan to come to an end and he urged the Soviet Union to exert its influence over the Karmal regime to allow the ICRC to return as a gesture of goodwill.[690]

"For our part," Adamichin replied, "we can only attest that the ICRC has not kept its promises and has misrepresented the position of the Afghan government in its communiqué."[691] "There must obviously have been a misunderstanding," Probst interjected, adding that the ICRC would like to rectify this by meeting with representatives of the Red Cross Society of the Soviet Union.[692] To this Natchaev responded that, "Before we agree to go to Geneva, the ICRC has to make an effort to liberate the […] Soviet prisoners in question."[693] These, he added, should have been transferred in July, while the Soviet side had not only tolerated but extended the ICRC's mission in Afghanistan. Only once these prisoners had been transferred, he concluded, would it be conceivable for the ICRC

[686] Ibid.
[687] Ibid., author's translation from, "Il serait plus agréable de ne pas avoir de protestations à formuler."
[688] Ibid., author's translation from, "par analogie à la 3ème Convention de Genève."
[689] Ibid.
[690] Ibid.
[691] Ibid., author's translation from, "Pour notre part, nous constatons que non seulement le CICR n'a pas tenu ses promesse, mais qu'il a de plus présenté dans un communiqué la position du gouvernement afghan de manière faussé, en rejetant sur ce dernier ses propres manquements."
[692] Ibid.
[693] Ibid., author's translation from, "Pour que nous nous rendions à Genève, il faut auparavant que le CICR s'engage à libérer les[…]prisonniers soviétiques en question."

to return to Kabul.[694] Adamichin asked Probst to wait for a definitive response to the question of direct talks between the ICRC and the Soviet Red Cross Society. The following morning, he sent word to Probst at an ambassador's luncheon, that talks could proceed in Geneva, albeit not necessarily with the Soviet Red Cross alone and "taking into consideration the realization" *(sic)* of the ICRC's promises to transfer the remaining prisoners.[695]

Up until this point, the FDFA had not given much consideration to the fact that the number of prisoners who had been transferred to Switzerland had only been very small and that this might have become a problem for the Soviet authorities. As Probst's discussions in Moscow showed, however, this mattered to them. In a documentary aired on ABC News in February of 1983, journalist Ludmilla Thorpe estimated that the resistance held almost 150 prisoners and that the ICRC had received official notification of thirty.[696] What was more, Paul Wipfli, the Swiss ambassador to Islamabad, also informed the FDFA in November of 1983 that a substantial number of Soviet deserters were rumoured to have crossed the Afghan border into Pakistan – many of them into Peshawar – without being checked by the Pakistani authorities.[697] As many as 200 of them were said to have filtered into a refugee camp at Darrah, near Peshawar, making it appear rather strange in comparison that only five prisoners had so far been transferred to Switzerland.[698] What might therefore have been the case was that the Soviet Union began to see the merits of the prisoner transfer scheme as a way to counteract the problem of desertion.

[694] Ibid.
[695] Ibid.; *24 heures*, 'Raymond Probst rentre de Moscou: On a parlé des soldats russes,' 23-24 October 1982, J1.301#2002/197#547*, CH-BAR.
[696] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Prisonniers soviétiques capturés par la résistance afghane – Émission de la chaîne américaine ABC, vendredi 18 février 1983,' 22 February 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[697] Paul Wipfli, 'Correspondence to EDA Direktion für Internationale Organisationen,' 10 November 1983, E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.
[698] Ibid.

Wipfli's contacts with the ICRC had also revealed that the Pakistani authorities had themselves interfered in a number of the transfer operations to Switzerland, capturing soldiers of military rank or political significance from the *mujahideen* and delivering them to the Russian embassy in Islamabad, from where they were taken directly to the Soviet Union.[699] In other words, it appeared rather as though the Soviet Union actually had a more convenient alternative to stem the flow of deserters than the channel that existed through ICRC and the Swiss authorities. This in turn, according to Wipfli, was the reason for the *mujahideen*'s growing reluctance to hand over their prisoners to the ICRC. They had repeatedly lost prisoners to the Soviet Union this way without compensation by way of publicity, the release of *mujahideen* prisoners from regime prisons or ICRC access to Afghanistan.[700] What was more, as time progressed, the *mujahideen* began to criticize the continued absence of the ICRC from Afghanistan. In February of 1983, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, for instance, announced that he would refrain from transferring any more prisoners to the ICRC until it resumed its activities in the county.[701] Likewise, in Reuters Dispatch from 24 January 1984, journalist Tom Heneghan reported that *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* even blamed the ICRC itself, arguing that "The Red Cross didn't keep its part of the deal, so we're not giving them prisoners anymore."[702] In other words, between 1983 and 1984, several of the transfer arrangements' fundamental flaws were becoming consequential to the extent that the arrangement itself appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

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[699] Wipfli, 'Correspondence to Jean-Pierre Ritter,' E2200.162A#1994/329#45*, CH-BAR.
[700] Ibid.; Tom Heneghan, 'Reuters Dispatch,' 24 January 1984, E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR.
[701] Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Prisonniers soviétiques capturés par la résistance afghane,' E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[702] Heneghan, 'Reuters Dispatch,' E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR; Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Afghanistan – Professeur Rabbani,' E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.

# Chapter 6: The Return of the ICRC to Afghanistan, 1986-1987

What is puzzling about both of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's and Burhanuddin Rabbani's comments on the prisoner transfer scheme is that actually, the ICRC still managed to negotiate the release of two prisoners in November of 1982, one more in January of 1983 and another prisoner in October of 1983. Rimas Victorovitch Burba and Guernam Vassilievitch Anissimov both arrived in Switzerland on 23 November 1982.[703] Rimas was the first ranking officer to be transferred to Switzerland and he was also the first to have been released directly by *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who operated from inside of Afghanistan as opposed to from Pakistan.[704] Youri Ivanovitch Washenko, landed in at Zurich-Kloten airport on 14 January 1983. He was a native of Kansk in Siberia and had been captured by the *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami-yi* Afghanistan on 20 November 1982.[705] At the time of his release, the ICRC sent word to the FDFA that thirty more Soviet prisoners were ready to be transferred.[706] Yet only one more arrived by 1983. His name was Mikhail Nicolaievitch Govtva and he too came from Siberia.[707] Unlike previous prisoners, he had not been handed over to the ICRC by the *mujahideen*, but by the Pakistani authorities.[708] In the meantime, the fact that various *mujahideen* groups continued to capture and transfer Soviet prisoners once again showed how scarcely they coordinated their activities, even on this issue.

Back in Switzerland, the transfer scheme and especially the failure of the ICRC to regain admittance to Afghan territory, also became an increasingly public discussion. At the centre of it were the FDFA and the ICRC. This was unusual for Switzerland because the FDFA and Swiss foreign policy were not often in the news and therefore the news cycle did not often shape foreign policy decisions. This

[703] N.a., 'Personalien der sowjetischen Internierten,' 14 January 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[704] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Prochain transfert en Suisse d'un prisonnier soviétique,' 24 September 1983, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[705] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Internés miliaire soviétiques – Prochain transfert en Suisse, Entretiens avec M. Fournier du CICR,' 28 décembre 1982 ; 3,4 et 5 janvier 1983, 5 January 1983, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[706] Ibid.
[707] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de dossier: Internés miliaire soviétiques – Nouveau transfert en Suisse d'un soldat soviétique capturé en Afghanistan,' 25 October 1983, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[708] Ibid.

might appear somewhat strange and as discussed in the literature review of this thesis, there exists somewhat of a debate on the role of the public in making Swiss foreign policy. On one hand, Switzerland is a unique case of direct democracy and both the concepts of a referendum and of the public initiative actually give private citizens substantial leverage to derail and shape government policy respectively. Yet in fact, the facultative *Staatsreferendum*, the state referendum, which made it compulsory for major foreign policy decisions to be submitted to a nation-wide referendum if at least 50'000 citizens signed a petition to that effect, was only introduced into the Swiss constitution in 1977 and it was not used to that effect until 1986, when the FDFA formally proposed a referendum on Switzerland's membership of the UN.[709] Despite this, that particular case, as well as the case of the ICRC's prisoner transfer from Afghanistan, are prominent instances where public opinion came to play an unusually dominant role in shaping foreign policy.

Back in the fall and winter of 1982, the Swiss press had begun to seriously engage with the flaws of the prisoner transfer scheme, with the result that this eventually led to a parliamentary hearing of FDFA Secretary of State Raymond Probst on 22 November. Three main themes initially dominated the discussion, the first being the internment conditions on the Zugerberg, the second the secrecy of the transfer operation, and the third the conditions of the prisoners' repatriation. At the heart of all three was the fact that the arrangement had been primarily political, meaning that each party was essentially free to interpret it according to their own interests. According to Maya Jurt of the conservative weekly *Weltwoche*, what was strange about the affair was that "All parties to the agreement turned a blind eye to some aspects and showed no interest in being informed about all of the details."[710] The Soviets seemingly "did not want to know the role that Pakistan was playing in

[709] Bundesamt für Justiz, 'Fakultatives Staatsvertragsreferendum: Entwicklung der Praxis des Bundesrats und der Bundesversammlung seit 2003,' 29 August 2014, https://www.bj.admin.ch/dam/bj/de/data/aktuell/news/2016/2016-06-22/ber-bj-d.pdf.download.pdf/ber-bj-d.pdf.

[710] Maya Jurt, *Weltwoche*, 'Sorgenkinder,' 29 Dezember 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "Dass alle Vertragsparteien ihre Augen zudrücken und kein Interesse zeigen, über alle Details genau informiert zu werden."

the handover of the prisoners of war" while the "Afghans profited from the propaganda opportunity and did not want to know how the prisoners were being interned in Switzerland."[711] Finally, the ICRC did not appear to be at all interested in the "caprices and the pranks" played by the internees on their Swiss wards.[712] These, as the journal *ZeitBild* (sic) reported, had become increasingly serious on the Zugerberg and included the theft of a motorbike, unwarranted and unsupervised disappearances and excessive consumption of alcohol, in addition to at least two more escape attempts on the part of Yuri Povarnitsin.[713] Individually, these flaws in the arrangement may have appeared minor. However, collectively, they had the effect of creating conflict, rather than commitment amongst the parties to the arrangement at a time when it came under increased public scrutiny.

Public scrutiny, moreover, identified a number of aspects of the arrangement, which called into question, whether the arrangement itself was genuinely one of good offices or rather a morally questionable form of appeasement towards the Soviet Union to secure the ICRC's return to Afghanistan. Peter Sager, one of the editors of the journal *ZeitBild* wrote to Raymond Probst in December of 1982, for instance, pointing out the one-sidedness of the scheme and the dangers it entailed for the Soviet prisoners. First of all, according to Sager, the prisoners were not simply interned in Switzerland but were virtually kept in conditions solitary confinement.[714] Apart from the Swiss authorities and the ICRC, only the Soviet embassy had been able to visit the prisoners and journalists were strictly barred from doing so. He did concede that Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention required prisoners of war to be sheltered from public scrutiny but in this particular case, he claimed that the effect was one of intimidation, rather than protection.[715] Second, he was aware of the fact that these conditions had been arranged such as to increase the likelihood of the ICRC's

[711] Ibid., author's translation from "Die Sowjets wollen nicht wissen, welche Rolle Pakistan bei dieser Übergabe der Kriegsgefangenen spielte; Afghanis profitieren von der Propaganda Gelegenheit und wollen nicht wissen, wie die Sowjetsoldaten in der Schweiz untergebracht sind."
[712] Ibid., author's translation from, "Das IKRK zeigt überhaupt kein Interesse über die Kapricen und Streiche der unbändigen Sieben informiert zu werden."
[713] *ZeitBild*, 'Die Verlautbarung des EDA,' 29 December 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[714] Peter Sager, 'Correspondence to Raymond Probst,' 22 December 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[715] Ibid.

return to Afghanistan. Seeing as the ICRC had been expelled from that country again on 7 October, however, he thought the entire arrangement was nothing short of "Soviet extortion."[716] After all, "even if the Soviet Union pretends not to be at war in Afghanistan, it is without any doubt still obligated to grant the ICRC access to its prisoners," no conditions attached.[717]

Further, according to an article in *ZeitBild*, prisoners who did not agree to be repatriated to the Soviet Union after two years were not even permitted to partake in the transfer scheme in the first place.[718] The problem with this was that many POWs feared repatriation for one of two reasons. First, because POWs were historically mistreated in the Soviet Union and second, because they were inherently difficult to distinguish from deserters. As Nikolas Tolstoy of the *Wall Street Journal* reported on 14 November, in the Soviet Union "traditionally, [Soviet] prisoners of war have been considered as traitors, a state of affairs made official by numerous government orders issued during World War Two."[719] According to Tolstoy's reporting, 5.5 million Soviet prisoners who had returned to the Soviet Union after the end of the Second World War had been either executed or sent to Siberian labour camps.[720] In other words, repatriation could mean yet more imprisonment or worse for Soviet POWs, because they were virtually indistinguishable from deserters.[721] Yuri Povarnitsin, one of the earliest transferees Switzerland, confirmed this himself in a highly consequential interview that he gave to *Radio Free Kabul* in early 1982.

*Radio Free Kabul* was a radio station run by the so-called Committee for Human Rights that included writers such as Vladimir Boukovsky, Marek Halter and the controversial French public intellectual

[716] Ibid.
[717] Ibid., author's translation from, "Die Sowjetunion ist auch dann, wenn sie keinen Krieg zu führen vorgibt, zweifellos verpflichtet, dem IKRK Zugang zu Lagern von Gefangenen, die im Rahmen militärischer Feindseligkeiten gemacht worden sind, zu gewähren."
[718] *ZeitBild*, 'Die Verlautbarung des EDA,' J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[719] Nikolas Tolstoy, *The Wall Street Journal*, 'The Clock is Ticking on Seven Russian Soldiers,' 14 November 1983, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[720] Ibid.
[721] Ibid.

Bernard-Henri Lévy.[722] "On my return," Povarnitsin said, "the government in Moscow will convene a tribunal and they will decide whether to put me in prison or in front of a firing squad."[723] In the same interview, he also made serious allegations against the Soviet government on account of its interference in Afghanistan. "They told us we were being sent to Afghanistan to fight the Chinese and the Americans, but since coming here, I have not seen a single Chinese or American soldier."[724] These allegations were widely publicized in the Swiss press during the summer of 1982, causing many to worry for Povarnitsin's safety upon his repatriation to the Soviet Union.[725] In sum, as suggested by Jacques de Watteville, who oversaw the prisoner transfer operation at the FDFA's Directorate for International Organizations at the time, "the case of these prisoners [was becoming] instrumentalized by both sides for political reasons."[726]

Ambassador Lavrov had lodged another angry protest with the FDFA when the interview was published in the daily *24 heures* in August of 1982.[727] Yet the ICRC and the FDFA were far more concerned about the overall effect that media such as *ZeitBild* and *Radio Free Kabul* had on the POWs themselves. In fact, according to Jean-Pierre Hocké of the ICRC, the real purpose of *Radio Free Kabul* was actually to encourage desertion amongst Soviet soldiers.[728] Therefore, should their narrative take hold, it would raise the question of whether the prisoners on the Zugerberg were themselves

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[722] Vincent Philippe, *24 heures*, 'Détenu soviétique en Suisse dénonce la guerre en Afghanistan: "Entre la mort et la prison,"' 21/22 August 1982, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.
[723] Ibid., author's translation from, "A mon retour, le gouvernement de Moscou convoquera un tribunal et ils décideront s'il faut me mettre en prison ou me fusiller."
[724] Ibid., author's translation from, "Ils nous ont dit que nous étions envoyés pour défendre l'Afghanistan contre les Chinois et les Américains, mais depuis que j'y suis, je n'ai pas vu un seul, ni un soldat chinois ni un soldat américain."
[725] *NZZ*, 'Die Komplexität eines Guten Dienstes (Canton de Zoug, Suisse),' 8 September 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2762*, CH-BAR.
[726] Jacques de Watteville, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 11 December 2018, author's translation from, "Le cas de ces prisonniers a été instrumentalisé par les uns et les autres à des fins politiques. "
[727] Paul Widmer, 'Stichwortartige Aufzeichnung: Gefangenenaustausch und Probleme mit Internierten; Unterredung mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Lavrov, Bern den 24. August 1982,' 25 August 1982, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[728] N.a., 'Note de dossier: Intenés militaires soviétiques – Offensive des "Comités Radio-Kaboul libre,"' 2 September 1982, E2023A#1993/129#2762*, CH-BAR.

deserters, as opposed to genuine POWs. This in turn would threaten to derail the ICRC's transfer mission anew and thereby imperil its chances of returning to Afghanistan again.

According to British archival material, the ICRC was convinced that the prisoners on the Zugerberg were "genuine POWs and not defectors."[729] Yet at this point, the media also began to turn on the integrity of the ICRC itself. On 10 November, Bernard-Henri Lévy launched a furious critique of the ICRC's handling of the operation in his column for the French daily *Le Matin*. According to Lévy's own account, he had been solicited to work for the organization in 1981, while working on a project to set up a Russian-language radio broadcasting station in Pakistan together with his two collaborators, Marek Halter and Renzo Rossellini.[730] Lévy claimed that as they were working on their project, they were approached by an employee of the ICRC, who asked them to negotiate the release of Soviet prisoners of war held in captivity among Afghan resistance fighters.[731] Lévy had allegedly agreed to do so under the condition that if transferred to Switzerland, the Soviet soldiers would be accorded the rights of POWs as contained in the Third Geneva Convention. In his column, Lévy not only broke the silence he had allegedly committed himself to in negotiating on behalf of the ICRC, but he accused both the ICRC and the Swiss government of directly violating the Third Geneva Convention through their treatment of the Soviet POWs on the Zugerberg.

Why, Lévy asked, had the presence of the Soviet prisoners in Switzerland originally been kept so secret from the public? Was it normal that no foreign journalists were allowed to meet them? Like Sager, Lévy criticized that the only visitors who had been permitted to see them had been diplomats from the Soviet embassy in Berne. In fact, British archival documents suggest that a member of the

[729] B.D. Adams, 'ICRC/ Afghanistan,' 9 August 1983, FCO 37/3070, UK-TNA.
[730] Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Matin*, 'Scandale à la Croix-Rouge ?,' 10 November 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[731] *NZZ*, 'Die internierten Rotarmisten in der Schweiz,' 11 November 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR; Vincent Philippe, *24 heures*, 'Prisonniers Soviétiques: Les Français s'en mêlent – Bernard-Henri Lévy veut voir Youri,' 11 November 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.

Soviet Embassy in Berne visited them every single day.[732] This, he argued, constituted a "flagrant violation" of article 13 title 2 of the Third Geneva Convention, which prohibited any form of intimidation.[733] Referring to the 22 January agreement between the ICRC and the Soviet Union, Lévy accused the ICRC of having signed "an occult accord with the Kremlin," whose alleged condition that the prisoners would be repatriated after a span of two years amounted to a "visa for immediate deportation."[734] In the case of Povarnitsin, he even warned that it would be "quite simply a death sentence."[735]

In a letter to the editors of *Le Matin*, the ICRC took a stance on Lévy's accusations on 16 November. The Swiss and the Soviet governments did not comment. To begin with, Michel Mercier, the head of the public relations division, dismissed the notion that Lévy had been in any way involved in negotiating the release of Soviet prisoners of war from captivity.[736] According to Mercier, it had been Lévy who had contacted the ICRC in Peshawar during the previous summer, not the other way around. At a meeting with ICRC delegates, there had been a general exchange of information but nothing had been either offered to Lévy or asked of him.[737] As to the Soviet prisoners who had been transferred to Switzerland since then, Mercier argued that they had been informed of their right to freely choose whether or not to subject themselves to this transfer as soon as they had been released from custody by the *mujahideen*. Mercier stressed that, on principle, the ICRC never acted against the will of those it sought to assist. Each step of the procedure concerning their internment in Switzerland had therefore been clearly explained to each of the prisoners who had taken up the offer. As part of their interment on the Zugerberg, they also received regular visits from delegates of the ICRC, which were not in contradiction of, but modelled on the Third Geneva Convention. Lastly,

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[732] Adams, 'ICRC/ Afghanistan,' FCO 37/3070, UK-TNA.
[733] Lévy, 'Scandale à la Croix-Rouge ?,' 10 November 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[734] Ibid.
[735] Ibid.
[736] Michele Mercier, 'Message to *Le Matin* de Paris from the International Committee of the Red Cross,' 16 November 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[737] Ibid.

while Mercier conceded that Article 13 of the convention prohibited any form of intimidation towards POWs, the same article also entitled them to protection against public scrutiny. Should the editors of *Le Matin* therefore wish to contribute in any way to the safety and well-being of the current and future Soviet POWs in Switzerland, it was of the essence that they avoid further "allegations and pseudo-scandals."[738]

Unfortunately for Mercier and for the ICRC, however, the Swiss parliament did not think of what had transpired as a "pseudo-scandal" and on 22 November, Secretary of State Raymond Probst was called to testify before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly. This was an important moment for the prisoner transfer operation. Not only did parliament finally initiate a degree of oversight, but for the first time, government was forced to confront those issues that had been neglected since the beginning of the operation. National Councillor Friedrich began the proceedings by clarifying that he had not asked Probst testify because he was against the operation, but because it had been heavily criticized in the press.[739] Apparently, the ICRC had wanted to gain access to prisons in Afghanistan by offering the extraction of Soviet POWs and their transfer to Switzerland. Yet what one continued to hear was that the former part of the operation had failed. "Is that so?" he asked.[740] National Councillor Stucky added to this that he had heard from the warden of the detention facility on the Zugerberg that he himself was still unclear about the legal status of the Soviet inmates. He had never actually received any detailed instructions about how to treat them.[741]

Turning first to Friedrich and then to Stucky, Probst acknowledged the principal shortcomings of the arrangement. First of all, there was no guarantee that the ICRC would be allowed back into

[738] Ibid.
[739] N.a., 'Nationalrat: Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten, Protokoll der Sitzung vom 22 November 1982, 9:30 – 13:45 Uhr in Bern, Parlamentsgebäude, Zimmer 3,' December 1982, E2850.1#1991/234#173*, CH-BAR.
[740] Ibid.
[741] Ibid.

Afghanistan.[742] Second, there were no assurances as to the treatment of the prisoners upon repatriation. "We are fully aware of the risk that [they] are taking," he conceded.[743] Third, Probst conceded that at the same time, "we cannot declare now that we will grant political asylum to the prisoners who are here, because if we do, that would prevent the ICRC from ever returning to Kabul."[744]

By November of 1982, therefore, an arrangement that had originally begun with genuine concern for the humanitarian situation within Afghanistan, had evolved into a public discussion on whether or not the ICRC and the Swiss government were violating their own humanitarian principles. Moreover, the arrangement itself, which had originally gone ahead in loose "analogy" to the Third Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, threatened to sacrifice the well-being of those very prisoners without even having achieved access to Afghanistan for the ICRC in return. All of this became compounded in a public debate in the press that threatened to derail the entire scheme. On the whole, the situation appeared bleak for Swiss foreign policy-makers in November of 1982.

In the meantime, the ICRC and the Swiss government had begun to hold a series of discussions with the Soviet Union, as agreed in Moscow in October 1982. Originally, talks between a Soviet consular delegation and the ICRC resumed without the Swiss authorities, taking place in Geneva from 6-19 February 1983.[745] Yet these discussions achieved little. According to ICRC records held at the Swiss Federal Archives in Berne, the communication between the FDFA and the Soviet Union had been a major issue in the past, as had the conditions of the prisoners' internment, of which the Soviet Union

[742] Ibid.
[743] Ibid., author's translation from "Wir sind uns des Risikos der Internierten voll bewusst."
[744] Ibid., author's translation from "Wir können jetzt nicht offiziell erklären, wir würden den Kriegsgefangengen Asyl gewähren, weil sonst das IKRK keine Möglichkeit mehr hätte, nach Kabul zurückzukehren."
[745] Rossier, 'Kurzbericht über die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen in der Schweiz,' E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.

had not approved. As a result, these two points formed the basis of much of the discussions that were held during this time.[746] Surprisingly, the issues that had been heavily debated in the Swiss press and in parliament over the preceding months were almost completely left out. While the ICRC rejected Soviet demands to station their own personnel on the Zugerberg, it did not challenge the arrangement that the prisoners were to be repatriated to the Soviet Union after two years.[747] This eventually became a major problem, as several prisoners refused to return home once their two years elapsed.

Following a first round of discussions in Geneva in February, an ICRC delegation headed to Moscow for a second round on 14 March.[748] Amongst this delegation were Jean de Courten, the ICRC's lead delegate for Asia and the Far East, as well as François Zen Ruffinen, the head of the ICRC's delegation that had visited Kabul in 1982.[749] Initially, there was scarce progress, as the Soviet diplomats insisted that only the Afghan authorities could decide on whether or not to permit the return of the ICRC.[750] Changing gear, they then claimed to know that the ICRC had received reports of thirteen more Soviet prisoners in January and demanded that they be transferred to Switzerland immediately.[751] De Courten and Zen Ruffinen, on the other hand, argued that they stood little chance of receiving any further prisoners from the *mujahideen* unless the ICRC be readmitted to Afghanistan first.[752]

In the absence of progress, both sides agreed to postpone their negotiations and to include the Swiss authorities in their further deliberations. This did not at first resolve their differences, but it did – for the first time – indicate why the Soviet Union had hitherto refused to cooperate fully with the arrangement. On 3 May 1983, a Soviet delegation led by Ambassador Lavrov and composed of

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[746] N.a., 'Projet aide-mémoire à remettre aux autorités soviétiques,' n.d., E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[747] Ibid.
[748] Edouard Brunner, 'Note d'entretien: Internés militaires soviétiques – Entretien avec MM. De Courten et Zen Ruffinen, du CICR, Berne, jeudi 3 mars 1983,' 4 March 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2764*, CH-BAR.
[749] Ibid.
[750] Ibid.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Ibid.

representatives from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, the armed forces and of the Soviet Red Cross, arrived in Geneva, where tripartite talks resumed at the ICRC headquarters.[753] The Soviet delegation began by presenting a catalogue of no less than 28 demands concerning the conditions of internment on the Zugerberg.[754] These demands – not the issues discussed in Moscow in March – then formed the basis of the discussions with the Swiss authorities. The Swiss authorities declared themselves willing to make certain adjustments to these conditions, but not to adopt all of the 28 Soviet demands, some of which contradicted the initial agreement between the ICRC and the Soviet Union.[755] For instance, they agreed to arrange daily telephone calls and to allow Soviet embassy staff to show the internees Soviet film material as per one of their 28 requests.[756] However, they refused to allow the embassy to station staff permanently on the Zugerberg and they refused Soviet demands that all prisoners be repatriated at the end of their internment.

According to both the ICRC and the Swiss authorities, it would violate the principle of free choice to deny the prisoners the opportunity to change their minds on whether or not to return to the Soviet Union at the end of their internment. This refusal was at the heart of the disagreement between the Soviet Union on one side and the Swiss and the ICRC on the other. For the Soviet Union, consent to repatriation had been a necessary and inviolable condition for each prisoner transfer. For the ICRC and the Swiss authorities, on the other hand, it was more important to know that each prisoner consented to this condition voluntarily and as such, they also recognized that some of the prisoners might change their minds. What was more, they feared that the Soviet Union primarily wanted its own personnel on site at the Zugerberg to inform on them and to pressure the prisoners to return home. In fact, British archival sources reveal that one of the prisoners themselves already acted as

[753] Pierre Aubert, 'Gespräche mit einer sowjetischen Delegation über die internierten sowjetischen Soldaten,' 30 May 1983, E5001G#1994/118#148*, CH-BAR.
[754] Ibid.
[755] Ibid.
[756] N.a., 'Note d'information,' 13 October 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR.

an informant for the Soviet embassy in Berne.[757] As a result, talks broke down anew on 26 May, leaving the future of the arrangement unresolved.[758]

To compound matters still further, on 8 July, two weeks after talks broke down, one of the Soviet prisoners escaped from the Zugerberg, plunging the already problematic transfer scheme into its most acute crisis to date. Each Friday, the prisoners had been allowed an informal outing to the nearby town of Zug, where they could spend their earnings from work at the camp on a bit of shopping. On 8 July, four of the Soviet prisoners were taken into Zug by six guards in plain clothes. At the local COOP, a standard-sized supermarket, Youri Washenko asked permission to use the facilities as a pretext to escape into the crowd.[759] His guards immediately alerted the cantonal police and the Federal Military Department (FMD), which notified the Swiss border patrol. The only problem was that out of all of the internees currently on the Zugerberg, Washenko was the only one of whom the authorities did not have a photograph.[760]

Roger Bär, from the Swiss embassy in Bonn, subsequently reconstructed Washenko's escape in a diplomatic cable dated 18 July. According to Bär, Washenko crossed the border to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) sometime between 8 and 9 July. From there, he hitchhiked to Freiburg im Breisgau, where he arrived on 9 July. The following day, a Taxi driver dropped him off at a local police station, from where he was transferred to the Department for Immigration in Karlsruhe. On 11 or 12 July, Washenko formally applied for asylum in the FRG. In an interview with the German magazine *Die Bunte* in September of 1983, he gave two reasons for his escape and for applying for

[757] C. W. Long, 'Correspondence to H.E. Mr Adams: ICRC and Afghan Problems,' 26 October 1983, FCO 37/3070, UK-TNA.
[758] Edouard Brunner, 'Internés militaires soviétiques,' 27 May 1983, J1.301#2002/197#548*, CH-BAR.
[759] Adrien Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internés soviétiques – Disparition de Iouri Vachtchenko,' 11 July 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR; Edouard Brunner, 'Note de dossier: Internés militaires soviétiques/ Vachtchenko/ Entrevue avec l'Ambassadeur d'URSS, Mercredi 27 juillet 1983,' 28 July 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR.
[760] Evéquoz, 'Note de Dossier: Internés soviétiques – Disparition de Iouri Vachtchenko,' E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR.

asylum. First, because the FRG was geographically close and second, because unlike the Swiss "they don't collude with the Soviets."[761] He also made it known that "I am not ashamed to be Russian. I am ashamed for my political leadership."[762] Apparently, throughout his internment in Switzerland, he had received visits from high-ranking officials at the Soviet embassy, who had lectured to him about Soviet politics and pressured him to return home. "Everything they said and wrote was a lie," he told *Die Bunte*, much like Povarnitsin had told *Radio Free Kabul* before leaving Pakistan.[763] Both of these interviews were significant for two reasons. First, because they showed that the Soviet Union was right to worry about what the POWs on the Zugerberg thought of their own government. Second, because the Swiss press and public were right to worry about the POWs and their repatriation. As Povarnitsin's attempts and Washenko's successful escape demonstrated, desertion continued to be a major issue even among soldiers who had become prisoners. On an even deeper level, their troubled relationship with their own government, the fact that the Soviet embassy spied on them and insisted on their repatriation was also indicative of a far greater problem within the Soviet Union. Subsequent chapters of this thesis will touch on the systemic factors that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Yet arguably, individual stories like those of the Soviet prisoners on the Zugerberg tell us equally much about the degradation of faith in the Soviet system amongst its own citizens.

Markus Zemp, one of the FDFA's Russian translators on the Zugerberg, wrote in one of his reports on the situation that the only internee who had ever spoken positively about the prospect of repatriation was Viktor Sintschuk. Hassan Agadjanov had occasionally mentioned it in connection with work and said that he hoped to resume his post as an overseer on frozen goods transports after

[761] *Die Bunte*, 'Ein Russe packt aus,' 15 September 1983, J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR, author's translation from "Deutschland steckt nicht mit den Sowjets unter einer Decke."
[762] Ibid., author's translation from, "Ich schäme mich nicht, ein Russe zu sein. Ich schäme mich für meine politische Führung."
[763] Ibid., author's translation from, "Alles, was sie sagten und schrieben, war eine Lüge."

going back.[764] Rimas Burba was apparently conflicted about wanting to see his parents again, but feared what might happen if he did.[765] Zemp reported to the FDFA in mid-August of 1983 that Victor Sintchuck had made up his mind not to return to the Soviet Union. If forced to return, he threatened to escape to the FRG or Canada like Washenko.[766] Interestingly, Yuri Povarnitsin was one of the few who originally indicated that he would return to the Soviet Union. It would be stupid, he argued, to want to stay in "free" Switzerland, seeing as he had only ever seen its "fences and barbed wire."[767] This being said, Linda Howard, the FDFA's original translator, who had stayed with the Soviet prisoners since their days at St. Jean, wrote to the FDFA in February of 1984 that none of the remaining prisoners wanted to guarantee to the Soviet embassy that they were willing to return home after two years.[768] According to Markus Zemp, they generally appeared to be afraid of the embassy officials who paid them regular visits.[769] They had repeatedly asked him about whether he reported their misdeeds to the embassy and apparently they were well aware of the fact that the Soviet government had committed itself to pay the expenses related to their internment.[770] On more than one occasion, they told Zemp that they were glad that the Soviet embassy was not allowed to station any embassy officials on the Zugerberg, because it would have meant that they would lose the last of their privacy.[771]

On 12 March 1984, with the two-year internment of the first three prisoners coming to an end in May, the National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, once more took up the subject of repatriation. In his response to a series of questions from Jean Clivaz of the Social Democratic Party, Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert announced that in theory the plan was still for the original three

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[764] Markus Zemp, 'Bericht von Markus Zemp, Dolmetscher "Campo,"' 5 August 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR.
[765] Markus Zemp, '2. Bericht von Markus Zemp, Dolmetscher Campo2 *(sic),'* 16 August 1983, E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR.
[766] Ibid.
[767] Ibid., author's translation from, "Es sei dumm zu glauben, er wolle in der freien Schweiz bleiben, da er bis jetzt nur Gitterstäbe und Stacheldraht gesehen habe."
[768] Linda Howard, 'Correspondence to Adrien Evéquoz,' 1 February 1984, E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR.
[769] Zemp, '2. Bericht von Markus Zemp,' E2023A#1993/129#2765*, CH-BAR.
[770] Ibid.
[771] Ibid.

prisoners to return to the Soviet Union on 27 May.[772] Aubert also reminded Clivaz that Didienko, Povarnitsin and Sintshuk had each told the ICRC of their consent to repatriation prior to coming to Switzerland.[773] Yet instead of following up with a guarantee to this effect to the Soviet Union, Aubert took the liberty to depart from the original arrangement between the ICRC and the Soviet Union of 22 January 1982. Instead, he announced that:

> If, at the end of their internment, any of the internees express their desire not to go back, to stay in Switzerland or to go to a different country, that will, freely expressed, will be respected. We will force none of them to return to their home country against their will.[774]

In other words, to their credit, the Swiss authorities chose not to appease the Soviet Union on this matter. After much debate and criticism in the press and in parliament, they ultimately made the decision to prioritize humanitarian principles over diplomatic relations to the Soviet Union. The debate in the press died down somewhat after that. What was more, over time, the substantial majority of prisoners actually chose to return to the Soviet Union and this may have played a role in the decision of the Soviet Union to allow the ICRC back into Afghanistan in 1986. As subsequent chapters will show, systemic factors relating to the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, to his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and to prepare the Afghan regime accordingly may also played a role. Yet for the purpose of this thesis it is important to stress that Switzerland's role as a protective power and as a mediator was a likely causal factor in the return of the ICRC to Afghanistan.

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[772] N.a., 'Antwort von Bundesrat P. Aubert vom 12. März auf die parlamentarische Anfrage Clivaz,' 27 April 1984, E2023A#1993/129#2766*, CH-BAR.

[773] Ibid.

[774] Ibid., author's translation from, "Je voudrais redire ici très clairement ce qui suit: si l'un ou l'autre des internés devait à l'échéance exprimer le désir de ne pas rentrer, de rester en Suisse ou de gagner un autre pays, sa volonté librement exprimée serait respectée."

Three weeks prior to 27 May, the FDFA formally invited the three original Soviet POWs, Didienko, Povarnitsin and Sintshuk, to re-state their intentions with regards to repatriation. Didienko decided to return home, while Povarnitsin and Sintshuk chose to stay and these decisions were relayed to the ICRC.[775] Both Povarnitsin and Sintshuk also had to re-state their intentions to a representative of the Soviet embassy, after which the FDFA transferred them to a secret location outside of the reach of the Soviet authorities.[776] Didienko, meanwhile, was driven to Zurich-Kloten airport on 27 May, where he boarded an Aeroflot flight to Moscow in the presence of the FDFA, the ICRC and officials from the Soviet embassy.[777] Being the first to repatriate to the Soviet Union, Didienko initially maintained regular correspondence with his former translator. According to this correspondence, Didienko returned to his native Ukraine, where he first stayed with his parents in Zaporoshie and then settled in Kiev where he resumed work as a crane operator on various construction sites.[778]

Sintchouk and Povarnitsin both tried to settle in Switzerland, but they both encountered difficulties initially. Sintchouk briefly settled in Aesch, a German-speaking village close to the border-town of Basel, where he took up employment as an agricultural labourer on the farm of Andreas Koellreuter.[779] According to Koellreuter, the authorities swore him to secrecy about Sintchouk's true identity and he therefore told his staff that Sintchouk was a seasonal labourer from Poland. Surprisingly, however, shortly after Sintchouk's arrival, the wife of one of his employees asked to see him in confidence and told him she knew who Sintchouk really was. Two years ago, she had been on a camping holiday in Erlach near Gals with her family and had seen Sintchouk's and Povarnitsin's break-out of the correctional facility at St. Jean. Fortunately for both Koellreuter and Sintchouk,

[775] Jacques de Watteville, 'Sort des soldats soviétiques ayant terminé leur période d'internement en Suisse,' 20 January 1986, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.
[776] Ibid.
[777] Ibid.
[778] N.a., 'Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen: Wie Walerij versucht , so zu leben wie alle,' 2 November 1990, E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*, CH-BAR; ICRC archival documents diverge on this point. To verify the records of the ICRC, it is necessary to submit a FOIA request citing Article 7 of the Rules governing access to the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, adopted on 2 March 2017.
[779] Andreas Koellreuter, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 17 December 2018.

however, she agreed to keep their secret for the sake of Sintchouk's safety.[780] Then, to Koellreuter's surprize, one day, Sintchouk simply disappeared. Records at the Swiss Federal Archives located him in Australia several years later.[781] Povarnitsin, on the other hand, applied for political asylum in Switzerland. His application was originally rejected, but was eventually successful upon appeal and he settled in the region of Lake Geneva. In December of 1985, he moved to Bovy near Chexbres, where he began to work as an agricultural technician.[782]

Without exception, all of the remaining Soviet prisoners eventually returned to the Soviet Union, undergoing the same procedure as Povarnitsin, Sintchouk and Didienko prior to their departure. Hassan Agadjanov was released in August of 1984, as was Viktor Sapojnikov. According to information that the FDFA continued to receive from the Soviet embassy in Berne, Agadjanov returned to his native Azerbaijan, while Sapojnikov went home to his native Ural region in Russia. Rimas Burba settled with his parents in Lithuania in November of 1984 and remained in touch with Markus Zemp via regular telephone calls thereafter. Guernam Anissimov returned to Kujbychev that same month. Mikhail Govtva went home to his parents in Leningrad in December of 1985, having first undergone a debriefing in Moscow and another at Tashkent.[783] Even Youri Washenko returned to the Soviet Union, after having originally applied for political asylum in Germany. He eventually settled in Sverdlovsk.[784] The last Soviet prisoner of war left Switzerland on 26 March 1986 and overall, the prisoner transfer scheme never exceeded eleven prisoners in total.

The FDFA speculated in its concluding report on the prisoner transfer scheme their voluntary repatriation ultimately worked in favour of the ICRC's recurrent attempts to return to Afghanistan.

[780] Ibid.
[781] N.a., 'Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen,' E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*, CH-BAR.
[782] De Watteville, 'Sort des soldats soviétiques ayant terminé leur période d'internement en Suisse,' E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR; N.a., 'Pressemitteilung: Asylentscheid im Fall Povarnitsin,' 25 May 1986, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.
[783] De Watteville, 'Sort des soldats soviétiques ayant terminé leur période d'internement en Suisse,' E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.
[784] N.a., 'Afghanistan ist nicht vergessen,' E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*, CH-BAR.

According to its author, Jacques de Watteville, “It even seems as though under these circumstances, she [the Soviet Union] encouraged the Afghan government to resume negotiations with the ICRC to arrange for its activities in Afghanistan to continue.”[785] In fact, talks had already resumed in November of 1985, after it had become clear that the majority of the Soviet POWs would opt for repatriation. The *mujahideen*, on the other hand, were furious, given the fact that the ICRC had chosen to comply with the stipulation of repatriation after two years despite the fact that the Afghan authorities had refused to allow the ICRC to return on a permanent basis. Many of them refused to offer up any further prisoners to the scheme after this.

What is more, according to an article that appeared in *The Times* on 7 October 1986, the ICRC had chosen to negotiate the provision of medical aid to the Afghan interior without insisting on prison inspections at the same time.[786] In other words, the organization prioritized the well-being of the Afghan civilian population over that of the Afghan prison population. Jean-Michel Monod of the ICRC confirmed this in conversation with a representative of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in September of 1986.[787] What this means is that journalists such as to Maya Jurt of the conservative weekly *Weltwoche*, Peter Sager of *ZeitBild* and even Bernard Henry-Lévy were not entirely wrong in accusing the ICRC of double standards in the context of Afghanistan. To use Maya Jurt’s phrase, the ICRC did turn a “blind eye” in this case.[788] That being said, one can conclude that these critics only partially understand the nature of the work of the ICRC. It is true that in theory, the ICRC is responsible for monitoring the application of the Geneva Conventions and therefore for upholding wide-reaching respect for international humanitarian law. Yet due to the inherently political nature

[785] Jacques de Watteville, ‘Note de dossier: Bilan de l’opération Zugerberg: Internement de prisonniers soviétiques en Suisse (1982-1986),’ 5 May 1986, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR, author’s translation from, “Il semble même que dans ce contexte elle ait encouragé le gouvernement afghan à reprendre des négociations avec le CICR en vue d’une reprise de ses activités en Afghanistan.”
[786] Michael Hamlyn, *The Times*, ‘Red Cross urged to win access to Afghanistan’s prisoners,’ 7 October 1986, FCO 58/4514, UK-TNA.
[787] Wade-Grey *(sic),* ‘Your Telno. 347 to UKMIS Geneva: ICRC - Afghanistan,’ 25 September 1986, FCO 58/4514, UK-TNA.
[788] Jurt, *Weltwoche*, ‘Sorgenkinder,’ J1.301#2002/197#549*, CH-BAR.

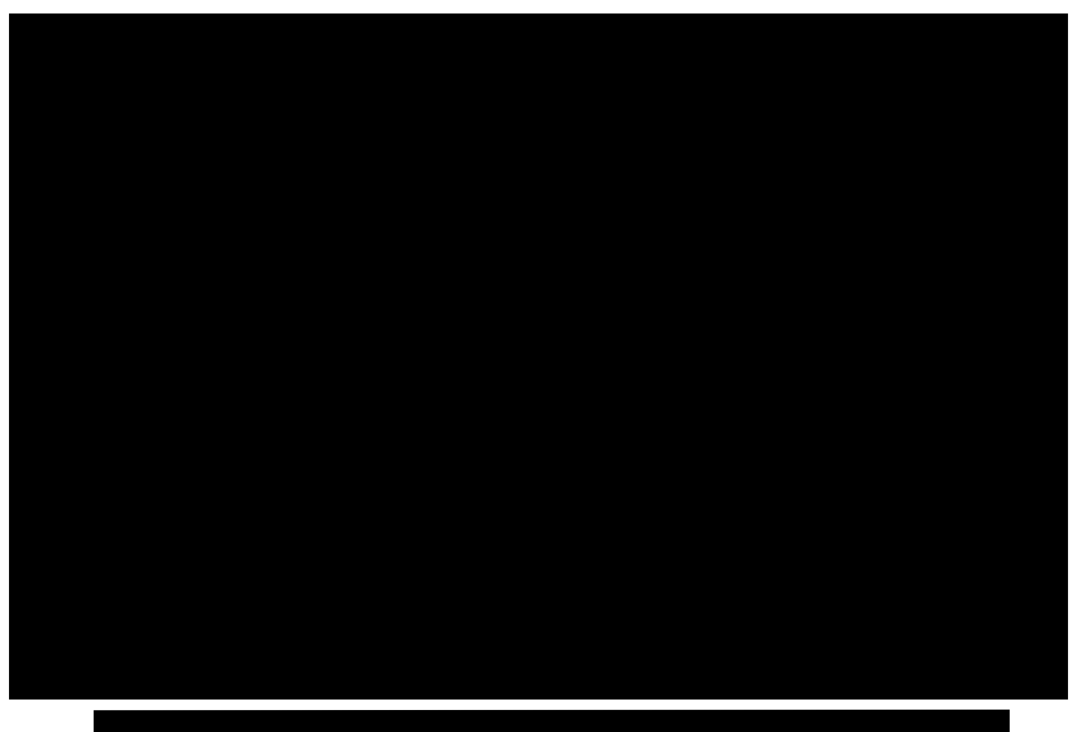
of this task – as this particular case demonstrates well – making compromises such as these is an equally inherent part of the ICRC's work in practice. What is more, I would disagree with American journalist Edouard Girardet, who has implied that the ICRC should have extended humanitarian aid to Afghanistan long before, if only it had been willing to compromise on its statutes, cooperate with the Afghan regime or operate clandestinely the way *Médecins Sans Frontières* had done.[789] To its credit, one can say that unlike most other non-governmental organizations, the ICRC consistently attempted to legally access Afghanistan throughout the 1980s and that the prisoner transfer scheme with the Swiss government played part in the ICRC's eventual success.

On 6 April 1986, after six years of negotiation, intermittent mediation, repeated visits and recurring expulsions, the ICRC finally received permission to return to Kabul.[790] The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published an enthusiastic commentary on the occasion, emphasizing that "for the first time in four years, an ICRC delegation will visit Afghanistan."[791] Others, such as the daily *Tages-Anzeiger*, were slightly more cautious, arguing that the terms of the Karmal regime's invitation were actually quite "vague" and that interestingly, the invitation coincided with rumours that the Red Army might withdraw some of its troops from Afghanistan soon.[792] As the following chapter will discuss, the ICRC actually received permission to return to Afghanistan one month before the Soviet Politburo replaced Babrak Karmal with Mohammad Najibullah, the director of the KHAD, in an attempt to prepare the regime for the eventual withdrawal of Soviet troops.

In the meantime, on 13 April, Jean de Courten, the ICRC's Delegate General for Asia, personally led the ICRC's renewed mission to Kabul and it turned out to be the ICRC's most successful mission to

[789] Girardet, *Afghanistan,* 224.
[790] ICRC, 'Afghan Sitrep No. 49,' 23 April 1986, E2023A#1998/212#976*, CH-BAR.
[791] *NZZ*, 'Sondierungsgespräche des IKRK in Afghanistan,' 9 April 1986, Press Collection, CH-SBA, author's translation from, "Erstmals nach vier Jahren besuchte in dieser Woche wieder eine Delegation des IKRK Afghanistan."
[792] Pierre Simonitsch, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Das IKRK hat wieder einen Fuss in Afghanistan,' 15 April 1986, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

date. It precipitated a further round of negotiations with the Afghan regime, the results of which allowed the ICRC to establish a permanent presence in the country starting March 1987.[793] What was more, not only was the ICRC now authorized to operate in the government-controlled areas, but in all areas controlled by the *mujahideen* as well. These are illustrated in map 6 below, dated May 1989. As the map shows, while the regime and the Red Army did control the main ring road, which connects most major Afghan population centres, they continued to control little else.



The first ICRC medical team left Geneva for Kabul on 27 February of 1987 and – as it turned out – was allowed to conduct a renewed inspection of *Pul-i-Charkhi* prison, beginning in early March.[795] This time, the team inspected not just block one, but blocks three and four as well. In addition, the ICRC was also able to visit prisons in Mazar-i- Sharif and in Herat, as well as the *Dar-u-Tadib* detention

[793] ICRC, 'Afghan Sitrep No. 64 (January-June 1987),' June 1987, E2023#1998/212#861*, CH-BAR; ICRC, 'Pressecommuniqué Nr. 1531: Wiederaufnahme der IKRK-Aktivitäten in Afghanistan,' 3 Febrary 1987, E2023#1998/212#861*, CH-BAR; N.a., 'Afghanistan,' *International Review of the Red Cross* 30(1990), 52.
[794] William B. Wood, 'Long Time Coming: The Repatriation of Afghan Refugees,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 79(1989), 358.
[795] ICRC, 'Afghan Sitrep No. 64 (January-June 1987),' E2023#1998/212#861*, CH-BAR; ICRC, 'Communication à la presse no 7/87,' 25 Febrary 1987, E2023#1998/212#861*, CH-BAR.

centre in Kabul.[796] Unlike most prisons, which operated under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, this prison was administered directly by the KHAD.[797] As might have been expected, complications surrounding the ICRC's presence in Afghanistan led to a renewed interruption of inspections between July and December of 1987.[798] According to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the new government of former KHAD director Mohammad Najibullah refused to comply with the ICRC's confidentiality criteria during its prison visits.[799] Yet this time, in contrast to previous occasions, the ICRC itself chose to interrupt its visits on account of these circumstances.[800] The interruption was shorter than previous ones and in line with Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Afghan government, the ICRC was not only allowed to return the following year but to open its first ever hospital in Kabul.[801] Originally, the clinic operated with 50 patient beds and by the end of 1990, this number had increased to 280. Between January and December of 1990, it admitted 4'088 patients, carried out 8'724 surgical interventions and consulted 7'189 out-patients.[802]

This was a significant development in the Afghan crisis, as well as for the relationship between the Swiss government and the ICRC. With support from the Swiss government, the ICRC had become the first major NGO to deliver humanitarian aid to the Afghan interior with the consent of the new Afghan regime. As subsequent chapters will discuss, leadership changes in the Soviet Union in 1985 and in Afghanistan in 1986 may also have played a role in enabling the ICRC to return. In the meantime, archival materials at the Swiss Federal Archives do not suggest that the Swiss government in any way controlled or dominated the ICRC over the course of the prisoner transfer operation or during the ICRC's return to Afghanistan. Rather, during the initial stages of the operation, the ICRC was the driving force behind the transfer scheme. The Swiss authorities acted in a supportive

[796] N.a., 'Afghanistan,' *International Review of the Red* Cross 30(1990), 52.
[797] Ibid.
[798] Ibid.
[799] *NZZ*, 'Wieder IKRK-Gefagenenbesuche in Kabul: Entsendung einer achtköpfigen Delegation,' 9 February 1988, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[800] Ibid.
[801] N.a., 'Afghanistan,' *International Review of the Red Cross* 30(1990), 53.
[802] Ibid.

capacity, providing the infrastructure and conducting the day-to-day operations of the internment with a view to supporting the ICRC in its efforts to return to Afghanistan. It is important to remember, however, that ultimately, it was the decision of the Swiss government, not to force any of the Soviet prisoners to repatriate at the end of their two-year internment. The Swiss thereby also took the risk of derailing the chances of the ICRC to return to Afghanistan indefinitely. Fortunately for the ICRC, the majority of the Soviet POWs opted for repatriation, which went to show that agency at the level of the individual could have implications at the intergovernmental level, especially in the context of Afghanistan. The present chapter has made this case for the Soviet POWs and as subsequent chapters will show, individual agency and especially the agency of non-state actors also became a crucial enabling factor for Switzerland's mandate to mediate in Afghanistan after 1990.

Having thus covered Switzerland's deepening involvement in Afghanistan in the domain of humanitarian aid and humanitarian protective power diplomacy, the remainder of this thesis will explore how Switzerland's mediatory mandate ultimately came about, what difficulties it encountered and what significance it had for Swiss foreign policy at the end of the Cold War. The successful return of the ICRC to Afghanistan had shown the Swiss that their neutral good offices could make a difference, however small. More importantly, it had also shown to many Afghans that Switzerland was genuinely neutral in the Afghan crisis and that both its humanitarian tradition and its good offices were genuine. This being said, throughout the 1980s Switzerland continued to struggle for a role in the international system more broadly. As the following chapter will demonstrate, while Switzerland had been engaged in the prisoner transfer scheme, the United Nations had begun to mediate a diplomatic solution to the Afghan crisis by arranging government-level discussions between Afghanistan and Pakistan in Geneva. What is more, after Mikhail Gorbachev took office as General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985, the Soviet Union began not only to encourage domestic reforms in Afghanistan itself but to support the Geneva Talks as a mechanism through which to legitimize the eventual withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces.

# Chapter 7: The UN-Mediated Geneva Talks on Afghanistan, 1982-1986

Artemy Kalinovsky has argued that, "Soviet leaders had come to accept the need for UN diplomacy" as early as 1982.[803] Not only had the invasion of Afghanistan damaged the Soviet Union's relations with many Third World countries, but it failed to stabilize Afghanistan domestically. Having covered Switzerland's engagement in Afghanistan from 1982 to 1986, this chapter will now retrace the same time period to narrate the role of the UN. It is worth retracing the role of the UN in the Afghan crisis in some detail for three reasons. First, because already during the early years of the Soviet occupation, there developed an element of implicit institutional competition between the Swiss and the UN. A number of states and intergovernmental organizations approached the Swiss government to host an international conference on Afghanistan during the early 1980s, yet ultimately, high-level diplomatic talks took place through the UN. Second, whereas the Swiss government had demonstrated its ability to remain neutral as a provider of good offices during the prisoner transfer scheme of 1982 to 1986, the UN – in the context of the Geneva Talks – had not. It excluded the *mujahideen* from the talks between 1982 and 1988 and as a result, not only did the *mujahideen* mistrust the UN, but they did not feel bound by the Geneva Accords after 1988. Third, in 1986, the Swiss government launched a renewed bid to join the UN. This may at first appear to be unrelated to Afghanistan, but it was actually important both as a sign that Switzerland continued to struggle for a role in the international system and because eventually, the Afghan conflict parties approached the Swiss government precisely because Switzerland did not end up as a member of the UN. In 1986, the Swiss public voted against a government bid for membership to protect Switzerland's neutrality. In summary, therefore, the period of 1982 to 1986 was important for Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan not only because of its role as a protective power and a mediator during the ICRC's prisoner transfer scheme. It was also important because over this period, it became clear that

[803] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 55.

Switzerland and the UN would go separate ways, both in relation to each other and in relation to Afghanistan.

The search for a diplomatic solution to the Afghan crisis in fact began almost immediately after the Soviet invasion itself. As described in chapter three, the Soviet Union initially vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution and while the General Assembly passed Resolution ES-6/2 of January 1980, the resolution itself was legally non-binding. As a result, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) became one of the first intergovernmental organizations to pursue diplomatic talks outside of the UN and one of the first to approach the Swiss government to host them. The OIC has since received scarce attention from the secondary source literature. It began a Saudi project for the promotion of Islamic cooperation in an effort to counterbalance Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's idea of secular pan-Arab nationalism.[804] In September of 1969, 25 Islamic countries dispatched representatives to its first summit in Rabat and in March of 1970, the OIC held its first meeting at the Foreign Minister level to establish a permanent secretariat.[805] By the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the organization had grown to 42 members and had committed itself to the promotion of Islamic solidarity, to cooperation in economic, social, cultural and scientific domains, as well as to arrange consultations among its members and other intergovernmental organizations.[806]

At the behest of the Pakistani government, its first gathering on Afghanistan took place in Islamabad on 22 May 1980.[807] According to Ahmad Siddiqi, the OIC condemned the Soviet invasion even more harshly than the UNGA. First of all, it demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Second, it called for the restoration of Afghanistan's independence,

[804] N.a., 'The Organization of the Islamic Conference,' n.d., FCO 37/2414, UK-TNA.
[805] Ibid.
[806] Ibid.
[807] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon: Taiwan und die wichtigsten Ereignisse der letzten drei Monate,' 18 August 1980, E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR ; Siddiqi, 'From Bilateralism to Cold War Conflict,' 171.

sovereignty and previously non-aligned character, as well as respect for its Islamic identity. In addition to this, the conference insisted that the Afghan people be able to freely choose their own form of government, their social and economic system of governance, as well as to return to their homes in Afghanistan in conditions of both honour and safety.[808] Most importantly, unlike the NAM, the conference suspended Afghanistan's membership in light of the invasion and it called on all member states to cut their diplomatic ties to the Karmal regime.[809] To find a diplomatic solution to the Afghan crisis, it established a standing committee consisting of Agha Shahi, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, the Foreign Minister of Iran,[810] as well as Habib Chatty, the General Secretary of the Islamic Conference.[811] The Karmal regime was not represented.

As one of its first steps, the standing committee approached the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) on 12 June 1980 to arrange for talks between the committee, the Karmal regime and the *mujahideen* in Switzerland.[812] Deliberations had initially revolved round Paris as a venue for the negotiations. However, Iranian Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh had objected to France, because the French government had imposed sanctions on Iran over the course of the Iranian hostage crisis.[813] On the other hand, Iran did not appear to mind that Switzerland was at this point actively involved in securing the release of these hostages as a neutral mediator. Rather, it was the FDFA which was initially hesitant to provide a venue for these discussions, fearing that doing so might upset Switzerland's bilateral relationship with the Soviet Union.[814] This was still at a time when parliament and the Federal Council were coming to terms with the Soviet invasion itself, as well as with the effects of the collapse of *détente* on the international system as a whole. As chapter three

[808] Agha Shahi, 'Prospects of a Political Settlement of the War in Afghanistan,' *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 7(1984), 4.
[809] Siddiqi, 'From Bilateralism to Cold War Conflict,' 171.
[810] He was to be removed from his post in August of 1980 and executed in 1982 for allegedly having plotted an assassination attempt against Ayatollah Khomeini.
[811] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon,' E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR ; N.a. 'Afghanistan (Background Paper),' 18 June 1980, E2010-01A#1991/18#5*, CH-BAR.
[812] Shahi, 'Prospects of a Political Settlement of the War in Afghanistan,' 4.
[813] A. Rüegg, 'Dreierausschuss der islamischen Konferenz für Afghanistan,' 16 June 1980, E2024A#1993/354#209*, CH-BAR.
[814] Ibid.

has shown, the Swiss were initially very cautious and saw no role for themselves in the Afghan crisis. Upon reflection, however, according to Alfred Rüegg, the deputy director of the FDFA Secretariat for Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America, the FDFA decided that Switzerland stood to gain both trust and goodwill among most Islamic countries by supporting the diplomatic effort of the Islamic Conference.[815]

The meeting eventually took place at Mont Pélérin on Lake Geneva from 20-21 June 1980.[816] On account of its neutrality, the Swiss government did not participate. Neither did the Karmal regime, which chose to boycott the OIC in light of its own expulsion from the organization.[817] Further, Karmal himself argued that by inviting the *mujahideen* to the conference, the standing committee was recognizing them on an equal footing to other parties to the talks, which he refused to accept.[818] This issue of recognition eventually became a significant diplomatic stumbling block over the course of the Afghan crisis and one which barred the conflict parties from direct talks for years. As a result, the Iranian government withdrew from the standing committee shortly after the Mont Pélérin meeting and according to Shahi, "No progress towards a political solution appeared possible under the aegis of the Islamic Conference."[819]

The NAM, the CSCE and the European Community (EC) also tried to find a political solution to the Afghan crisis. Yet they all failed for similar reasons. The NAM were actually deeply divided amongst themselves over the issue.[820] On one hand, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia attempted to mobilize the NAM to condemn the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The Republic of Cuba, on the other hand obstructed this attempt wherever possible, on account of its close ties to the Soviet Union. Robert Rakove has shown that since the inception of the NAM, during the early 1960s, many

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[815] Ibid.
[816] David Gowan, 'Paper on the Organization of the Islamic Conference,' 21 July 1981, FCO 37/2414, UK-TNA.
[817] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon,' E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR.
[818] Shahi, 'Prospects of a Political Settlement of the War in Afghanistan,' 4.
[819] Ibid.
[820] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon,' E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR.

of its members have been active as mediators either individually or collectively.[821] Mali, Algeria, Ghana and India, for instance, had all tried to mediate during the Vietnam War and Algeria was ultimately successful in mediating a resolution to the Iranian hostage crisis.[822] In the case of the Afghan crisis, however, some of the NAM did not work with each other, but against each other. The Castro government delayed ministerial meetings of the NAM on the subject and instead offered its own good offices to Afghanistan and Pakistan instead.[823]

On 29 April, Isidoro Malmierca Peoli, the Cuban Foreign Minister, left Havana on what was his third tour related to the Afghan crisis, planning visits to Vienna, Tehran, Colombo, Belgrade and possibly Islamabad.[824] Meanwhile, Cuban Vice President Juan Almeida had been touring African capitals to promote Cuba's offer of good offices. In doing so, his principal aim was to persuade the Pakistani government to take up direct talks with the Karmal regime in de facto recognition of the latter. Related to this, the Cuban government supported the Soviet narrative that the purpose of the invasion of Afghanistan had merely been to prevent foreign interference of any kind in honour of the 1978 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA).[825] Talks with Pakistan would have made it appear as though Pakistan was to blame for such interference. As a result of the Castro regime's stalling, the NAM foreign ministers only formally convened in January 1981. Meeting in New Delhi, they repeated earlier demands for the withdrawal of any and all foreign forces from Afghanistan and for reciprocal guarantees of non-intervention for the future.[826]

The CSCE and the EC also discussed the subject of Afghanistan intently during the early 1980s. According to Edouard Brunner, who led the Swiss delegation to the CSCE follow-up conference in

[821] Robert Rakove, 'The Rise and Fall of Non-Aligned Mediation, 1961-6,' *The International History Review* 37(2015), 993.
[822] Ibid., 1004-1008.
[823] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon,' E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR.
[824] Lord Carrington, 'Afghanistan, Neutrality and Non-Alignment,' 7 May 1980, FCO 98/900, UK-TNA.
[825] N.a., 'Tour d'Horizon,' E2004B#1984/38#2*, CH-BAR.
[826] Shahi, 'Prospects of a Political Settlement of the War in Afghanistan,' 6.

Madrid from 1980 to 1983, "Hardly a day passed by on which Afghanistan was not discussed."[827] Yet unlike at the NAM, where a member state actively obfuscated the diplomatic resolution of the crisis, at the CSCE, other crises gradually pushed it from the agenda. Martial law and the threat of a Soviet invasion of Poland in 1981, as well as the Soviet downing of a civilian Korean Airlines flight and the American invasion of Grenada in 1983 not only preoccupied the CSCE, but interrupted its proceedings for several months on multiple occasions.

The effect of the EC on the Afghanistan deliberations was similar.[828] At the initiative of the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Peter Carrington, the ten-nation EC originally proposed the neutralization of Afghanistan in February of 1980.[829] The so-called Carrington Plan was different in form to some of the other proposals that were circulated at the time, because it arguably perceived the Afghan crisis not just as a regional crisis, but as a systemic Cold War crisis. Accordingly, the plan included talks between the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China by virtue of their permanent membership of the UN Security Council. In addition, according to the plan, Pakistan, India and Iran would be invited in their capacity as neighbours to Afghanistan. Representatives of the *mujahideen* would only be invited during the later stages of the conference.[830] On 12 July 1981, as the Islamic Conference had done, the British ambassador to Berne called upon the Swiss government to host such a gathering and in an act of uncharacteristic speed, the Federal Council offered two options to the British on the same day. The first was to stage a conference on the Carrington Plan on Swiss territory. The second was that Federal Councillor Aubert, who currently presided the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, would encourage the members of the council to support the Carrington Plan.[831] This was a remarkable transition from the government's original stance of 1980, which foresaw no role for Switzerland in the Afghan crisis.

[827] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 296.
[828] B. Schenk, 'Afghanistan: Nie Vergessen,' 3 April 1984, E2010-01A#1994/372#42*, CH-BAR.
[829] Siddiqi, 'From Bilateralism to Cold War Conflict,' 171.
[830] Leonard Downie, *Washington Post,* 'EEC to Propose Talks on Pullout by Soviets from Kabul,' 25 June 1981, E2200.36#2000/290#330*, CH-BAR.
[831] Edouard Brunner, 'Afghanistan,' 2 July 1981, E2200.36#2000/290#330*, CH-BAR.

It is difficult to tell what would have become of the Carrington Plan and of Switzerland's readiness to provide its good offices as a neutral conference host, had not a different diplomatic channel begun to gain traction through the UN at the same time. Up until this point, most diplomatic initiatives had failed because they could not secure the support of the Soviet Union. Yet towards the end of 1982, this began to change. There are competing explanations for why this happened. According to Artemy Kalinovsky, one explanation might have been Leonid Brezhnev's death in November of 1982. Another explanation might have been that the Politburo realized that the war against the *mujahideen* could not be decisively won. Not only could the *mujahideen* retreat across the border to Pakistan and cultivate their supply lines from there, but they enjoyed popular support on both sides of the Durand Line. In fact, CPSU Politburo meeting minutes from as early as February of 1980 reveal that some, including Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Defence Minister Dmitry Ustinov, thought openly about withdrawal.[832]

At the NAM foreign ministers conference in New Delhi in January of 1981, the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan signalled to the Pakistani delegation at the conference that the Soviet Union was prepared to hold discussions on Afghanistan.[833] Kurt Waldheim, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who was also present, immediately decided to integrate this piece of news into his scheduled speech and offered the good offices of the UN on the spot.[834] Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, his designated Personal Representative for Afghanistan, was with him and he recalls in his memoirs that on the flight back to New York from New Delhi, they began their preparations for UN-mediated peace talks.[835] They agreed on four main points of discussion, many of them similar to the preceding diplomatic initiatives of the OIC, the NAM and the EC. They included the withdrawal of troops, non-interference in the

[832] N.a., 'CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt), On Andropov's Conversations with Afghan leaders,' 7 February 1980, CWIHP, translated by M. Doctoroff, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111587.
[833] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 182.
[834] Ibid., 184.
[835] Ibid.

internal affairs of Afghanistan, appropriate guarantees and the voluntary return of Afghan refugees.[836] What is more, as the OIC and the EC had tried to do, the UN chose to hold its talks in Switzerland – albeit at its European headquarters in Geneva, for which it did not require the approval of the Swiss government.

Pérez de Cuéllar actually succeeded Waldheim as Secretary-General of the UN that year and the Ecuadorian diplomat Diego Cordovez became the UN Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Afghanistan.[837] In 1982, having received the consent of the Soviet Union and having visited the conflict region in person, Cordovez announced that tripartite talks between the Karmal regime, the Pakistani government and the UN were to begin in Geneva in June. Originally, the Pakistani delegation refused to meet with a delegation from the Karmal regime for fear of implicitly recognizing the regime as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. As a result, between 14 and 16 June 1982, Cordovez chose to shuttle between the two delegations in Geneva. More specifically, he walked back and forth between the Geneva Inter-Continental Hotel and the UN main building to speak to Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan and his Afghan counterpart, Shah Mohammad Dost, respectively.[838] He also kept the Iranian Permanent Representative to the UN, Jafar Mahallati informed on any progress at the talks.

It is worth going into some of the detail surrounding these discussions, not only because there are few contributions in the literature that do so – not even the press was well-informed on the Geneva Talks at the time – but essentially because the UN made a number of strategic mistakes in Geneva. These ultimately led to the failure of the Geneva Accords of 1988, damaged the UN's own ability to

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[836] Ibid.

[837] Baczko Adam and Dorronsoro Gilles, 'United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGMAP),' in *The Oxford Handbook of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, edited by Joachim A. Koops, Thierry Tards, Norrie MacQueen and Paul D. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 270; Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 65-66.

[838] N.a., 'First Indirect Trilateral Talks On Afghanistan Under UN Auspices In Geneva,' *Defence Journal* 1-2(1982), 52.

mediate between the conflict parties during the early 1990s and so altered Switzerland's position in the constellation of state and non-state actors revolving around the Afghan crisis. During the initial stages of the Geneva Talks, for instance, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, who had succeeded Agha Shahi in March of 1982, made it clear that Pakistan would only agree to a comprehensive agreement, rather than to a series of agreements on separate issues of the conflict. He also expected the eventual agreement to involve a mechanism for consulting Afghan refugees on the issue of their return home.[839] This particular point developed into a major point of contention, however, as both the Iranian government and the Pakistani delegation to the Geneva Talks suggested that the UN consult the refugees directly.[840] In conversation with the Pakistani president Mohammad Zia Ul-Haq on 15 January 1984, Pérez de Cuéllar argued that as a non-governmental entity, the refugees could not be approached, as this would set a dangerous precedent for the UN.[841] According to article II, paragraph 7 of the UN Charter, "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the jurisdiction of any state."[842] Pérez de Cuéllar and Cordovez outwardly took this to mean that they were bound to work at the government level only. In his memoirs, Pérez de Cuéllar recalls that part of the reason for the UN's refusal to include refugee representatives in the Geneva process was that, as he puts it, the word "refugee had two meanings."[843] It referred to Afghans living Pakistan and Iran. Yet as discussed in chapter four, he recognized that it was also "a euphemism for the leadership of the resistance," which mixed freely with the civilian refugees across the border.[844]

[839] Imitiaz Bokhari, 'Evolution of a Dual Negotiation Process: Afghanistan,' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 518(1991), 64.
[840] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 188; N.a., 'Notes on the Meeting with the Permanent Representative of Iran,' 3 March 1982, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 8, Yale Archives and Manuscripts (YAM-USA), New Haven, USA.
[841] N.a., 'Notes of the Secretary-General's meeting with the President of Pakistan,' 15 January 1984, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 8, YAM-USA.
[842] United Nations, 'Charter of the United Nations,' 26 June 1945, https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html.
[843] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 188.
[844] Ibid.

This seemingly procedural decision had far-reaching consequences both for the UN's attempt to mediate in the Afghan crisis, as well as for Switzerland's eventual attempt to mediate. At a very fundamental level, it implied that the UN chose sides by ignoring the Afghan *mujahideen* but treating with the Afghan regime. What it also meant was that by choosing to confer directly with the regime – even if the Pakistani government did not – the UN de facto recognized the Karmal regime as the government of Afghanistan. What was more, as the Swiss daily *Tages-Anzeiger* commented in 1984, no UN member state formally petitioned the UN for the withdrawal of Afghan membership and few states, with the exception of Pakistan, had broken off diplomatic ties to the Karmal regime.[845] In his memoirs, Pérez de Cuéllar reveals that the UN actually maintained clandestine contacts to the *mujahideen*, beginning at the thirteenth Islamic Conference meeting of foreign ministers in Niamey, Niger, in August of 1982.[846] At Niamey, Isofou Fjermakoye, an Under-Secretary-General of the UN, held confidential meetings with Sebghatullah Mujaddedi of the Afghan National Liberation Front, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani,[847] the leader of *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami Afghanistan* and Maulawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, the leader of *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami Afghanistan*.[848]Also present was Giandomenico Picco, Diego Cordovez' deputy, who continued to hold regular meetings with resistance leaders after 1983.[849] In public, the *mujahideen* condemned the Geneva Talks harshly for not being included and in fact, their discrete contacts to the UN Secretariat did little to advance their interests in the long term. Lastly, in addition to their absence and to the indirect nature of the discussions, a further issue inherent in the diplomatic framework of the Geneva Talks was the absence of both the Soviet Union and of the United States. In other words, the framework of the Geneva Talks excluded the main conflict parties, meaning the *mujahideen* and the Soviet Union. It also failed to recognize the Cold War dimension of the Afghan crisis, by treating it as a conflict among neighbours, rather than a proxy war among Cold War superpowers.

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[845] *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Wer hat denn Interesse an Afhanistan-Lösung?,' 30 August 1984, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[846] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 189.
[847] Not to be confused with Pir Ishaq Gailani, personal representative of Sebghatullah Mujaddedi.
[848] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 189.
[849] Ibid.

By this point the United States had begun to channel substantial military and financial aid to the *mujahideen*. As discussed in chapter three, the Carter Administration had initially been concerned about the potential Soviet expansion to the Persian Gulf. According to Elisabeth Leake, "The local resistance movements were important in this consideration" especially as they demonstrated their ability to tie down the Red Army in Afghanistan itself.[850] Covert American aid to the *mujahideen* began informally under the Carter administration. This was after the administration had actually suspended aid to Pakistan in April of 1979 on account of its covert uranium enrichment program.[851] In February of 1980, President Carter offered Zia ul-Haq $400 million in security and economic assistance in the context of the Afghan crisis. This ultimately translated into approximately USD 30-40 million annually.[852] Yet it was the Reagan Administration, which came into office in January of 1981, that envisioned not merely the containment but the so-called "roll-back" of Soviet influence in the region.[853] According to Barnett Rubin, American aid grew from $30 million in 1980 to $600 million annually between 1986 and 1989, an amount that was matched and at times exceeded by aid from Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.[854]

Further, from 1982 onwards, both the range of arms and the sums allocated to the Afghan resistance began to increase.[855] Between 1982 and 1986, most of the weapons that the Reagan administration channelled to the *mujahideen* through the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence Agency (ISI) consisted either of Egyptian purchases of Soviet military stock from the 1960s or of Chinese imports.[856] Stinger missiles, which allowed the *mujahideen* to target Soviet armoured helicopter gunships, did not begin

[850] Elisabeth Leake, 'Spooks, Tribes and Holy Men: The Central Intelligence Agency and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 2018(53), 246.
[851] Richard P. Cronin, *Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 1987), 4-5.
[852] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 71; Cronin, *Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance Facts*, 5.
[853] Leake, 'Spooks, Tribes and Holy Men,' 245-246.
[854] Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,* 196.
[855] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 71.
[856] Wriggins, 'Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan,' 295; Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,* 197; Girardet, *Afghanistan*, 67.

to arrive in Afghanistan until 1986, because they were still in development.[857] In delivering these weapons, Pakistan both supported the *mujahideen*, but also controlled them to a certain extent. According to Edward Girardet, for instance, the ISI was careful to prevent the transfer of highly sophisticated weaponry to the *mujahideen* in large numbers, so as to prevent an uncontrolled escalation of the conflict.[858] At the same time, the ISI refrained from encouraging the *mujahideen* to pursue a unified strategy and in fact cultivated the ongoing fragmentation of the resistance by channelling military aid to some groups more than others.[859] The Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* speculated in January of 1985 that this tactic was primarily intended to prevent the resurgence of the idea of a reunified Pushtunistan across the Afghan-Pakistani border amongst the Peshawar parties.[860] In other words, at the same time as participating in the Geneva Talks, the Pakistani government played an active part in keeping the Afghan conflict going – arguably not even for the sake of a military solution, but to gain a measure of control over the conflict itself.

It is therefore unsurprising that the Geneva Talks made little progress throughout the mid-1980s. The second instalment of the Geneva Talks took place exclusively within the UN European headquarters from 11-22 April and from 12-24 June 1983.[861] It followed one of many shuttle missions that Diego Cordovez undertook to the conflict region over the years, this time consisting of visits to Islamabad, Kabul and Teheran.[862] During Geneva II, as it was called, the parties discussed the broad principles and objectives that an eventual settlement ought to have. Provisions for implementation including timeframes were also addressed, but no decisions were made. In 1984, the Swiss daily *Tages-Anzeiger* likened the indirect talks to a scene from a surrealist theatre production:

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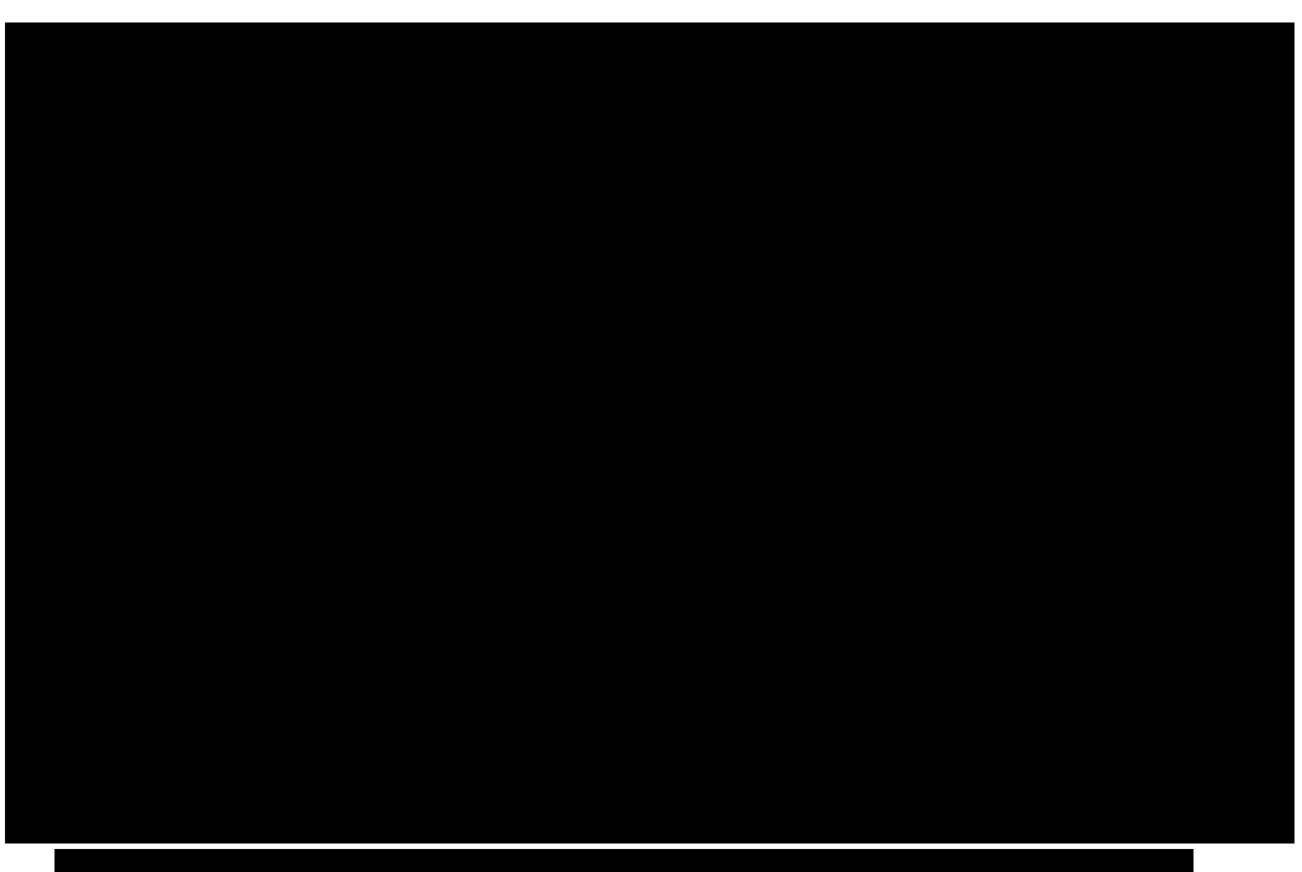
[857] James A. Phillips, 'A U.S. Agenda for an Afghan Peace Settlement, Heritage Foundation Backgrounder,' 4 April 1988, https://www.heritage.org/middle-east/report/us-agenda-afghan-peace-settlement; Leake, Spooks, Tribes and Holy Men, 246.
[858] Girardet, *Afghanistan*, 67.
[859] *NZZ*, 'Pakistans afghanische Gratwanderung: Neue Phase im "grossen Spiel" um den indischen Subkontinent,' 23 January 1985, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[860] Ibid.
[861] UN Peacemaker, 'Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan (Geneva Accords),' 14 April 1988, https://peacemaker.un.org/node/641.
[862] Ibid.

> The foreign ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan met to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Afghanistan conflict in a closed-off section of the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva. Except, they did not speak to each other and relied on the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations as a sort of mailman. The main actors were not there either. Neither the Soviet Union or the Afghan resistance, nor the Americans or the Chinese, who had been accused of interfering in the conflict, were there. And in the meantime, this exceptionally brutal war, which had already cost 130'000 lives and exiled a quarter of a million Afghans, continues.[863]

The years 1984 and 1985 saw almost no progress in these negotiations.[864] After a 10-month suspension of the talks, Cordovez undertook what was by now his fifth shuttle mission to the region in April of 1984, visiting Teheran, Kabul and Islamabad.[865] In her assessment of this mission, the Swiss Permanent Observer to the UN in New York, Francesca Pometta, argued that the main accomplishment of the UN at this point lay simply in providing the only surviving venue for a possible political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.[866] In her opinion, as the Soviet Union had displayed no tangible intention to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, it was understandable that the negotiations had made no progress.[867] In fact, the only consensus that the parties reached that year was a purely procedural one. Meeting again in Geneva from 24-30 August 1984, they agreed to

[863] *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Wer hat denn Interesse an einer Afghanistan-Lösung?,' Press Collection, CH-SBA, author's translation from, "Die Szene gleicht einem surrealistischen Theater. Auf einer abgesperrten Etage des Genfer Völkerbundpalastes verhandlen die Aussenminister Afghanistans un Pakistans unter Vermittlung der Vereinten Nationen über eine Lösung des Afghanistan-Konflikts. Sie sprechen aber nicht miteinander, sondern verwenden den UNO-Untergeneralsekretär als Briefträger. Die eigentlichen Hauptakteure treten überhaupt nicht in Erscheinung. Weder die Sowjets und die afghansichen Wiederstandskämpfer noch die der Einmischung bezichtigten Amerikaner und Chinesen. Unterdessen geht der brutale Krieg weiter, der schon 130'000 Menschenleben kostete und einen Viertel der Bevölkerung Afghanistans ins Exil trieb."
[864] Francesca Pometta, 'Weiterführung der Afghanistan-Diplomatie der Vereinten Nationen,' 14 June 1984, E2023A#1993/129#2760*, CH-BAR.
[865] Bokhari, 'Evolution of a Dual Negotiation Process,' 64.
[866] Pometta, 'Weiterführung der Afghanistan-Diplomatie der Vereinten Nationen,' E2023A#1993/129#2760*, CH-BAR.
[867] Ibid.

change the format of the talks and to henceforth label them as "proximity talks," meaning that both delegations were to occupy adjoining offices and Cordovez was to shuttle between them for the sake of efficiency.[868]



By August of 1985, the text for three of the four component parts that Waldheim and Pérez de Cuéllar had agreed on during their flight from New Delhi to New York in January of 1981 were written out.[870] Draft agreements on foreign interference, international guarantees and the voluntary return of refugees were essentially completed. What was missing, however, was an agreement on the modalities of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. According to Kalinovsky, "The crux of the problem was that Moscow did not want to commit to a timeframe until Pakistan had made a formal

[868] UN Peacemaker, 'Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan (Geneva Accords),' 14 April 1988, https://peacemaker.un.org/node/641.
[869] Cordovez, 'The Slow Thaw,' 232.
[870] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 108-109.

commitment to end its interference."[871] Pakistan, on the other hand, refused to commit itself to non-interference until the Politburo offered a realistic timeframe for its troop withdrawals.[872] However, on 10 December 1985, the US State Department dispatched a letter to Diego Cordovez, expressing the consent of the American government to sign the agreement on international guarantees, meaning that it would act as a guarantor for the legal framework concluded at Geneva.[873] That same month, the Karmal regime reportedly handed Cordovez a schedule for Soviet troop withdrawals to be discussed at Geneva if the Pakistani delegation agreed to direct talks.[874]

Most contemporary and retrospective observers agree on what had been the main reason for this change in attitude on both sides. In March of 1985, the General Secretary of the Politburo of the Soviet Union, Konstatin Chernenko, had died of heart failure.[875] His successor, Mikhail Gorbachev, spent the first few months in office consolidating his position and grappling with the worsening economic situation of the Soviet Union.[876] Yet as the year progressed, it became increasingly clear that as part of his reform agenda, the new General Secretary intended to retreat from Afghanistan. Gorbachev even briefly discussed this topic with American President Ronald Reagan during their summit meeting in Geneva in November of 1985.[877] One might assume that part of the General Secretary's calculus in this respect was the declining state of the Soviet economy, which had hardly grown during the 1970s. During the 1980s, it actually began to contract, leading to shortages, supply line failures and rising prices.[878] Westad estimates that, in 1979, Soviet GDP declined from a

[871] Ibid., 69.
[872] Ibid.
[873] Klaus Jacobi, 'Verhandlungslösung für Afghanistan,' 17 December 1985, E2010-01A#1994/372#43*, CH-BAR; Bokhari, 'Evolution of a Dual Negotiation Process,' 65.
[874] Bokhari, 'Evolution of a Dual Negotiation Process,' 65.
[875] Archie Brown, 'The Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume III)*, edited by Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 247.
[876] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[877] Jack Matlock, 'Memorandum of Conversation: Reagan-Gorbachev Meetings in Geneva November, 1985,' 19 November 1985, NSA-GWU, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=5752885-National-Security-Archive-Doc-01-Memorandum-of.
[878] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2010), 595.

projected increase of three percent for that year to only 0.7 percent.[879] As global oil prices declined during the early 1980s, Soviet oil exports began to decline likewise, giving rise to a foreign debt of $54 billion by 1989.[880]

However, as chapter eight will discuss, the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan was not crippling for the Soviet economy. What is more likely is that against the backdrop of an already declining economy, over the course of the 1980s, the Soviet war in Afghanistan became somewhat of a public relations liability domestically. According to Rodric Braithwaite, despite the fact that the war was heavily censored in the Soviet press, public opinion gradually began to turn against the war as military victories remained few and as families continued to miss loved ones without an explanation.[881] In other words, the negative sentiments and the distrust expressed by the likes of Yuri Povarnitsin and Youri Washenko in their interviews to *Radio Free Kabul* and *Die Bunte* in 1982 and 1983 respectively, may have implicitly become more widespread.

1986 was a critical year in this respect and as the remainder of this chapter will argue, there were in fact at least two important developments outside of Afghanistan that ultimately had important consequences for those involved in finding a diplomatic solution to the ongoing crisis. The first was the decision of the Soviet Politburo to announce the withdrawal of 7’000 troops. The second was the decision of the Swiss voting public to remain outside of the UN. As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, this particular development may at first appear to be unrelated to events in Afghanistan. However, as subsequent chapters will show, Switzerland’s continued absence from the UN, combined with the fact that the UN failed to mediate a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict, eventually persuaded both the Afghan regime and the *mujahideen* to approach the Swiss for mediation instead. What is more, both the Politburo’s 1986 decision to withdraw 7’000 troops and

[879] Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 336.
[880] Ibid.
[881] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 236; 243.

Switzerland's decision to remain outside of the UN arguably showed that public opinion mattered in both of these countries and that it could even have implications for the conduct of foreign policy.

On 26 April 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded in the Ukrainian SSR, emitting over one hundred times the amount of radiation released by the American bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.[882] Two weeks later, the Politburo publicly admitted to the disaster and asked for foreign assistance, a sign that it recognized the need to improve its relationship with the public.[883] According to John Lewis Gaddis, the extent of the Chernobyl disaster convinced the senior leadership of the Soviet Union not only of the need for economic reform, but of the inadvertent necessity of transparency, as Gorbachev's twin programmes of *glasnost* and *perestroika* became known. This also had consequences for the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. On 28 July, Gorbachev publicly announced the unilateral withdrawal of 7'000 Soviet troops from Afghanistan at a speech in Vladivostok. Already in February of that year, he had disclosed his determination to find a political solution to the Afghan crisis in an address to the 27th Party Congress of the CPSU.[884] Some might argue that these announcements were primarily intended for a foreign audience, particularly to those involved in the Geneva Talks, as a gesture that the Soviet Union was willing to negotiate the terms of its withdrawal. However, it seems evident that it was equally intended for a domestic audience. Indeed, for many, it would have been the first positive news to come out of Afghanistan since the initial successes of the Soviet invasion in 1979.

In the meantime, the Swiss government once again seriously considered joining the UN. This matters both for the remaining chapters, as well as for the overall argument of this thesis. The remainder of the present chapter will therefore re-introduce the Swiss strand of the narrative against the backdrop of the ongoing developments in the relationship between Afghanistan and the Soviet

[882] Judt, *Postwar*, 597.
[883] Ibid., 598.
[884] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 274.

Union. Whilst the 1986 UN membership referendum did not succeed, it revealed a number of important insights into the changing nature of Swiss foreign policy after the collapse of *détente*. Most important, the FDFA appeared to have reversed its stance on the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954, which had essentially forbidden the Swiss government from joining any intergovernmental organizations whose purpose was not purely technical. This is significant, because it also appears to indicate that Switzerland's long-standing policy of Neutrality and Solidarity, intended to create a role for Switzerland in the Cold War international system, had not sufficed to alleviate the implicit threat of diplomatic isolation inherent in permanent neutrality. Unfortunately for the FDFA and for the Swiss government, the voting public was not prepared to compromise Switzerland's neutrality for the sake of international solidarity. This arguably made the episode of the 1986 UN referendum even more important in view of subsequent developments in Afghanistan. Thus far, the FDFA had become acquainted with the Afghan crisis both as a provider of humanitarian aid, as well as in the capacity of a protective power for the Soviet prisoners of war and as an occasional mediator between the ICRC and the Soviet Union. Having been outmanoeuvred by the UN as a host of diplomatic talks in 1982 and having failed to gain UN membership in 1986, the Swiss therefore ultimately had an even greater incentive to mediate in Afghanistan when asked to do so by the Afghans themselves in 1990. Given the circumstances, it arguably gave them an opportunity to demonstrate the merits of the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity more effectively than ever before.

The reasons for the Swiss government's decision to reconsider UN membership remains disputed in the literature. According to Elisabeth Glas, Switzerland's active and successful performance at the CSCE had convinced the Federal Council to re-evaluate its relationship with the United Nations.[885] However, there is evidence to suggest that the Federal Council had already given thought to the subject as early as 1967. That year, National Councillor Willy Bretscher submitted a postulate to the Federal Council on Switzerland's relationship to the UN. The Federal Council considered this question

[885] Glas, 'Aufbruch der Schweiz in die multilaterale Welt,' 103.

for two years before submitting two government-internal reports on the subject, one in 1969 and one in 1971.[886] Both reports essentially confirmed the foreign policy course that the Swiss government had been pursuing since the post-war period, namely, to remain outside of the UN and to compensate for this absence by performing joining technical intergovernmental organizations and by performing good offices abroad in times of crisis. Yet curiously, neither of these reports explicitly excluded the possibility of Switzerland joining the UN at some point in the future.[887] In addition to this, the Federal Council set up an independent task force to inquire into the political feasibility of a Swiss bid to join the UN and in 1973 this task force surprisingly reached a favourable verdict.[888]

A third government-internal UN report appeared in 1977 – two years after the Helsinki Final Act – and this time, the Federal Council explicitly came out in favour of joining the UN.[889] More specifically, it argued that joining would be "a necessary extension of Switzerland's foreign policy and would give our country access to a forum that it needs, if it is to unfold its entire potential."[890] In 1981, roughly one year after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Federal Council published this stance in a public "Message" to parliament and in 1984, both the National Assembly and the Council of States sided with the government.[891] As discussed, Glas has suggested that the obvious explanation for this drastic change of course was Switzerland's success at the CSCE described in chapter three. Yet there are also arguments to the contrary. Swiss historian Thomas Fischer, for instance, argues that Switzerland's performance at the CSCE only encouraged the political elite to reconsider UN membership but did not influence the public.[892] What was more, the political elite was less driven by Switzerland's performance at the CSCE than by lingering fear of diplomatic isolation.

[886] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 69.
[887] Ibid., 71.
[888] Ibid.
[889] Glas, 'Aufbruch der Schweiz in die multilaterale Welt,' 121.
[890] Ibid., 113, author's translation from, "Der Beitritt wäre eine notwendige Ergänzung unserer Aussenpolitik und würde unserem Land ein Forum erschliessen, das es braucht, wenn es alle seine Wirkungsmöglichkeiten voll entfalten will."
[891] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 75.
[892] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 158.

Writing in 1982, Edouard Brunner, for instance, argued that, "One hears neutrality enjoys great prestige and respect among other states, who appreciate the quality of our good offices and who entrust many such missions to us."[893] At the same time, however, he realized that, "One should not overestimate the character of these missions and imagine that our country is the mediator *par excellence*."[894] Rather, as discussed in chapter one, Brunner conceded that during recent years, most of Switzerland's good offices had taken the form of protecting power mandates.[895] It had become rare for the Swiss government or for Swiss citizens to take on mandates of mediation or arbitrage and "this diminution of Switzerland's mediating role is indicative of an atrophy of her importance and of her image on the international stage."[896] In other words, the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity was not achieving its desired effect. According to Brunner, because Switzerland was absent from the UN, she was also absent from the place where mediation increasingly tended to take place.[897] The Geneva Talks on Afghanistan were a case in point.

The only problem with this line of argument was that it contradicted both the Bindschedler Doctrine of 1954 and, more importantly, public opinion. As a result of the so-called *Staatsvertragsreferendum* of 1977, membership applications for major international organizations could become subjected to a nation-wide referendum. Yet throughout the years leading up the UN referendum of 1986, there was not a single proponent of UN membership who could explain to the public, why UN membership had – all of a sudden – become compatible with the Bindschedler Doctrine. One internal FDFA memorandum even argued – incorrectly – that UN member states only had to comply with UN

[893] Edouard Brunner, 'La Suisse aux Nations Unies, pourquoi? in Seminar über "Die Schweizerische Neutralität im Zeitalter der Weltweiten Interpendenz,"' 4-6 November 1982, E9500.1#1993/131#39*, CH-BAR, author's translation from, "L'on entend dire que notre neutralité jouit d'un grand prestige, qu'elle nous attire le respect des autres États, qui, appréciant la qualité de nos bons offices, nous confient beaucoup de missions."
[894] Ibid., author's translation from, "Il ne faut pas surestimer le caractère de ces missions et s'imaginer que notre pays est le médiateur par excellence."
[895] Ibid.
[896] Ibid.
[897] Ibid.

sanctions if they ratified an agreement to that effect with the Security Council.[898] It then added that the Security Council had never before agreed on military sanctions anyway and that therefore, voters should not be concerned anyhow.[899] Despite the fact that this argument was factually incorrect – the UN had sanctioned a military intervention during the Korean War in 1950 – this became a widely-used argument in the ensuing popular debate on UN membership. Another argument that the FDFA invoked frequently was the fact that Switzerland had joined a substantial number of specialized UN organizations during the post-war period. However, as a non-member of the UN, it had little say in setting agendas, allocating funds or planning specific operations. Such was the case, for instance at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

None of these arguments swayed the public vote in favour of UN membership, which always seemed staunchly against. In fact, in November of 1983, British diplomat Sir Antony Acland had reported to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office that, "I think the discussion is somewhat academic since all were agreed such a proposal would not pass the two stages of a referendum."[900] Indeed, on 16 March 1986, only 24.3 percent voted in favour with a turnout of 50.7 percent of the population.[901] Thomas Fischer has also pointed out that the return of Cold War tensions between the superpower camps, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of *détente*, were partly to blame for the negative outcome of the UN referendum. In the prevalent climate of tension, fluctuation and uncertainty, Fischer argued, "The Swiss government no longer managed to stay its course of opening

[898] N.a., 'Schweizerisches Institut für Berufspädagogik,' J1.301#2002/197#39*, CH-BAR.
[899] Ibid.
[900] Antony Acland, 'Correspondence to Mr. Young, WED *(sic)*,' 7 November 1983, FCO 28/5907, UK-TNA.
[901] Altermatt, 'Vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges bis zur Gegenwart,' 75.

up towards the outside world."[902] Rather, as had been the case during the post-war period, the Swiss public appeared have more faith in Swiss neutrality than in international institutions.

Hence, to conclude, the period between the summer of 1982 and the summer of 1986 was a critical period for all the three strands of narrative that run through this thesis – the Swiss, the UN and the Afghan narratives. During the summer of 1982 and with the consent of the Soviet Union, diplomatic talks on Afghanistan began at the UN in Geneva. That being said, neither the Soviet Union nor the Afghan *mujahideen* – the main parties to the conflict – were represented at the talks themselves. What was more, the Soviet Union arguably only began to signal its intention to withdraw from Afghanistan in the summer of 1986, after Mikhail Gorbachev had become General Secretary of the CPSU the year before. Up until this point, the Geneva Talks had virtually stalled on the essential issue of Soviet withdrawal. To signal his commitment, Gorbachev announced in July of 1986 that he would commence the withdrawal of 7'000 troops. Meanwhile, that spring, the Swiss voting public refused to endorse the government's plans to join the UN. This was important not only in the context of Switzerland's relationship to the UN, but also of Switzerland's role in Afghanistan. As chapter three has shown, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of *détente*, the Swiss government initially struggled to find its bearings. During the preceding decades, Switzerland had built a reputation for itself as a neutral provider of good offices both bilaterally and – in the context of the CSCE – multilaterally as well. Between 1980 and 1982, however, the Swiss government was side-lined as a neutral conference host by the UN and was subsequently excluded from the Geneva Talks. As the final two chapters of this thesis will show, the UN fared poorly as a mediator. Not only was the UN not neutral in its choice of who to include in the Geneva Talks, but it was ultimately not effective in mediating a diplomatic solution to the ongoing violence in Afghanistan either. Chapter eight will cover the remainder of the Geneva Talks from 1986 to their conclusion in 1988 and their

[902] Fischer, *Die Grenzen der Neutralität,* 18, author's translation from, "Im Klima der zunehmenden internationalen Spannungen, die spätestens 1980 mit Afghanistan deutlich wurden, gelang es auch der Schweizer Regierung nicht mehr, den von ihr angestrebten Kurs der aussenpolitischen Öffnung zu halten."

role in securing the Soviet withdrawal of 1989. In doing so, it will highlight the shortcomings of the final arrangement and the opportunities that this created for Swiss good offices outside of the UN framework at the end of the Cold War.

# Chapter 8: The Geneva Accords and the Soviet Withdrawal, 1986-1989

One of the defining features of the final phase of the Geneva Talks was that the Cold War superpowers became increasingly involved in finding a diplomatic solution behind the scenes. Chapter eight will cover their involvement in some detail, because it serves as important background information to Switzerland's mediatory mandate in Afghanistan after 1990. This being said, because the focus of this thesis is on Swiss foreign policy, it will include comparatively less detail on overall Soviet and American domestic and foreign policies, unless they relate to Afghanistan. As briefly discussed already in chapter seven, under Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union began preparations to withdraw the Red Army from Afghanistan. It also began to initiate changes at the Afghan government level that were intended to prepare the country for this to happen. Concurrently, as the present chapter will show, the Politburo began to establish bilateral channels of communication with the Pakistani and the American governments, concerning their ongoing support for the *mujahideen*. This was an important reminder for all those involved – the Afghans, the UN and even the Swiss – that throughout this time, they continued to operate in an international system, one of whose defining characteristics was the relationship between the Cold War superpowers. Having failed to convince the voting public of the merits of UN membership, the Swiss effectively played no role during the final stages of the Geneva Talks and in fact, during this period, it increasingly seemed as though Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan was over as well. However, as this chapter will argue, the steps that the UN, the Soviet Union and the United States took during the final phase of the Geneva Talks ultimately paved the way for Switzerland's final, most direct and most consequential appearance on the scene. It will begin with the steps taken by the Soviet Union, proceed to the role of the UN and ultimately to that of the United States. The final part of this chapter will then explore the immediate impact of the Geneva Talks on bringing about both the Soviet withdrawal but also the renewed descent into civil war in Afghanistan.

As discussed above, during the summer of 1986 the Soviet Union began to signal its intentions to withdraw. At roughly the same time, the Soviet Union also replaced President Babrak Karmal with Mohammad Najibullah in May of 1986. In March of that year, as the Swiss went to the polls over UN membership, Afghan President Babrak Karmal had visited Moscow for medical treatment, where the Soviet Politburo demanded he step down as president of Afghanistan. The Afghan media later reported that he chose to resign for health reasons and according to Artemy Kalinovsky, he eventually settled in Moscow, where he received a state-owned apartment and a nearby *dacha*.[903] On 4 May, he was replaced as the head of the PDPA by Mohammad Najibullah, the former chief of the Afghan secret police, KHAD.[904]

Najibullah, as he preferred to be known, was a trained doctor and like Karmal, he had joined the PDPA at its creation in 1965.[905] In 1977, he joined the party's central committee and after the Soviet invasion of 1979, he became the director of the KHAD.[906] Two years later, he entered the Politburo of the PDPA, in charge of tribal relations. Of Pashtun tribal origin himself, he was an exception among the *Parcham* faction and the Soviet Politburo now hoped to use this to its advantage.[907] Kalinovsky has argued that replacing Karmal with Najibullah became the first of several steps that the Soviet Union took from 1985 to 1987 with the primary aim of reforming the government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and with the ultimate aim of withdrawing from the country altogether.[908]

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[903] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 98.
[904] Ibid., 97; Bokhari, 'Evolution of a Dual Negotiation Process,' 66; Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[905] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 95.
[906] Baker, *War in Afghanistan*, 191; Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 95.
[907] *NZZ*, 'Der neue Machthaber in Kabul: Weitere Intensivierung der Kämpfe zu erwarten,' 6 May 1986, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[908] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 94.

Beginning in 1987, the Najibullah regime launched a so-called initiative of "National Reconciliation."[909] The idea behind it was to reach out to the *Khalq* faction of the PDPA, to members of the clergy and to ordinary citizens to broaden the popular appeal of the government.[910] In January 1987, the government announced a ceasefire and an amnesty for selected *mujahideen* fighters.[911] The word "Democratic" was removed from the country's name to turn it into the Republic of Afghanistan. Islam was restored as the state religion and in November of 1987, a *Loya Jirga*, a council of tribal elders, was convened to approve a new constitution.[912] The constitution introduced multi-party democracy and the right to private property for the first time since the PDPA take-over in 1978 – before many Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe did so.[913] The government abandoned its plans for extensive land reform and returned expropriated land to former landowners.[914] Yet perhaps unsurprisingly, none of these measures were sufficient to endear Najibullah and his regime to the *mujahideen*, who boycotted the parliamentary elections that followed in April of 1988.[915] As a result, the PDPA continued to dominate parliament and Najibullah retained his position in the new government.

The fact that the policy of "National Reconciliation" did not manage to broaden the popular appeal of the regime and to stabilize Afghanistan politically was not lost on the Soviet Politburo. Yet neither was the ever-increasing imperative to withdraw from the country. Estimates of the cost of the war varied widely. The Directorate of Intelligence at the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimated in 1987, that between 1979 and 1986, the Soviet Union had spent 15 billion roubles on its

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[909] Ibid.
[910] Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 192.
[911] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 94; Baker, *War in Afghanistan,* 192.
[912] Benedict Gubler, 'Besuch des afghanishen Botschafters in Moskau, Muhammedulla Safi bei Botschafter Pianca und dem Unterzeichneten am 1. Dezember 1987,' 3 December 1987, E2010-01A#1994/372#44*, CH-BAR.
[913] Mike Bowker, *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1997), 136.
[914] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye* 142.
[915] Bowker, *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, 136; Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 105.

Afghan campaign.[916] This was not actually an enormous sum, considering that, "this is only 75 percent of what the war in Vietnam cost the US in the peak year of 1968."[917] According to the minutes of a Politburo meeting from 21-22 January 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev's new Foreign Minister Edouard Shevardnadze estimated that the campaign in Afghanistan cost "a billion roubles a year."[918] The main reasons why the costs of the war could be contained were that the invading force only constituted roughly ten percent of the Red Army. What was more, unlike the American campaign in Vietnam, the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan relied on relatively short supply lines. Finally, the CIA reckoned in its 1987 report that not only did the Red Army draw on relatively old armaments stocks, much of which it sold on to the Afghan army, but it also relied on the Afghan army to do much of the fighting.[919]

It is therefore likely, that the real imperative for withdrawal had less to do with the economic cost of the war, than with the effectiveness of the campaign itself and – as discussed in the previous chapter – with its negative impact on public opinion. The same could be said for Afghanistan as well, where, according to Edouard Shevardnadze, "The attitude toward us is more negative than it seemed to us."[920] At a further Politburo meeting on 26 February, Gorbachev concluded that, "The withdrawal of troops is the only correct decision."[921] In anticipation of this and parallel to launching the policy of "National Reconciliation," he had also established a direct diplomatic channel to the Pakistani government of President Zia ul-Haq during the closing months of 1986.[922] In December of that year, Yuli Vorontsov, the recently-appointed Soviet ambassador to Kabul, invited the new Pakistani

[916] Directorate of Intelligence, 'The Costs of Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan,' February 1987, Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (CIA-ERR), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp89t00296r000100040006-9.
[917] Ibid.
[918] N.a., 'Notes from Politburo Meeting, 21-22 January 1987 (Excerpt),' 22 January 1987, CWIHP, translated by Gary Goldberg, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117230.
[919] Directorate of Intelligence, 'The Costs of Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan,' CIA-ERR, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp89t00296r000100040006-9.
[920] N.a., 'Notes from Politburo Meeting,' 21-22 January 1987 (Excerpt), CWIHP, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117230.
[921] N.a., 'Notes from Politburo Meeting, 26 February 1987 (Excerpt),' 26 February 1987, CWIHP, translated by Gary Goldberg, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117233.
[922] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 110.

Foreign Secretary, Abdul Sattar, to Moscow.[923] Throughout the following year, the Politburo tried to use this new direct channel to promote "National Reconciliation" and to make the Najibullah regime more palatable to Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, rejected the idea that Najibullah or the PDPA could remain part of a future Afghan government after the Soviet withdrawal.[924] Instead, Sattar argued for the merits of a neutral interim government. In the absence of a bilateral agreement and in the absence of progress in "National Reconciliation," the Politburo eventually agreed to discuss the future nature and character of the Afghan regime at the UN-mediated Geneva Talks.

Together, the Soviet Union and the Afghan government, called for a seventh series of talks in Geneva, which were duly scheduled from 7-10 September. The agenda included no discussions on the future nature of the Afghan regime or about whether Najibullah and the PDPA would continue to be a part of it. Rather, this round of talks was dedicated almost exclusively to the timeframe of the Soviet withdrawal, possibly to distract from earlier discussions on the Afghan regime itself. Yet there continued to be scant progress. The Pakistani delegation demanded that withdrawal be completed within seven to eight months of its start date, while the Afghan regime insisted on sixteen months.[925] In December of 1987 and in January of 1988, Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze respectively announced that the Soviet Union would agree to twelve months in exchange for the creation of a broad coalition government and for the cessation of foreign aid to the *mujahideen*.[926] This was an extraordinary concession and it is not very well known that the Soviet Union was seriously prepared to retreat this early. Artemy Kalinovsky has written extensively about the misconception that the Soviet withdrawal was a rushed decision, in effect calling the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan a "Long Goodbye" and arguing that it had been in the making for much of the 1980s. It is an interesting aspect of the final phase of the Geneva Talks that they actually slowed down the Soviet withdrawal

[923] Cordovez, 'The Slow Thaw,' 379.
[924] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 111.
[925] Richard P. Cronin, *Afghanistan Peace Talks: An annotated Chronology and Analysis of the United Nations-Sponsored Negotiations* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 1988), 30.
[926] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 392.

instead of speeding it up. The Pakistani government, for one, continued to insist on the formation of a coalition government that excluded the PDPA prior even to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. What was more, the United States, although not represented at Geneva, refused to unilaterally cease military support to the *mujahideen* as long as it was unclear what forms of support the Soviet Union would continue to channel to Afghanistan after its withdrawal.[927]

Increasingly desperate to leave, the Politburo therefore chose to extend a further concession. On 8 February 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that the Soviet withdrawal could begin on 15 May, if an agreement were concluded in Geneva by 15 March.[928] He also agreed to complete the withdrawal within nine months of its starting date.[929] Wasting no time, Diego Cordovez immediately reminded the United States of its December 1985 offer to act as a guarantor to a signed agreement.[930] The only remaining issue at this point was that the United States continued to militarily support the *mujahideen* behind the scenes. According to a Soviet Military Intelligence (GRU) memorandum dated March 1988, "The amount of official American aid to the counterrevolutionaries has exceeded two billion dollars and in 1988 the planned aid amounts to more than $700 million."[931] By this point, however, Artemy Kalinovsky argues that "Gorbachev had reconciled himself with the idea that a Soviet withdrawal would not bring about the cessation of US aid to the *mujahideen*."[932] This came as a shock to the Najibullah regime, whose new foreign minister, Abdul Wakil, refused to sign any potential agreement on these terms. It took roughly six weeks for Gorbachev to convince Najibullah and for Soviet ambassador-at-large Nikloai Kozyrev to convince Wakil to consent to the terms that the Soviet Union and the United States had agreed on bilaterally. On 8 April, Cordovez announced

[927] Ibid., 393.
[928] Rosanne Klass, 'Afghanistan: The Accords,' *Foreign Affairs* 66(1988), 932.
[929] Ibid.
[930] Ibid., 932-933.
[931] N.a., 'Soviet Military Intelligence (GRU) Memorandum, "About US Aid to the Counterrevolutionaries" (Excerpt),' March 1988, CWIHP, translated by Gary Goldberg, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117276.
[932] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 394.

that the terms of the Soviet withdrawal had been concluded and that the Geneva Accords were open for signature.

What is revealing about this particular episode of the Geneva Talks is the extent to which their outcome began to depend not on the represented parties themselves, but on the United States and the Soviet Union. Officially, neither of them had been directly involved in the talks. Yet as part of the Geneva Accords, which were duly signed on 14 April, both superpowers signed a Declaration of International Guarantees, in which they pledged to "invariably refrain from interference and intervention in internal affairs of the Republic of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," as well as to "respect the commitments contained in the bilateral agreement between the two on the principles of their mutual relations."[933] Pakistan and Afghanistan in turn signed two separate agreements as part of the Geneva Accords. The first governed the so-called "Principles of Mutual Relations," which mainly revolved around non-interference and non-intervention.[934] The second regulated the voluntary return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan to Afghanistan.[935] Finally, the "Interrelationships Agreement," which was signed by all four, provided for the phased withdrawal of "foreign" – not "Soviet" – troops from Afghanistan until 15 February 1989.[936] Collectively, the Geneva Accords were to come into force on 15 May 1988, yet as quickly became apparent, they did not resolve the war in Afghanistan.

Reporting from the UN *Palais des Nations*, the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* criticized that in reality, nobody expected them to do so either.[937] According to a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office cable:

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[933] UN Peacemaker, 'Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan (Geneva Accords),' 14 April 1988, https://peacemaker.un.org/node/641.
[934] Ibid.
[935] Ibid.
[936] Ibid.
[937] *NZZ*, 'Unterzeichnung der Afghanistan-Abkommen in Genf: Garantieunterschriften Shultz' und Schewardnadses,' 15 April 1988, Press Collection, CH-SBA, author's translation from, "Dass man in

> Arrangements at the brief signature ceremony ensured that there was no physical recognition of the Kabul regime by the Pakistanis and Americans or contact between any of the four signatory delegations until after the ceremony, when Shevardnadze and Wakil exchanged handshakes, as did George Shultz, the American Secretary of State, and Zain Noorani, the Pakistani Foreign Minister [since 1985].[938]

Further, at the press conference after the signing, Shultz stressed several times that the United States would continue to supply the *mujahideen* with military aid in equal measure as the Soviet Union continued to support the Najibullah regime.[939] Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil, on the other hand, emphasized that in signing the Declaration of International Guarantees, the United States had committed itself to non-interference in the Afghan conflict.[940]

The Accords themselves also contained a number of substantial weaknesses. First of all, they included no explicit provisions to end the struggle between the Afghan regime and the *mujahideen*, which was going to remain a major issue up until the collapse of the regime in 1992.[941] Second, they also left the issue of the future form of Afghan government unresolved, as the *mujahideen* blatantly refused to work with the Najibullah government in any way.[942] Third, according to Rosanne Klass, a contemporary observer of the Afghan conflict, the Geneva Accords "did not deal directly with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan per se."[943] They did not require the Soviet Union to dismantle any of its military installations or to remove any of its civilian or intelligence advisors from Afghan

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Wirklichkeit auf keiner Seite damit rechnet, mit den Genfer Abkommen auch den Konflikt um Afghanistan bereinigt zu haben."

[938] Vereker *(sic)*, 'My Telno 225: Afghanistan – Signature of the Geneva Agreements,' April 1988, FCO 37/4964, UK-TNA.

[939] *NZZ*, 'Unterzeichnung der Afghanistan-Abkommen in Genf,' CH-SBA.

[940] Ibid.

[941] Richard Cronin and Francis Miko, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 1988), 3.

[942] H. Hubel, 'Dokumente zu den Genfer Afghanistan-Abkommen vom April 1988,' *Europa-Archiv* 43(1988), D291.

[943] Klass, 'Afghanistan,' 922.

territory.[944] Fourth, as Secretary of State Shultz reiterated in the press conference following the signatory ceremony, the accords contained no explicit provisions concerning the flow of American weapons to Pakistan, although technically it prohibited the flow of these weapons from Pakistan to Afghanistan.[945] Finally, the accords lacked a credible enforcement mechanism.

In his memoirs, UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar "considered the fact that an arms cut-off was not included in the Geneva Accords to be a major weakness."[946] At the same time, however, he argued that "the subject was never within the control of influence of the United Nations during this period."[947] This was a serious misjudgement in my opinion, on par with the UN's refusal to include the *mujahideen* in the Geneva Talks themselves. The fact is that over the course of the talks, the UN made a number of decisions that had serious political repercussions and justified them as matters of procedure. On genuine matters of procedure, on the other hand, the UN seriously underperformed, particularly when it came to monitoring the implementation of the Geneva Accords.

Following the signature of the Accords, Pérez de Cuéllar dispatched no more than fifty UN military observers to the region and they could do no more than relay their observations back to the UN.[948] Peacekeeping operations normally tended to be authorized by the UN Security Council, yet in the case of Afghanistan, the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) came about in an exchange of letters between the president of the Security Council and the Secretary-General.[949] According to Pérez de Cuéllar, it stood little chance in the Security Council, because the Soviet Union would have wanted the mission to focus on monitoring compliance with non-interference, while the United States would have expected it to exclusively

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[944] Ibid., 924.
[945] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 149.
[946] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 197.
[947] Ibid.
[948] Klass, 'Afghanistan,' 924.
[949] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 198.

monitor the Soviet withdrawal.[950] During the spring and summer of 1988, UNGOMAP – headed by Major General Rauli Helminen of Finland and Benon Sevan, Senior Political Advisor at the UN – established its headquarters in Islamabad and Kabul.[951] UNGOMAP included officers from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Fiji, Ghana, Ireland, Nepal, Poland and Sweden.[952] Already between 16 May and 30 June, they received diplomatic protest notes concerning roughly 400 allegations of violations of the Geneva Accords.[953] These included cross-border firings, references to *mujahideen* training camps and arms depots in Pakistan, restrictions on refugees who wished to return, hostile political activities and that was only the beginning.[954] On top of that, they were expected to observe the carefully planned withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan.

In fact, Soviet Defence Minister Dmitry Ustinov had issued a formal directive for the withdrawal even before the Geneva Accords were signed in April of 1988.[955] According to Rodric Braithwaite, at this stage there were about 110'000 Soviet troops, over 600 tanks, 1'594 armoured fighting vehicles, 2'862 armoured personnel carriers, 326 helicopters and 160 aircraft in the country.[956] They were spread over 25 garrisons and 45 barracks. In May of 1988, their retreat began at Jalalabad and Kandahar (see map 1 in chapter 2). In July, the retreat continued in Shindand near Herat and according to Richard Cronin and Francis Miko, by that time approximately 10'000 troops had been withdrawn.[957] Retrospectively, the Russian General Staff estimates that by February 1989, the Red Army had suffered 13’833 casualties, 49’985 wounded and approximately 311 soldiers missing in action.[958] On the Afghan side, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* estimated in 1988 that out of a population

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[950] Ibid.
[951] N.a., ‘Implementation of the Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan: Progress Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General,’ 26 July 1988, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 10, YAM-USA.
[952] Ibid.
[953] Ibid.
[954] Ibid.
[955] Braithwaite, ‘The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,’ https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.
[956] Ibid.
[957] Cronin and Miko, ‘Afghanistan,’ 3.
[958] The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War,* 309.

of 16 million, over a million people had died.[959] Seven million people had fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran and few dared to return.[960] Even after the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan remained littered with active land mines. Fields had become barren and livestock had become lost.[961] What was more, the future of the government remained uncertain.

During the summer of 1988, Pakistani President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq approached Yuli Vorontsov, the Soviet ambassador to Kabul, and signalled to him that he would support a future Afghan government that would be composed of one third PDPA, one third "moderate" opposition and one third from the so-called "Peshawar Seven," the officially recognized *mujahideen* parties that had operated from Pakistan.[962] Vorontsov passed this message on to the Soviet Politburo and received a approving response. Unfortunately, Zia ul-Haq was killed in a plane crash on 17 August 1988 – the details of which still remain unclear – and the initiative faltered. In December of 1988, UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar made a second attempt at a government transition by arranging for a meeting between Vorontsov and *mujahideen* leaders, including Burhanuddin Rabbani from the moderate *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami*, in Saudi Arabia.[963] This was the first time that the Soviet Union held direct talks with the *mujahideen* and as such, it was a tremendous success for the resistance.[964] Over the course of the following months, Vorontsov also met with representatives of the Shi'a *mujahideen* in Iran and Turkey, yet he achieved little by way of actual progress.[965]

[959] *NZZ*, 'Afghanistan und die Kriegsfolgen: Landminen, Schulden, Flüchtlinge und Invalide,' 29 August 1988, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[960] *NZZ*, 'Uno-Bilanz über Kriegsschäden in Afghanistan: "Sieben Millionen Flüchtlinge ,"' 23 September 1988, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[961] Ibid.
[962] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 155.
[963] Ibid.
[964] *NZZ*, 'Warten auf den Abzug der Roten Armee: Die afghanischen Mujahedin in der Bewährungsprobe,' 10 January 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[965] Y.M. Vorontsov, 'Report concerning the current political situation inside Afghanistan and the possibilities of solving the Afghan question,' 3 February 1989, CWIHP, translated by Todd Hammond and Derek Paton, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113128.

Perhaps because of this, Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a so-called "Intra-Afghan Dialogue," an exclusively Afghan gathering between the regime and its various opponents, in December of 1988. The idea was to resolve the ongoing differences between the Afghan regime and the *mujahideen* without the involvement of the Soviet Union, which was in the midst of its withdrawal operations, yet also without any outside interference from the likes of the UN, Pakistan or the United States.[966] This notion is important to bear in mind, because although the *mujahideen* initially rejected this idea, the UN revived it in 1991 and the Swiss government eventually deferred to it in its own attempts to mediate between the conflict parties. Yet, there were two main reasons why the *mujahideen* rejected it at the time. The first was Najibullah's ruthlessness both as president, as well as formerly as head of the notorious KHAD. As discussed in chapter four, KHAD had imprisoned and tortured countless regime opponents over the course of the 1980s. As a result, the *mujahideen* categorically refused to work with its former director. The second was that the Soviet Union continued to supply Najibullah with both military and non-military aid throughout this period.[967] The imperative for Najibullah to compromise was therefore not acute. However, as it turned out, the further the Soviet withdrawal progressed, the more it became apparent that opposition to Najibullah not only came from the *mujahideen*, but from within his own ranks.

[966] Barnett Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan: From Buffer State to Failed State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 102.
[967] N.a., 'Correspondence to Secretary of State Klaus Jacobi,' 28 March 1991, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.

On 15 February 1989, a little over nine years since their initial invasion, the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan without having achieved their initial objectives.[969] Ironically, the government-controlled Soviet newspaper *Pravda* reported from the Soviet-Afghan border the following day that, "At present, the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan is perhaps the most real victory that the people can see and feel we have had during the revolutionary struggle we call restructuring."[970] In reality, according to Braithwaite, "The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in order to put their own man in charge of the Communist regime, train its security forces to defend him and then leave."[971] Yet with their departure, events appeared to unravel almost in reverse order.

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[969] Bowker, *Russian Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, 136.
[970] V. Artemenko and V. Okulov, 'Home from the War!,' *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41(1989), https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13549799.
[971] Braithwaite, 'The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,' https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198725015.001.0001/acprof-9780198725015-chapter-9.

Already during the fall of 1988, General Shahnawaz Tanai and Colonel Seid Muhammad Gulabzoi staged the first of two regime-internal military coups against Najibullah.[972] Gulabzoi had already been amongst the group of plotters who, back in 1979, staged an unsuccessful coup against Hafizullah Amin. This time, he was joined by General Tanai, an early member of the *Khalq* faction of the PDPA during the 1970s and Najibullah's Minister of Defence.[973] As the first of two coups against Amin in 1979 had been, this first of two coups against Najibullah was unsuccessful. What was more, in light of the coup, Najibullah imposed martial law across the country on 20 February 1989. At the same time, he also launched a far-reaching purge of his own party.[974] The purge included Mohammad Zeary, the head of the PDPA's recruitment branch and Ismail Danesh, the Minister of Education. Prime Minister Mohammad Hasan Sharq, not a member of the PDPA himself, retained his post.[975] Most new members of his new cabinet pertained to the *Khalq* faction of the PDPA.[976] The idea behind this was to prevent another coup from the within the faction itself.[977]

Yet a second coup by General Tanai in March of 1990 demonstrated that despite the purge and the imposition of martial law in early 1989, Najibullah remained vulnerable to attacks from within his own ranks. This time, Tanai even joined forces with the *mujahideen*. More specifically, he joined forces with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.[978] According to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Tanai had continued to resist and confront Najibullah openly ever since the coup of 1988.[979] In response, Najibullah had

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[972] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 157.
[973] Ibid.; Pravda, 'Afghanistan: Coup Attempt Thwarted,' *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 10(1990), https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13552445.
[974] N.a., 'Afghanistan: Offizieller Besuch des Österreichischen Vizekanzlers und Aussenministers Aloïs Mock vom 8./9. März 1989,' 28 February 1989, E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[975] *NZZ*, 'Ausnahmezustand in Afghanistan: Machtzuwachs für Präsident Najibullah,' 20 February 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[976] *NZZ*, 'Die inneren und äusseren Feinde Najibullahs: Kabuls Rückkehr zur orthodoxen Parteiherrschaft,' 1 March 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[977] Ibid.
[978] *NZZ*, 'Putschversuch gegen Najibullah,' 7 March 1990, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[979] Pierre Simonitsch, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Offener Machtkampf in Kabul,' 9 March 1990, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

arrested up to 137 army officers loyal to Tanai.[980] By March of 1990, the atmosphere had become so tense that Tanai and Najibullah no longer attended the same meetings and Tanai refused to enter the presidential residence for fear of arrest.[981] He launched his second armed bid for power on 7 March 1990, ordering the air force to bomb the presidential residence.[982] Yet this coup too failed within several hours and Tanai defected to Pakistan.[983]

Pakistan, in the meantime, continued to support the *mujahideen* in violation of the Geneva Accords and as discussed above, the Soviet Union lodged numerous complaints to that effect with the UNGOMAP between 1989 and 1990. President Zia ul-Haq's successor, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, on the other hand, accused Afghanistan of similarly violating the Geneva Accords. What was more, both the Soviet Union and the United States categorically refused to sign a formal agreement to end military support to their respective clients.[984] By February of 1989, Afghanistan had submitted 215 protest notes to UNGOMAP, listing 2'132 specific violations of the Geneva Accords. Pakistan submitted 89 complaints containing 877 incidents.[985] With only fifty officers to monitor compliance with the accords, UNGOMAP was essentially unable to enforce them at all.[986] In fact, by March of 1989, the number of officers had dwindled to 39 as a result of a time-lag in the rotation of officers amongst various other UN peacekeeping missions.[987] After the completion of the Soviet withdrawal in February that year, the United States urged the UN to further reduce its monitoring mission and on 15 March 1990, UNGOMAP was discontinued for lack of agreement within the Security Council.[988]

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[980] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 184.
[981] Ibid.
[982] Ibid., 185.
[983] Ibid., 184.
[984] N.a., 'Correspondence to Secretary of State Klaus Jacobi,' E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[985] N.a., 'Implementation of the Accords on the Settlement of the Situation Relating to Afghanistan: Report of the United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan,' 15 February 1989, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 11, YAM-USA.
[986] Baczko and Dorronsoro, 'United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan,' 273.
[987] Diego Cordovez, 'Note for the Secretary-General: Implementation of the Geneva Accords,' 31 March 1989, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 11, YAM-USA.
[988] Ibid.; Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, 'Report of the Secretary-General,' 17 October 1990, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 11, YAM-USA.

On the whole, like the Soviet invasion in 1979, the Soviet withdrawal was well planned and well executed. Yet naturally, the withdrawal had a destabilizing effect on both the Afghan regime and on the role of the United Nations in the region. What was more, the Soviet withdrawal also had a disorienting impact on the Afghan resistance. At no point over the course of the Soviet occupation had the *mujahideen* been a united force. Yet not a single *mujahideen* group interpreted the Soviet withdrawal as a victory, because the Soviet Union did not leave on their terms and left behind a Soviet-style government. By removing the Soviet Union from the equation, the Geneva Accords had deprived the *mujahideen* of their common cause. Yet the question of how Afghanistan should be governed remained unresolved and, on this issue, most *mujahideen* groups had differed since the beginning.

The seven Sunni *mujahideen* parties that were recognized by the Pakistani government held a *shura* in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, as the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February of 1989.[989] A *shura*, an Islamic institution much like a *Loya Jirga*, consists of a consultative and advisory body. Its purpose was to form a provisional government in light of the Soviet withdrawal. However, the composition of the *shura* itself already gave rise to considerable disagreement amongst the *mujahideen*.[990] According to Petar Troendle, the Swiss ambassador in Islamabad, the Pakistani military and intelligence services had initially pressured the Pakistani-based *mujahideen* parties into forming a provisional government in opposition to the Najibullah regime.[991] At the same time, Brian Glyn Williams argues that the Pakistani authorities actively side-lined certain *mujahideen* factions, most notably Tajik-dominated *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami*, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani.[992] Meanwhile, the government of Iran campaigned heavily for the presence of Shi'a representatives at the *shura*, while Saudi Arabia, according to Barnett Rubin, "weighed in with huge payoffs to assure that the clients of

[989] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan,* 103.
[990] N.a., 'Afghanistan nach dem 15. Februar,' 24 April 1989, E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[991] Ibid.
[992] Brian Glyn Williams, 'Afghanistan after the Soviets: From Jihad to Tribalism,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 2014(25), 938.

Iran, its main rival for influence in the region, received no representation."[993] In the end, the entire *shura* was composed of delegates from the so-called "Peshawar Seven." Not even the former King, Zaher Shah, who had been deposed in 1973 and now lived in exile in Rome, was invited to attend.[994]

On 10 February, five days before the completion of the Soviet withdrawal, the *shura* finally met in a vast government-sponsored transit centre for religious pilgrims and on 23 February, after two weeks of heated debate, it announced the composition of the so-called Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan (IIGA).[995] Most major ministerial posts went to representatives from the Peshawar Seven. Sebghatullah Mujaddedi of the Afghan National Liberation Front became interim president and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf of *Ittehad-al-Islami* (Islamic Union), became prime minister.[996] Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was made chief commander of the IIGA's unified armed forces. Yet as quickly became apparent, neither the IIGA nor its armed forces were as unified as they made themselves out to be.[997] Neither were they universally accepted as an interim government, an issue that Ahmad Shah Massoud already pointed out in correspondence to American President Ronald Reagan in September of 1988.[998] The IIGA was not only unrepresentative of the ethnic composition of Afghan society, it did not even exercise the functions of a government in exile. It was much more like another *mujahideen* alliance in its composition and function. Some, such as Barnett Rubin, argue that it did not even succeed in this and that it "exacerbated rather than resolved conflicts among the *mujahideen*."[999] Finally, "to gain both international recognition and credibility as a genuine contender for state power," the IIGA had to first of all regain Afghan territory.[1000]

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[993] Rubin, 'The Fragmentation of Afghanistan,' 155.
[994] Ibid., 156.
[995] N.a., 'Afghanistan: Offizieller Besuch des Österreichischen Vizekanzlers und Aussenministers Aloïs Mock,' E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR; Cordovez, 'The Slow Thaw,' 383; Rubin, 'The Fragementation of Afghanistan,' 154.
[996] N.a., 'Afghanistan: Offizieller Besuch des Österreichischen Vizekanzlers und Aussenministers Aloïs Mock,' E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[997] Williams, 'Afghanistan after the Soviets,' 938.
[998] Ahmad Shah Massoud, 'Correspondence to Ronald Reagan: Recognition of the Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan,' 22 September 1988, CO 002 Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of, Box 36-38, RRA-USA.
[999] Rubin, 'The Fragementation of Afghanistan,' 154.
[1000] Ibid., 156.

Therefore, beginning in the spring of 1989, the IIGA launched a series of military operations across the border into Afghanistan, the most important one being an attack against the city of Jalalabad (see map 1 in chapter 2 above).[1001] Jalalabad was strategically located near the Pakistani border and convenient for the Peshawar-based *mujahideen* to reach, seeing as they already controlled the main highway from Peshawar up until the outskirts of the city.[1002] Under the command of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the armed forces of the IIGA launched an assault on the city on 7 March. Afghan President Najibullah immediately requested outside support from the Soviet Union, much like during the time of the Soviet occupation and not so different from Hafizullah Amin, who had repeatedly asked for Soviet support against the *mujahideen* in 1979.[1003] As during the spring of 1979, the Politburo denied these requests on 10 March.[1004]

To the genuine surprize of most observers, however, the Jalalabad campaign failed.[1005] The government troops stationed in and around the city did not defect to the IIGA as anticipated and neither did the local population. Rather, the Swiss embassy in Islamabad reported to Berne that the population actively participated in the defence of the city.[1006] What was more, as part of the armed assault on Jalalabad, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had anticipated armed support from Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. His advance from the northern Panjshir region would have intercepted government supply lines from the Soviet Union.[1007] The reason why Massoud did not comply with Hekmatyar's request for assistance was not only that his own party, *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami,* had not been represented at the IIGA and that in fact, Hekmatyar had repeatedly interrupted Massoud's own

[1001] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy,* 296; Baczko and Dorronsoro, 'United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGMAP),' 272.
[1002] Rubin, 'The Fragementation of Afghanistan,' 156.
[1003] Ibid., 157.
[1004] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy,* 296.
[1005] Williams, 'Afghanistan after the Soviets,' 938.
[1006] N.a., 'Afghanistan nach dem 15. Februar,' E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[1007] Williams, 'Afghanistan after the Soviets,' 938.

supply lines from Pakistan in the past.[1008] To add to Massoud's refusal, pro-communist Uzbek militias led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had collaborated with the Afghan regime for years, opted to protect the government's supply lines from the Soviet Union.[1009] Come August of that year, Massoud even launched his own armed assault on Hekmatyar's forces, but by mid-October – at which point heavy snow fall began to interfere with the ongoing hostilities – neither side had won a decisive victory and the Najibullah regime was still in power.[1010]

This long but significant account of events on the ground graphically illustrates the complexity of the process in which the Swiss were about to become embedded. To some degree, it also reflects the problems of End-of-the-Cold-War international politics. What began with the Soviet Union's intentions of a peaceful withdrawal and a peaceful government transition collapsed in view of continued foreign intervention. The purge of the PDPA and the imposition of martial law had briefly allowed Najibullah to unify his own ranks, as the IIGA failed both to mount credible political opposition and a unified military campaign against the regime.[1011] Throughout this time, Najibullah also continued to receive arms, ammunition, fuel and basic foodstuffs from the Soviet Union to sustain his regime.[1012] The Swiss government estimated that since its withdrawal in February 1989, the Soviet Union had spent between $2.5-$3 billion for this purpose.[1013] In September of 1989, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported that the Soviet Union also retained over 300 political and military advisers in the country.[1014] This was a larger presence than even the UN had in Afghanistan at the time. The dissolution of UNGOMAP was imminent and the office UN Coordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes Relating to Afghanistan (UNOCA), which had been founded in

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[1008] Ibid.
[1009] Ibid.
[1010] Rubin, 'The Fragementation of Afghanistan,' 160.
[1011] N.a., 'Patt-Situation in Afghanistan,' 27 September 1989, E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[1012] Ibid.
[1013] N.a., 'Zur Lage in Afghanistan: Besuch des Generaldirektors für europäische Angelegenheiten im iranischen Aussenministerium, Hussein Musavian – in Bern, am 23. November 1989,' 22 November 1989, E2010-01A#1996/396#1*, CH-BAR.
[1014] *NZZ*, 'Afghanistan und die äusseren Mächte: Ende der Waffenlieferungen noch nicht in Sicht,' 16 September 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

January of 1989, was still in its initial stages of development.[1015] Led by Prince Saddrudin Aga Khan, himself from Afghanistan, the purpose of UNOCA was to coordinate the humanitarian and economic assistance programs of various UN bodies in the country. Yet by September of 1989, the office still lacked the necessary funds to begin large-scale operations.

Under these circumstances, it became clear that the Geneva Accords of 1988 had been unsuccessful. Rather than bringing peace to Afghanistan after nine years of Soviet occupation, they marked the beginning of a new phase of the Afghan crisis. By leaving the fate of the Afghan regime uncertain, the accords essentially left the root cause of the crisis untouched. What was arguably even worse, they did so by design. Throughout the 1980s, the UN refused to include the Afghan refugees and the Afghan *mujahideen* in the Geneva Talks for fear of setting a precedent in the UN's relations to non-state actors. At the same time, the UN implicitly recognized the Soviet-sponsored Afghan regime by including it in the negotiations. What was more, between 1986 and 1988, the Cold War superpowers became increasingly important behind the scenes in negotiating the Soviet withdrawal, despite the fact that neither of them were official parties to the talks. Eventually, they both agreed to act as guarantors to the agreement, but as this chapter has shown, in reality they both continued to support the opposing sides of the ensuing civil war.

The Swiss government was not involved in the Geneva Talks during this time. In fact, besides its continued humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees, described in chapter four, there is no evidence of Swiss involvement as mediators or negotiators in Afghanistan between 1986 and 1990. During a parliamentary debate in March of 1987, Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert announced that since 1986, Switzerland had donated over 5.5 million Swiss francs in direct humanitarian aid to the country.[1016] At the same time, he passed judgment on the Geneva Talks and argued that in the long

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[1015] *NZZ*, 'Zurückhaltende Solidarität mit Afghanistan,' 13 January 1989, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1016] Henri Stranner, *Basler Zeitung*, 'Afghanistan-Konflikt: Konsens zwischen Bundesrat und Parlament,' 12 March 1987, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

term, there could be no solution without the participation of the *mujahideen*. Having lost the 1986 referendum on UN membership, however, there was little that Switzerland could do about that and the CSCE, of which Switzerland remained an active member, had no instruments to do so either, Afghanistan being a non-member state.

In early 1990, therefore, it looked not only as though the Afghan crisis had evolved into an irreversible civil conflict. It also looked as though the likelihood of a renewed Swiss involvement in the crisis had become minimal, if not entirely out of the question. Having assisted the ICRC in its return to Afghanistan, the Swiss authorities had completed their mission in 1986 without having made a genuine dent in either of Switzerland's two fundamental foreign policy dilemmas of Neutrality and Solidarity. Ultimately, Switzerland's renewed involvement in Afghanistan came from an entirely unexpected quarter, from an individual, to be precise, who was both a Swiss citizen and who had been a passionate observer of Afghanistan for many years. In light of this, the final chapter of this thesis will turn to the tools of personal contacts, track two diplomacy in mediation and to the culmination of Switzerland's turbulent role as a mediator in the Afghan civil war at the end of the Cold War.

# Chapter 9: Swiss Mediation in Afghanistan at the End of the Cold War, 1990-1992

During the fall of 1989 – half a year after the departure of the Red Army – Paul Bucherer, the director of the Swiss-based foundation *Bibliotheca Afghanica*, returned to Afghanistan for the first time in ten years. Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Bucherer had visited the country repeatedly for the purpose of historic and ethnographic research, whilst cultivating close ties amongst various strata of Afghan society on both sides of the conflict.[1017] At times, he was accompanied and assisted by his wife, Veronika Bucherer-Dietschi. Unable to continue their visits with the onset of the Soviet occupation yet overwhelmed by inquiries about Afghanistan from researchers, policy-makers and journalists alike, Bucherer and his wife decided to transform their private research ventures into a foundation in 1983.[1018] Researchers such as the Austrian professor Feilx Ermacora, for instance, who investigated the number of conflict-related deaths and atrocities in Afghanistan on behalf of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, relied heavily on the *Bibliotheca Afghanica*, because they were likewise barred from entering Afghanistan.

Over the course of his renewed visits to Afghanistan in 1989 and in 1990, Bucherer reported to the board of his foundation that he had been approached by various long-term acquaintances with requests that the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* mediate in finding a political solution to the ongoing hostilities. Many of them had not forgotten the role that the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* had played in documenting the violence in Afghanistan under the Soviet occupation.[1019] Unable to fund such an enterprise by itself, the board of the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* advised Bucherer to redirect his acquaintances to the Swiss foreign ministry, the FDFA, instead. More specifically, the FDFA had

[1017] Paul Bucherer, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 16 October 2018.
[1018] Ibid.
[1019] Ibid.

recently founded an office for Peace Consultancy Services. Its first director was Ulrich Lehner, to whom Bucherer now turned.[1020]

Bucherer's various acquaintances were swift to contact the FDFA as well and the pace of events began to accelerate. For instance, during a personal visit to Switzerland in August of 1990, Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil, deposited a petition at the FDFA in Berne, formally inviting the Swiss government to mediate between the communist regime of President Najibullah and the various groups of *mujahideen*.[1021] At the same time, the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* channelled similar requests to the FDFA from Jalil Shams, counsellor to the former Afghan King, Zaher Shah, who had been toppled in a military coup in 1973.[1022] During the fall of 1990, Pir Ishaq Gailani, a personal representative of Sebghatullah Mujaddedi, the president of the *mujahideen* Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan (IIGA) in Peshawar, also communicated interest to Paul Bucherer. Bucherer in turn recommended that Gailani contact the Swiss government and to have as many political and military leaders from the *mujahideen* endorse his bid for assistance as possible.[1023]

In the meantime, on 21 November 1990, President Najibullah himself paid a personal visit to Switzerland. The *New York Times* reported that he met with Afghan guerrilla leaders at the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva.[1024] This is likely to have been the first time that representatives from the Afghan regime and from the *mujahideen* met face to face. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* speculated – correctly as it later turned out – that Sayyid Ahmad Pir Gailani, founder

[1020] Uhlrich Lehner, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 18 September 2019; author's translation from "Dienst für Friedensfragen"; Paul Bucherer, 'Vorläufiger Bericht über die Reise nach und den Aufenthalt in Kabul vom 17. Bis 25. März 1991,' 27 March 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1021] Bucherer, 'Vorläufiger Bericht über die Reise nach und den Aufenthalt in Kabul vom 17. Bis 25. März 1991,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1022] Ibid.
[1023] Ibid.
[1024] *New York Times*, 'Afghans' President Meets Rebels,' 22 November 1990, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

of *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami Afghanistan* was among the *mujahideen* delegation.[1025] As the venue of their meeting already suggested, this was a UN, rather than a Swiss initiative.

On 7 November 1989, the UN General Assembly had passed a resolution requesting "the Secretary-General to encourage and facilitate the early realization of a comprehensive political settlement in Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Agreements."[1026] This was remarkable for two reasons. First, because in doing so, the General Assembly implicitly recognized that the Geneva Accords had failed. Second, because throughout the Geneva Talks, the Secretary-General had emphasized article II, paragraph 7 of the UN Charter, according to which "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the jurisdiction of any state."[1027] Most observers, including the Secretary-General himself, actually expected the Afghan regime to collapse soon after the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces.[1028] Nevertheless, on 7 November, he initiated discussions with Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Hasan Sharq and three days later, he met Burhanuddin Rabbani of the *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami*.[1029] On 15 March 1990, a little over a week after the abortive Tanai-Hekmatyar coup against the Najibullah regime, he established the Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP). The office was headed by Benon Sevan, who had previously served with the UNGOMAP peacekeeping mission.[1030] Hence, it beame apparent that at the time that Paul Bucherer was beginning to receive requests for mediation, the UN was setting in motion its own extensive mediation machinery.

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[1025] *NZZ*, 'Treffen des afghanischen Präsidenten mit Opponenten: Zufriedenheit Najibullahs mit Gesprächsergebnis in Genf, 21 November 1990,' Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1026] UN General Assembly, '44/15 – The Situation in Afghanistan and ist Implications for International Peace and Security,' 1 November 1989, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Afgh%20ARES44%2015.pdf.
[1027] United Nations, 'Charter of the United Nations,' 26 June 1945, https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html.
[1028] Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace,* 200.
[1029] Ibid., 201.
[1030] Pérez de Cuéllar, 'Report of the Secretary-General,' Javier Pérez de Cuéllar Papers (MS 1768), Box 11, YAM-USA.

The fact that the two initiatives coincided but did not overlap became evident during Najibullah's visit to Switzerland in November of 1990, where he visited both the UN and a delegation of Swiss parliamentarians on the same day. Interestingly, he did not meet with the Federal Council, as Abdul Wakil's request for mediation was still being processed. Neither did he appear in any way to link the two initiatives. Rather, when meeting with the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly, he lectured the councillors on his own peace plans, which involved organizing a *Loya Jirga* and a transitional government to prepare elections for a new government.[1031] Felix Auer, one of the councillors present, later suggested that it had been a "monologue," rather than a dialogue and the *Journal de Genève* commented that he did not repeat his government's request for Swiss mediation.[1032]

Since the previous year, there had been rumours of a new and possibly large-scale UN-mediated conference on Afghanistan – to be held in Switzerland but not involving Swiss mediation. In January 1989, the FDFA had received hints to that effect from a Swiss academic, Professor Nicolas Jéquier. According to internal FDFA memoranda, Jéquier entertained regular correspondence with members of the Afghan elite who had chosen to live in exile in Europe after the 1973 coup against King Zaher Shah. Some of them, it turned out, also maintained ties to Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, from whom they had gathered that the Secretary-General was about to announce a *Loya Jirga* of 100 to 800 people.[1033] According to Jéquier, the Secretary-General might approach the Swiss government to host this gathering in the not-too-distant future. Then, on 26 November of that year, five days after Najibullah's visit to Switzerland, the former Afghan king, Zaher Shah published his own peace plan.

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[1031] Paul Bucherer, 'Teilnehmer des Gesprächs vom Mittwoch 21 November 1990, 16:30 Uhr im Bundesrats-Zimmer, Bundeshaus Wandelhalle 1. Stock mit seiner Exzellenz, dem Staatspräsidenten der Republik Afghanistan Dr. Mohammad Najibullah,' 20 November 1990, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA; Felix Auer, 'Afghanistan: Parlamentariertreffen mit Präsident Najibullah vom 21.11.90,' 24 January 1991, Green Box, CH-SBA; N.a., 'Notiz: Empfang des Staatspräsidenten der Republik Afghanistan, Dr. Mohammed Najibullah, durch Mitglieder der Kommission für auswärtige Angelegenheiten des Nationalrates am 21. November 1990, 16:30h im Parlamentsgebäude,' 29 November 1990, E2023A#1999/138#2966*, CH-BAR.

[1032] *NZZ*, 'Friedensgesten im Konflikt um Afghanistan: Die Sondierungen Präsident Najibullahs in der Schweiz,' 30 November 1990, Press Collection, CH-SBA.

[1033] N.a., 'Note au Chef du Département (pour information préalable éventuelle du Conseil fédéral): Afghanistan/ Bons Offices,' 23 January 1989, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.

Similarly to the proposal that Najibullah had entertained at the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council and similar to what the FDFA had gathered from Professor Jéquier, this plan too involved the meeting of a *Loya Jirga*. More specifically, the plan proposed several places, where such a gathering might be held, including Afghanistan itself, but also Egypt, Turkey, Switzerland or Austria.

In a cable to the relevant Swiss embassies dated 5 December, Klaus Jacobi, who had succeeded Edouard Brunner as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1989, suggested that it should be made known that Switzerland was prepared to host such a gathering if two conditions were met. In line with the criteria for good offices that former Secretary of State Raymond Probst had formulated in 1958, Jacobi wrote that Switzerland would host, if all Afghan conflict parties agreed and if the UN Secretary-General had no objections.[1034] This was important because it suggested that the FDFA was aware that an element of competition was developing between Switzerland and the UN over mediation in Afghanistan. This was not in Switzerland's interest, seeing as the aim of Switzerland's policy of Neutrality and Solidarity had always been to highlight the complementarity between Switzerland and the UN.

The following day, the Swiss embassy in Washington D.C. also informed Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Kimmit about Switzerland's readiness to host a *Loya Jirga* in accordance with UN plans. The day after that, the Swiss ambassador to Moscow, met with Soviet representatives to that end.[1035] The State Department had no objections and the Soviet Union also welcomed Switzerland's offer in principle. However, according to FDFA reports, the Soviet Union felt that actually, Zaher Shah's plans for a *Loya Jirga* might be premature at this stage. This was because the IIGA not only rejected the participation of the former king at such a gathering, but demanded the resignation of Najibullah and his entire cabinet before entertaining the possibility of such talks.[1036]

[1034] Klaus Jacobi, 'Afghanistan,' 5 December 1990, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1035] N.a., 'Correspondence to EDA – Politische Direktion,' 6 December 1990, E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*, CH-BAR.
[1036] N.a., 'Afghanistan – Ihr 6483,' 7 December 1990, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.

This assessment turned out to be correct. Rather than pursuing the option of setting up a *Loya Jirga* through the UN – an option that the Swiss authorities had begun to embrace themselves – individual members of the IIGA actually opted to approach the Swiss authorities directly and to ask for Swiss mediation instead. As Paul Bucherer had suggested in the fall of 1990, Pir Ishaq Gailani, the personal representative of IIGA President Sebghatullah Mujaddedi relayed a formal request for Swiss mediation to Paul Bucherer on 16 February 1991. Bucherer delivered it to Ulrich Lehner at the FDFA that same day and in light of its reference to Switzerland's reputation for neutrality and the provision of good offices, it is worth quoting its preliminaries in full. It read as follows:

> Bearing in mind the considerable support for human rights and humanitarian aid that the Swiss people and their government have consistently demonstrated and in accordance with the solicitousness they have shown towards the Afghan people throughout the past decade, we hope that the Swiss government will deploy all available means to help the Afghan people restore peace and security and to find a just and honourable solution to the Afghan problem, which will guarantee the self-determination of the Afghan people.[1037]

The document was written by Gailani himself and signed by no less than 706 moderate members of the *mujahideen* and other prominent members of Afghan society.[1038] From Berne, it was immediately transmitted to Klaus Jacobi who was on an official visit to Washington D.C. at the time.

[1037] Pir Sayed Ishaq Gailani et al., 'Hilfeersuchen an Volk und Regierung der Schweiz zum Zweck der Wiedergewinnung von Frieden in Afghanistan nach elf Jahren Krieg,' 24 January 1991, Green Box, CH-SBA author's translation from, "In Anbetracht des grossen Einsatzes für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe, den Volk und Regierung der Schweiz seit langem erbracht haben, und der menschlichen Anteilnahme die die Schweiz im vergangenen Jahrzehnt dem Afghanischen Volk gezeigt hat, erhoffen wir von der Schweizer Regierung, das sie alle ihr zur Verfügung stehenden Mittel einsetzt, um den kriegsgeplagten Afghanischen Volk bei der Wiedergewinnung von Friede und Sicherheit behilflich zu sein und eine gerechte und ehrenhafte Lösung des Afghanischen Problems durchzusetzen, die das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Afghanischen Nation gewährleistet." The original letter was written in Dari, a Farsi dialect spoken in Afghanistan, and accompanied by a French translation.
[1038] Bucherer, 'Vorläufiger Bericht,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

Originally, the document presented Jacobi with somewhat of a conundrum, as it made clear that many, especially moderate *mujahideen* preferred Swiss over UN mediation. If the Swiss were to accept, this might steer them onto a collision course with the UN. Jacobi therefore immediately sought the opinions of both the Bush Administration – which had come into office in January of 1989 – and of the United Nations, concerning this unanticipated alternative to the ongoing plans for a *Loya Jirga*.

Back in Switzerland, meanwhile, Paul Bucherer proceeded to arrange a meeting between Gailani and the Afghan Mission to the United Nations in Geneva. This in turn eventually paved the way for an invitation for Bucherer to meet directly with Afghan President Najibullah in Kabul in March.[1039] The proposal that grew both out of Bucherer's correspondence with Gailani and of his personal meeting with Najibullah was essentially one that had already been proposed by Mikhail Gorbachev back in December of 1988, namely that of a so-called "Intra-Afghan Dialogue." Unlike the UN-mediated Geneva Talks – of 1982 to 1988 , it was to take place strictly between the Afghan parties to the conflict. Further, the discussions were to be held face-to-face, rather than through an official intermediary. Finally, unlike a *Loya Jirga*, it was much less strict concerning the number of attendees and the political nature of the gathering. As such, there was also much less at risk of outright failure over disagreements on representation. Recall that the *shura* that led to the establishment of the IIGA in 1989 almost broke down over this issue on a number of occasions.

To resolve the issue of ongoing institutional competition between Bucherer's initiatives and the UN's plans, the FDFA finally dispatched Bucherer to meet with Zaher Shah in person at his residence in Rome on 20 April. It was a remarkable meeting in two respects. First, because it was a prime example Switzerland's use of personal contacts and track two diplomacy – instances where private citizens engage in diplomacy on behalf of a state. Second, this brought about an implicit agreement between

[1039] Ibid.

the two existing initiatives on mediation in Afghanistan. Zaher Shah agreed to support the plan of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" and welcomed Switzerland's involvement, given its extensive experience in the domain of good offices.[1040] According to the former king, it should have been used as a means to secure the consent of the various *mujahideen* groups gradually and to then conduct peace talks on the basis of consent.[1041] Towards this end, he recommended a series of sequential dialogues with the diverse parties that made up the *mujahideen*, as well as with government representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.[1042] These talks, he stressed, should be conducted in strict confidentiality and without commentary to the press.[1043] Paul Bucherer, for his part, also emphasized that the plan should not be interpreted as a Swiss initiative, probably so as to avoid any further competition with the UN. Apart from that, he relayed to Zaher Shah that essentially, the idea had the approval of the United States, the UN and the government of Iran.[1044]

On 21 May 1991, almost exactly one month after Bucherer's meeting with Zaher Shah, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the Secretary General of the United Nations, published a UN plan for Afghanistan containing the idea of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue." Yet what may have appeared like the result of a coordinated effort between the UN and the Swiss was actually not coordinated at all. The so-called Five-Point Plan, stressed the importance of restoring Afghanistan's territorial integrity, of the self-determination of its political and social systems, as well as the need for the transition to a new government. This, it emphasized, should take place on the basis of an exclusively "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" among Afghans themselves. Outside stakeholders, on the other hand, should stop the flow of arms into the country and support the flow of financial and material aid instead.[1045] That being

[1040] Paul Bucherer, 'Aktennotiz über das Treffen mit Ex-König Zaher Shah und General Wali,' 23 April 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1041] Bucherer, 'Vorläufiger Bericht,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1042] Ibid.
[1043] Ibid.
[1044] Bucherer, 'Aktennotiz über das Treffen mit Ex-König Zaher Shah und General Wali,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1045] Javier Perez de Cuéllar, 'Statement by the Secretary-General on Afghanistan, SG/SM/4568,' 21 May 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

said, the UN plan made no mention of the role that Paul Bucherer and the FDFA had played in securing consent for the idea of an "Intra-Afghan dialogue." What is more, in his memoirs, Pérez de Cuéllar leaves out Switzerland's involvement entirely.

This renders his depiction of events inaccurate, when in fact, Bucherer and the FDFA went on to play an important role in promoting the idea of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" and in securing the consent of the conflict parties. In fact, on the very day of the publication of the UN Five Point Plan, Ulrich Lehner, Paul Bucherer and M.D. Shabaz of the Afghan Mission to the UN in Geneva, met to discuss the next steps in this direction. According to Shabaz, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi, the president of the IIGA, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani,[1046] the leader of *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami Afghanistan* and Maulawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, the leader of *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami Afghanistan*, had all informed him of their readiness to meet with representatives of the Najibullah regime to discuss forming a transitional government.[1047] What was more, according to Shabaz, the Najibullah regime was prepared to participate in these discussions – in no less than two weeks' time.[1048] Remarkably, however, none of them had mentioned involving the UN, which presented a problem for the Swiss. Whereas the Swiss authorities appeared to try to involve the UN at every turn, the *mujahideen* in fact appeared to avoid the UN wherever possible.

In mid-June 1991, Bucherer and Lehner travelled to the United States with the purpose of updating the UN and the State Department on their meeting with Shabaz and to propose that Switzerland send a delegation to the conflict region. The records of their meetings suggest that the UN did not object, yet it did not propose a joint mission either. Instead, during their meeting in New York on 17 June, Benon Sevan, the head of the OSGAP, gave Bucherer and Lehner two pieces of advice. First, he cautioned them against appearing too closely aligned with any particular party, be it the Afghan

[1046] Not to be confused with Pir Ishaq Gailani, personal representative of Sebghatullah Mujaddedi.
[1047] Paul Bucherer, 'Offizielle Information aus Kabul über einen Friedensplan,' 25 May 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1048] Ibid.

government or any particular resistance group.[1049] Perhaps this was in response to the fact that the IIGA appeared to favour contacts with the Swiss over contacts with the UN, thus making it difficult for the UN to mediate effectively on its own. He also advised that the Swiss delegation "play for time" if any of the conflict parties were to approach them with specific requests or peace plans of their own. This in turn suggests that the UN did not actually want the Swiss to make substantial progress during their visit to the region.[1050] In his account of the meeting, Lehner added to this that Sevan said he would be "pleasantly surprized" if the Swiss managed to convince Najibullah to resign, which was something that Sevan himself had been trying to achieve for two years.[1051] The reception that Bucherer and Lehner received in Washington D.C. was even more discouraging. On 18 and 19 June, Bucherer and Lehner met with Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia Teresita Currie Schaffner, Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh Affairs Edward Abington, as well as Afghan Country Officers David Katz and Leonard Scensny.[1052] Some of their interlocutors cautioned Bucherer and Lehner against their upcoming visit to the region.[1053]

Not to be discouraged and accompanied by both Bucherer and Lehner, Secretary of State Klaus Jacobi boarded the inaugural Swissair flight to New Delhi on Friday 28 June 1991, from where he proceeded to Kabul. An internal FDFA memorandum dated 28 June gave three reasons for his visit to the region. The first was to encourage the conflict parties to reconcile their differences and to find a coordinated solution. Second, to testify to the willingness of the Swiss government to contribute towards this end and third, for them to gather first-hand information about the different viewpoints and the different actors on the ground.[1054] Some of these actors were initially confused as to whether

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[1049] Ulrich Lehner, 'Note à Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat Klaus Jacobi,' 18 June 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1050] Ibid.
[1051] Ibid.
[1052] Ulrich Lehner, 'Note à Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat Klaus Jacobi,' 19 June 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1053] N.a., 'Afghanistan – Reise von Staatssekretär Klaus Jacobi – Briefing des State Departments,' 17 July 1991, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1054] N.a., 'Note de discussion: Voyage de Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat Klaus Jacobi en Inde, en Afghanistan et au Pakistan, du 28.6. au 6.7.1991,' 27 June 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

the Swiss were visiting on behalf or independently of the UN. There was more than one occasion during the visit, on which Jacobi, Bucherer and Lehner had to explain that there was no Swiss peace plan as such and they repeatedly attributed the idea of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" to the UN.[1055] Instead, they argued that, having been approached by various conflict parties, the FDFA had decided to provide its good offices in support of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's Five Point Plan.[1056] What made this arrangement confusing to outsiders was that the UN, at no point publicly confirmed this arrangement. What was more, while it may have made sense in the context of Switzerland's long-lasting effort to demonstrate the complementarity of Neutrality and Solidarity to make up for its absence from the UN, this was not something that most observers outside of Switzerland would have known. Especially seeing as the *mujahideen* had originally approached the Swiss authorities through Paul Bucherer in order to avoid UN involvement, many of them were actually highly sceptical of Jacobi's emphasis on Switzerland's subservience to the UN.

From New Delhi, the Swiss delegation flew on to Kabul, where Jacobi met with Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil and with Benon Sevan on 30 June. Wakil appeared incredibly pleased to welcome a high-level foreign diplomat such as Jacobi to Kabul, as it doubtlessly accorded the Najibullah regime a certain degree of legitimacy.[1057] After meeting with Wakil, Jacobi met with Fazlulhaq Khaliqyar, who had recently become Prime Minister, and with Najibullah himself. Both supported the idea of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" and Khaliqyar even told Jacobi that he was prepared to speak to the *mujahideen* without any prior conditions.[1058] Jacobi's meeting with Benon Sevan was slightly less straight-forward. Contradicting what Bucherer and Lehner had gathered from M.D. Shabaz in May, Sevan began by telling Jacobi that Najibullah remained completely unacceptable to the *mujahideen*

[1055] Ibid.
[1056] Ibid.
[1057] N.a., 'Entretien avec M. Abdul Wakil (W), Ministre des affaires étrangères de l'Afghanistan, le 30 juin 1991 à Kaboul,' 10 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1058] N.a., 'Entretien avec M. Fazlulhaq Khaliqyar (K), Premier ministre, le 1er juillet 191 à Kaboul,' 11 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA; N.a., 'Entretien avec le Président Najibullah (N), le 2 juillet 1991 à Kaboul,' 11 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

and that even if he was ready to speak to them, they were unwilling to speak to him.[1059] He also cautioned that most of the *mujahideen* leaders who had indicated their willingness to enter into discussions to M.D. Shabaz in May of that year had been fairly moderate and as such they were unrepresentative especially of the more radical *mujahideen* parties within the IIGA. Najibullah, on the other hand, Sevan reported, was anything but prepared to step down as a precondition for an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue."[1060] After all, who would take his place? The *mujahideen* were not a unified movement and did not have a decisive figurehead, the IIGA having failed to establish itself as a legitimate alternative to the Najibullah regime. The only person, to whom Sevan could imagine Najibullah ceding power was the former king, Zaher Shah. Yet it was highly unlikely that the latter would accept it, coming from Najibullah, who had originally been installed by the Soviet Union.[1061]

**Image 7. Klaus Jacobi and Paul Bucherer (left) meet President Najibullah (third from the right) on 2 July 1991[1062]**

[1059] N.a., 'Entretien avec M. Benon Sevan, Représentant personnel du Secrétaire général de l'ONU en Afghanistan et au Pakistan, le 30 juin 1991 à Kaboul,' 11 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA
[1060] Ibid.
[1061] Ibid.
[1062] *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA.

The following day, having travelled from Kabul to Islamabad, Jacobi met Akram Zaki, the Pakistani Secretary General for Foreign Affairs.[1063] Zaki effectively compounded the issue by telling Jacobi that Pakistan was happy to accept any leader in Afghanistan as long as they were not installed by the Soviet Union.[1064] He also argued that he believed this to be the will of the Afghan people, yet he did not address Pakistan's support for the *mujahideen*.[1065] This made it appear as though Pakistan was no more than an interested bystander, when in fact, as the West German ambassador to Pakistan told Jacobi later that day, Pakistan played a key role in the conflict and exerted substantial influence over the *mujahideen*.[1066] He added to this that Pakistani policy towards Afghanistan was determined primarily by General Asad Durani, the director of the Pakistani secret service, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), whom Jacobi was also scheduled to meet.[1067] According to the minutes of that meeting, Durani was openly irritated at Jacobi's visit and at Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan.[1068] Like Sevan, he argued that it was impossible even to seat all of the Afghan armed groups around a single table given the climate of mutual distrust.[1069] He therefore appeared not understand what the Swiss hoped to achieve.

That evening, arguably to clarify the reasons for his visit – and despite earlier warnings from Zaher Shah to avoid publicity – Jacobi gave a press conference at the Swiss embassy in Islamabad. He began by reiterating that Switzerland was interested only in promoting an "Intra-Afghan dialogue" in line with the UN's Five Point Plan. Yet as the press conference progressed, Jacobi's statements became increasingly more political. The aim of the dialogue for instance, he began to argue, was ultimately to reach an agreement on a process of transition in Kabul.[1070] According to the Pakistani newspaper

[1063] Pakistan did not have a foreign minister at the time.
[1064] N.a., 'Entretien avec M. Akram Zaki (Z), Secrétaire générale aux affaires étrangères,' le 3 juillet 1991 à Islamabad, 15 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1065] Ibid.
[1066] N.a., 'Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur RFA (D), le 3 juillet 1991 à Islamabad,' 15 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1067] Ibid.
[1068] Ibid.
[1069] Ibid.
[1070] *Frontier Post*, 'Swiss govt. Supports peace initiative on Afghanistan,' 4 July 1991, Green Box, CH-SBA.

*The Nation*, Jacobi also said that a solution to the Afghan war could not completely disregard President Najibullah.[1071] In fact, "If the Afghans are as yet not ready to speak to Najib, we will have someone as go-between from the UN, but those who do not want such a meeting should stay out until they like."[1072] In saying this, Jacobi may have alienated a number of *mujahideen* groups, who continued to insist on Najibullah's resignation. He also clearly equated the Swiss involvement in Afghanistan with the involvement of the UN, which had repeatedly disregarded the demands of the *mujahideen* throughout the Soviet occupation.

What was more, Jacobi also said all of this without first having discussed it with representatives of the *mujahideen*. By the time that he reached Peshawar the following day, news of his press conference had already arrived and unsurprisingly he received a cold reception. One of Jacobi's first encounters was with none other than Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of the radical *Hezb-i-Islami/ Hekmatyar*. Addressing most of the points that Jacobi had made at his press conference in Islamabad, Hekmatyar immediately made it clear that there was no way that he would work with Najibullah and that he rejected the UN Five Point Plan all-together. Instead, he expected the Kabul government to resign unconditionally.[1073] Burhanuddin Rabbani of the *Jam'iyyat-e-Islami* and Sebghatullah Mujaddedi of the IIGA, with whom Jacobi also had separate meetings that day, echoed some of these sentiments. Rabbani was equally adamant that Najibullah could not be included in the "Intra-Afghan Dialogue," because he continued to receive support from the Soviet Union. In fact, as Artemy Kalinovsky has shown, the Soviet Union only agreed to cut off its military aid to the Najibullah regime when one of his primary backers in Moscow, KGB Chief Vladimir Kriuchkov, was arrested following a failed August coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991.[1074] Mujaddedi added to this that, like

[1071] *The Nation*, 'Afghan issue: Najib can't be disregarded says Jacobi,' 4 July 1991, Green Box, CH-SBA.
[1072] Ibid.
[1073] N.a., 'Entretien avec Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (H), le 4 juillet 1991 à Peshawar,' 15 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1074] Artemy Kalinovsky, 'The Failure to Resolve the Afghan Conflict, 1989-1992,' in *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict*, edited by Aglaya Snetkov and Stephen Aris, 136-154 (London: Routledge, 2011), 138.

General Asad Durani in Islamabad, he did not consider it feasible to try to unite all of the *mujahideen* parties in an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" in the first place.[1075] The resulting picture was therefore one that differed remarkably from the one painted by M.D. Shabaz back in May of 1991. In fact, out of all his hosts, Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil and President Najibullah appeared to have been the only ones to welcome Jacobi and to encourage him in his effort to mediate in the Afghan conflict. At a first glance, therefore, Jacobi's visit to the region did not appear to have been a success, having failed to advance the prospect of a face-to-face dialogue amongst the Afghan conflict parties. Perhaps, as Zaher Shah had suggested in April 1991, he ought to have proceeded more slowly and widened the circle of participants more gradually.

Image 8. Klaus Jacobi meets Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Peshawar on 4 July 1991[1076]

That, in fact, was precisely one of Paul Bucherer's next initiatives. Soon after returning to Switzerland and arguably in an attempt to salvage the "Intra-Afghan Dialogue," Bucherer took the initiative to prepare a new, more modest round of consultations. These were intended to begin with an even smaller circle of people, and to be gradually widened to include participants from all sides of the

[1075] N.a., 'Entretien avec le Prof. S. Mujaddedi (M), chef du Jabhe-e-Nejat Milli, le 4 juillet 1991 à Islamabad,' 15 July 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1076] *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA.

conflict. By 11 July, discussions with Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil and Jalil Shams, counsellor to Zaher Shah, produced the so-called "2+3 plan" to bring together three representatives of hand-picked, moderate *mujahideen* parties and two representatives from the Najibullah regime at a secret location in Switzerland. Given the circumstances and the opposition that the "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" continued to experience among the *mujahideen*, this was a considerable achievement. However, it was also slightly problematic, because it is not entirely clear whether President Najibullah was personally aware of this plan. In fact, former Swiss diplomat Marianne von Grünigen has suggested that even prior to Klaus Jacobi's visit to the conflict region, it was not always entirely clear to what extent Najibullah was informed of ongoing consultations by his own government.[1077] The UN, on the other hand, was made aware when Klaus Jacobi and Benon Sevan met in Geneva on Friday 19 July. Once again, the Swiss informed the UN, but the UN did not offer any support.

Under these circumstances, two high-ranking representatives from the Kabul government and three high-ranking moderate representatives of the *mujahideen* – all of whose names remain classified – met in Switzerland on 8 August 1991. They gathered first at the Afghanistan Archive of the *Bibliotheca Afghanica* in Liestal, Switzerland, and subsequently proceeded to the nearby Hotel Bad Schauenburg for their discussions.[1078] Paul Bucherer, Ulrich Lehner and Peter Maurer, who is now president of the ICRC and who served as the personal assistant to Klaus Jacobi at the time, were also present but did not take part in the derliberations.[1079] The operation was codenamed "OSMAN Carpet Trading Inc." and according to Andreas Koellreuter – Viktor Sintchuck's employer after his release from the Zugerberg and member of the Cantonal Council of Baselland at the time – both the hotel staff and the local police were told that they were hosting a carpet dealer conference.[1080]

[1077] Marianne von Grünigen, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 26 October 2018.
[1078] N.a., 'Intra-Afghan Dialogue,' 7 August 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA; N.a., 'Bericht über die erste technische Vorbesprechung des "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" in Bad Schauenburg bei Liestal vom 8.-10- August 1991,' 14 August 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1079] N.a., 'Bericht über die erste technische Vorbesprechung,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1080] Andres Koellreuter, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 17 December 2018; N.a., 'Intra-Afghan Dialogue,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

Image 9. Hotel Bad Schauenburg, 1991.[1081]

Unfortunately, the conference quickly began to stall. The first working session began at 9:00 on 9 August, at which point the moderate delegates of the *mujahideen* announced that they could only speak in private capacity. The delegates from Kabul, on the other hand, claimed that they had been authorized to discuss technical matters only.[1082] During a second meeting that afternoon, they repeatedly refused the proposal of the *mujahideen* to organize a *Loya Jirga* and the demand that the Najibullah regime step down within a year after it was held.[1083] That evening, they agreed that the Kabul government would review its standpoint within one month, at which point Jalil Shams would travel to Kabul to resume the discussions. Within two weeks of his visit to Kabul, both sides would then determine a date for the formation of a common working group, which was to meet in

[1081] *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA.
[1082] N.a., 'Intra-Afghan Dialogue,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.; N.a., 'Bericht über die erste technische Vorbesprechung,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1083] Rashid, 'The Afghan Resistance,' 208; N.a., 'Intra-Afghan Dialogue,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

Switzerland.[1084] Unfortunately, however, after the closure of the afternoon session the representatives from Kabul changed their minds again and refused to sign the meeting's protocol.[1085] It would have been difficult to imagine either Bucherer or the FDFA trying to salvage the outcome of these discussions under these circumstances. Yet they do deserve credit for organizing a face-to-face meeting between select representatives of both the *mujahideen* and the Najibullah regime, having been told repeatedly that doing so would be impossible. Especially Paul Bucherer deserves credit for the multiple initiatives that he launched on behalf of the Afghan peace process on his own accord.

This being said, within the span of ten days, not only the circumstances surrounding Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan, but the systemic parameters of the Afghan crisis began to change quite abruptly. On 19 August, KGB Chief Vladimir Kriuchkov and Soviet Army General Valentin Varennikov, who had played an important role in planning and executing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, launched a coup against CPSU General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.[1086] As discussed earlier in this thesis, Soviet economic and political reforms had begun to lag behind the pace of both economic decline and political destabilization for some time.[1087] Archie Brown has argued that by 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev "had consciously set about dismantling the Soviet system."[1088] However, "At no time did he wish to see the disappearance of the Soviet state."[1089] Unknowingly, his drive to encourage public debate between 1987 and 1988 also led to rising resentment from among the public in various republics within the Soviet Union. Alex Pravda has since maintained that the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 involved two intertwined processes, "the transformation of the communist regime and the disintegration of the highly centralized Union."[1090] The liberalization and

[1084] N.a., 'Intra-Afghan Dialogue,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA; N.a., 'Bericht über die erste technische Vorbesprechung,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1085] Ibid.
[1086] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 200.
[1087] Brown, 'The Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War,' 248.
[1088] Ibid.
[1089] Ibid.
[1090] Pravda, 'The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1990-1991,' 356.

restructuring of the Soviet economy came from the top, while the Union, according to Pravda, was undermined from below.[1091]

In this explosive environment, between 1989 and 1991, and after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the governments of various Soviet republics began to declare their own laws, to develop their own institutions. Tax revenue no longer reached the Soviet treasury.[1092] From 1989 to 1990, the republics in the Baltics and in the Caucasus began to press for independence and between late 1990 and 1991, as did the Ukraine and even Russia itself.[1093] The fact that the Soviet Politburo had refrained from interfering during the uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1989, as well as the fall of the Berlin Wall in November of that year arguably gave a crucial signal to many Soviet republics themselves. The so-called Union Treaty, which was due to be signed on 20 August, was intended to reform the Soviet Union along the lines of a confederation, yet in light of the attempted coup, it was never signed. That being said, the coup itself failed and Mikhail Gorbachev remained in power until his resignation in December of 1991. However, beginning in August of 1991, the Soviet Union began to degenerate into its component parts and this had significant consequences for the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, as well as for the involvement of the Swiss and the UN.

First of all, following the attempted coup and a re-shuffle amongst the leadership of the Soviet armed forces, the Soviet Union and the United States announced on 13 September that they would both discontinue their support to the Afghan conflict parties.[1094] By the end of November, the governments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran also indicated their support for this so-called arrangement on "Negative Symmetry" – meaning simultaneous reductions in arms supplies that had

[1091] Ibid.
[1092] Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye,* 200.
[1093] Pravda, 'The collapse of the Soviet Union,' 1990-1991, 357.
[1094] N.a.,' Joint Soviet-American Statement on Afghanistan,' *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 37 (1991), https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/13537768; N.a., 'Statement by the Spokesman of the Secretary-General,' 13 September 1991, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.

been vital both for the Najibullah regime and for the *mujahideen*.[1095] The final cut-off date for military aid, it was agreed, was to be 1 January 1992. This was devastating for both the Afghan regime and for the Afghan resistance, as it ultimately threatened their material existence, as well as their internal cohesion. What it also meant was that as the United States and the Soviet Union began to coordinate their retreat from the Afghan war, mediators such as the Swiss and the UN became more important outside contacts for the conflict parties. On 22 August, the final day of the Soviet coup, for instance, Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil paid another visit to Klaus Jacobi and confided in him that he was now of the opinion that Najibullah would have to be replaced.[1096] Surprisingly, Najibullah Mujaddedi – the son of the president of the IIGA, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi – also reached out to the FDFA at around the same time. It is unclear whether they concurrently reached out to the UN. However, what gradually became apparent was that the information exchange between the UN and the Swiss authorities began to suffer after the "Negative Symmetries" agreement. Without American and Soviet military aid, pressure mounted on both the regime and the resistance to secure other forms of outside support to secure their survival. It also increased the pressure on both the Swiss and on the UN to find a diplomatic solution.

What complicated matters for the Swiss was that at the same time as withdrawing its military support from the *mujahideen*, the United States began to side openly with the UN over the issue of mediation. On 11 September, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia Teresita Currie Schaffner told Stephan Nellen of the Swiss embassy in Washington that, "Frankly, we think that an active role by Switzerland or anyone else will not help matters. We are not going to deal with Najib or his representatives and are not interested in efforts to arrange such a meeting."[1097] In other words,

[1095] Barnett Rubin, 'Post-Cold War State Disintegration: The Failure of International Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan,' *Journal of International Affairs* 46(1993), 485.
[1096] Christian Hauswirth, 'Besuch des afghanischen Aussenministers Abdul Wakil bei Staatssekretär Jacobi (JAC) vom 22. August 1991,' 19 September 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1097] Edouard Brunner, 'Afghanistan: (1) Die schweizerischen Bemühungen um Gesprächsvermittlung (Eure 97 und 100) und (2) der Beschluss des "arms cut-off" in Moskau vom letzten Wochenende,' 23 September 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

whilst the United States curtailed the flow of weapons to the *mujahideen*, it continued to propagate the stance of a selective part of fundamentalist groups that an “Intra-Afghan Dialogue” could only take place without the Afghan regime. The Swiss, on the other hand, had relied exclusively on the support of moderate members of the *mujahideen* in their attempt to revive the “Intra-Afghan Dialogue” in August. The Afghan regime, meanwhile, expressly thanked the Swiss government for its good offices at a meeting of the General Assembly on 25 September and even the Soviet Union relayed its gratitude through the Swiss embassy in Moscow on 24 October.[1098] These diverging opinions mattered both for the prospects of the diplomatic process in Afghanistan overall, as well as for Switzerland’s involvement specifically. Above all, they complicated the relationship between the Swiss authorities and the UN still further.

In late September, the Swiss Permanent Observer to the UN in New York, met with a member of Benon Sevan’s staff at OSGAP. Sevan himself was travelling in Afghanistan and Pakistan at the time. In his absence, they discussed that the UN had begun to plan a larger meeting of thirty to fifty Afghan representatives in Switzerland, presumably in Geneva, yet without involving the Swiss government.[1099] FDFA documents show that Sevan had informed the Swiss authorities of this on a previous occasion and Switzerland had actually already made it known that it was prepared to host such a gathering on its territory.[1100] However, at the time, Sevan had also advised the Swiss authorities to conduct themselves as discretely as possible. In a tone similar to that of Teresita Currie Schaffner, he had complained to FDFA staff that in recent talks with UN humanitarian aid personnel in Kabul, Paul Bucherer had apparently reiterated that Switzerland was operating “within the framework of the UN-Plan.”[1101] This was nothing new, as the Swiss had been repeating this mantra ever since Jacobi’s visit to the region in June of that year. Yet internal FDFA documents concluded

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[1098] N.a., ‘Correspondence to Klaus Jacobi,’ 25 September 1991, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR; N.a., ‘Correspondence to Politische Abteiung III, Dienst für Friedensfragen,’ 24 October 1991, E2200.157-04#2000/409#53*, CH-BAR.
[1099] N.a., ‘Correspondence to Klaus Jacobi,’ E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1100] N.a., ‘Correspondence to Secretary of State Jacobi,’ 4 October 1991, E2010-01A#2000/217#5*, CH-BAR.
[1101] Ibid.

that, "Perhaps by giving this remark a certain emphasis, S. [Sevan] wanted to imply that whatever the solution in Afghanistan, it was to be primarily the 'Chasse gardée,' the preserve, of the UN."[1102]

On 18 October, Pérez de Cuéllar publicly announced the UN's plans for an intra-Afghan conference to prepare a *Loya Jirga*. In an internal FDFA document, Jacobi commented that the FDFA had not been included in this process, having heard about this additional step from third parties instead.[1103] This trend of parallel Swiss and UN initiatives continued as the Afghan National Liberation Front, the moderate party of IIGA President Sebghatullah Mujaddedi asked for discussions with the Afghan regime in Switzerland shortly thereafter.[1104] On 27 October, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi's son Najibullah Mujaddedi and his associate General Hamidullah met with representatives of the FDFA at a restaurant in Zurich. Also present, but in separate rooms were Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil and Defence Minister General Ghulam Faruq Yaqubi.[1105] Mujaddedi had asked for this meeting for two reasons. First, because he faulted the UN for lack of concrete progress and second, because the Afghan National Liberation Front had gathered from the Afghan media that Najibullah might be prepared to step down in favour of Sebghatullah Mujaddedi.[1106] Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil did not explicitly deny these reports, yet again, it is unclear whether he acted independently or on behalf of Najibullah at this stage. Prior to confirming anything, he demanded that the regime be given protective guarantees from the UN and the Soviet Union, the United States, as well as from a representative part of the *mujahideen*.[1107]

Having obtained no concrete results in Zurich, a moderate group of *mujahideen* led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, then travelled to Moscow for the first time and met with Foreign Minister Boris Pankin on

[1102] Ibid.
[1103] Klaus Jacobi, 'Afghanistankonferenz der UNO,' 18 October 1991, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1104] Ibid.
[1105] Peter Sutter, 'Aktennotiz: Geheimtreffen zwischen einer Vertretung der afghanischen Regierung und der Opposition in Zürich (16./27.10.1991),' 29 October 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1106] Ibid.
[1107] Ibid.

15 November – Edouard Shevardnadze having stepped down in December of 1990.[1108] In a joint Afghan-Soviet statement that day, the Soviet Union publicly declared itself in favour of a democratically elected government in Afghanistan for the first time, as well as in favour of elections to be monitored by the UN and the OIC.[1109] In other words, having decided to withdraw its troops and its military support from the Afghan regime in 1989 and having agreed to stop supplying it in September of 1991, the Soviet Union now withdrew its political support as well. The more fundamentalist members of the IIGA, including Abdul Rasul Sayyaf of *Ittehad-al-Islami*, Mawlawi Yunis Khalis and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar refused to travel to Moscow and were not represented in the *mujahideen* delegation.[1110] What was more, it appears as though the Afghan regime was not consulted either.

It was most likely for this reason that president Najibullah reached out to Secretary of State Klaus Jacobi in a personal letter five days later, writing that, "I would like to invite you as a friend of the people of my country to pay a visit to Kabul."[1111] Its meaning was not entirely clear to Jacobi and he decided to consult M.D. Shabaz from the Afghan Mission to the UN in Geneva before issuing a reply. They met on 23 November, and Shabaz explained that in light of the immediate cessation of arms deliveries from the Soviet Union on 1 January, of the recent secret meeting in Zurich and of the public visit of the *mujahideen* to Moscow, the regime was now prepared to negotiate a transition.[1112] Ideally, he added, Najibullah would like to cede power to Zaher Shah and if that was not possible, he would settle for Seghatullah Mujaddedi, the president of the IIGA.[1113] This was remarkable in light of the fact that prior to Jacobi's visit to the conflict region that summer, Benon Sevan had told Jacobi

[1108] Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan,* 126.
[1109] N.a., 'Text of Soviet-Afghan Statement Coordinated,' 15 November 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1110] *NZZ*, 'Moskauer Gespräche einer Delegation des afghanischen Widerstands,' 13 November 1991, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1111] Najibullah, 'Correspondence to Klaus Jacobi,' 20 November 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1112] Paul Bucherer, 'Aktennotiz: Übergabe eines Schreibens des Afghanischen Präsidenten Najibullah an Staatssekretär Jacobi durch M.D. Shabaz in Egerkingen, 23.11.91,' 24 November 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1113] Ibid.

he would be "pleasantly surprized" if the Swiss could manage to convince Najibullah to resign.[1114] Now, five months later, Najibullah's resignation appeared to have become a genuine possibility.

Jacobi accordingly drew up the following plan: on 26 November, he would meet with Mujaddedi to discuss his views on the matter. At the same time, he would send Paul Bucherer and Peter Sutter of the FDFA to Kabul to begin negotiations with the regime. If Najibullah was prepared to resign, Sutter was instructed to call Jacobi immediately. If everything went according to plan, Jacobi would then cancel all of his appointments at short notice and fly to Kabul on 3 December to formally witness Najibullah's resignation on 5 December.[1115] Nobody was to know about this, not even the UN, and on 6 December, he would return to Switzerland while Bucherer and Sutter would try to establish contact with local *mujahideen* commanders, most notably with Ahmad Shah Massoud, whose forces were by this point garrisoned around Kabul.[1116] On 15 December, Jacobi would then invite Mujaddedi and Najibullah to Switzerland for a first face-to-face meeting in order to agree on further steps in the direction of a transitional government.[1117]

Once again, it is difficult to imagine what the consequences for Afghanistan could have been, had this plan succeeded. The fact that the conflict in Afghanistan continues to this day already suggests that it did not. In fact, even if it had succeeded, it is uncertain as to whether it would have sufficed to bring peace to Afghanistan. That being said, most observers remain ignorant not only of the role that the FDFA played in Afghanistan between 1990 and 1991, but of how close it came to securing Najibullah's resignation. This is why it merits a detailed narrative and analysis. On 1 December, Peter Sutter and Paul Bucherer met Abdul Wakil in Kabul and he repeated to them that Najibullah had chosen to resign. According to Wakil, ever since the diplomatic success of the *mujahideen* in

[1114] N.a., 'Note à Monsieur le Secrétaire d'Etat Klaus Jacobi,' E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1115] Bucherer, 'Aktennotiz: Übergabe eines Schreibens des Afghanischen Präsidenten Najibullah,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1116] Paul Bucherer, 'Vorgehen beim Besuch in Kabul, Anfang Dez. 1991,' 27 November 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1117] Ibid.

Moscow, Najibullah had felt himself betrayed by the Soviet Union, rejected by the United States and neglected by the United Nations. According to Sutter's reports, he thought that the Swiss were the only ones who could "get him back in the game."[1118] He relayed this back to Jacobi over the telephone on 2 December, but Jacobi was not convinced that he had sufficient information to indulge Najibullah's request for an immediate visit.[1119] He therefore instructed Sutter and Bucherer to investigate further, most probably, to verify, whether Najibullah genuinely intended to resign, whether it had been a tactical manoeuvre or whether others within his government were trying to remove him. After all, Abdul Wakil had privately confessed to Jacobi as early as August, that he thought Najibullah would have to be replaced.[1120]

As it was, under the present circumstances, Jacobi saw no need to cancel his scheduled appointments and travelled to the United States from 9-13 December. There, he met with Undersecretary of State Arnold Kanter, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar – whose term was about to expire at the end of the year – Benon Sevan and Yuli Vorontsov, who now served as the Soviet representative to the United Nations. Pérez de Cuéllar and Sevan reacted positively to Jacobi's news that Najibullah might be prepared to resign and they cautiously encouraged Jacobi to go to Kabul. Yet they also appeared wary that different parties within the regime might attempt to use Jacobi's visit for their own purposes. In the meantime, they continued to pursue their own plans for a preparatory *Loya Jirga* under UN supervision. The only person who opposed Jacobi's involvement was US Undersecretary of State Arnold Kanter, who repeated the American position that the UN was best

[1118] Peter Sutter, 'Mission von Paul Bucherer und Peter Sutter in Kabul vom 1. bis 5. Dezember 1991,' 6 December 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1119] N.a., 'Factfinding Mission nach Kabul/ Afghanistan im Dezember 1991 durchgeführt von P. Sutter, Bern und P. Bucherer, Liestal zur Vorbereitung einer allfälligen Friedensmission von Herrn Staatssekretär Klaus Jacobi,' 5 December 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1120] Hauswirth, 'Besuch des afghanischen Aussenministers Abdul Wakil bei Staatssekretär Jacobi,' EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.

suited to find a diplomatic solution to the war in Afghanistan. Any "parallel channels" he considered "dangerous."[1121]

It appears that as a result, Jacobi did not take up Najibullah's invitation but continued to gather more information instead. On 24 December 1991, the same day that Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as the General Secretary of the CPSU, representatives of the regime and from the moderate Peshawar parties once more travelled to Zurich. As in October, this delegation included Sebghatullah Mujaddedi's son Najibullah Mujaddedi, as well as two political advisers to Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani of the *Mahaz-i-Milli Islami Afghanistan*. Foreign Minister Wakil, as well as Security Minister Yaqubi, his adviser Dr. Zamir and Chief of Staff Walledullah *(sic)* arrived on 28 December.[1122] Abdul Wakil, who had convened the meeting, explained that he sided with the Swiss approach of steadily broadening the circle of participants at gatherings such as this one. In a next phase, for instance, he advocated the inclusion of former king Zaher Shah.[1123] Meanwhile, however, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's successor Boutros Boutros-Ghali, formally announced a so-called "Gathering of Afghans" in early February of 1992 and according to the Swiss newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*, Wakil had also given his consent to the UN plan.[1124] This new version of an Afghan gathering was planned to go ahead either in Geneva or in Vienna towards the end of April and the *Tages-Anzeiger* reported that the UN expected approximately 150 participants from various political parties and ethnic backgrounds, including high-ranking field commanders and representatives from the royal family.[1125] The plan was for there to be approximately 35 working groups for an even bigger gathering to identify candidates for an interim government.[1126]

[1121] Sekretariat Staatssekretär, 'Besuch Staatssekretär Jacobi in den USA, 9.-13.12.1991,' 17 December 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1122] Peter Sutter, 'Aktennotiz – Streng Vertraulich,' 8 January 1991, EDA 1 (1990-1992), CH-SBA.
[1123] Ibid.
[1124] *NZZ*, 'Neuer Anlauf für einen Frieden in Afghanistan: Kurswechsel in der pakistanischen Politik,' 4 February 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA; Pierre Simonitsch, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 'Die richtige Formel für Afghanistan ?,' 27 February 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1125] Ibid.
[1126] Ibid.

As it turned out, neither the Swiss nor the UN approach to the idea of an "Intra-Afghan Dialogue" succeeded, because on 18 March, President Najibullah made true his intention to resign. There is no accessible record of any Swiss involvement in his decision to resign that day. Former UN speechwriter Phillip Corwin has suggested that his speech had been written for him by UN staff.[1127] In it, he announced that he would no longer "insist on [his] personal participation in the proposed Afghan gathering, hosted by the Secretary-General as part of the UN process."[1128] Further, he added that, "Once an understanding is reached, through the United Nations process for the establishment of an interim government in Kabul, all powers and all executive authority will be transferred to the interim government as of the first day of the transition period and as stated by the Secretary-General."[1129] He made no mention of the diplomatic involvement of the Swiss and there is no evidence that he attempted to find an alternative solution through the parallel channels of the FDFA at this stage. Neither is there evidence of UN-FDFA coordination on this point.

This being said, whilst Najibullah's resignation may have appeared to be a success for the UN at first, the UN proved unable to predict and control its consequences. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali initially welcomed Najibullah's resignation as "a major contribution to the peace process."[1130] According to Boutros-Ghali, "An agreement in principle has been reached to establish, as soon as possible, a pre-transition council composed of impartial personalities to which all powers and all executive authority would be transferred."[1131] On the surface, at least, he therefore made it appear as though there was a feasible, pre-planned transition mechanism in place and that the UN was in control of it. In reality, however, the UN was anything but in control. To begin with, as the *Neue*

[1127] Philip Corwin, *Doomed in Afghanistan: A UN Officer's Memoirs of the Fall of Kabul and Najibullah's Failed Escape* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 171.
[1128] Muhammad Najibullah, 'Statement of President Najibullah,' March 1992, EDA 2 (1992-1997), CH-SBA.
[1129] Ibid.
[1130] Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 'Statement by the Secretary-General on Afghanistan,' 10 April 1992, E2210.5#1998/8#23*, CH-BAR.
[1131] Ibid.

*Zürcher Zeitung* commented in early April, “The UN peace plan includes early elections, an exceedingly optimistic projection for a country that is completely destroyed…”[1132] More critically still, with the announcement of Najibullah’s imminent departure, those *mujahideen* who had advanced to the outskirts of Kabul in 1991 now began to move on the city itself.[1133] Andreas Bänziger of the *Tages-Anzeiger* speculated that especially the northern Uzbek and Tajik militia under General Dostum and Ahmad Shah Massoud respectively, feared that unless they gained ground under the current circumstances, they would be marginalized by the dominant Pushtun *mujahideen* groups during peace talks.[1134]

A member of the Swiss ambassadorial staff in Islamabad surmised in 1993 that, “What happened was what almost everyone said would happen, namely that if Najibullah were to resign before a transition mechanism had been put in place, that would lead to chaos and civil war.”[1135] Uzbek General Dostum, who had been allied with Najibullah during the Soviet occupation, swiftly took Mazar-i-Sharif in the North and entered into an alliance with Ahmad Shah Massoud against Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s troops, which were stationed around Kabul.[1136] Then, on Saturday 18 April 1992, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported that, “The Najibullah regime is defeated.”[1137] Earlier that week, government troops had mutinied in Northern Kabul, inciting Najibullah to attempt to escape. On Thursday, he attempted to board a UN plane to India, but Uzbek militia prevented him from reaching the airport.[1138] From there, he retreated to the UN compound, where he was to remain in

[1132] *NZZ*, ‘Vordergründige Erfolge der Uno in Afghanistan,’ 7 April 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1133] Gabriele Venzky, *Basler Zeitung*, ‘UNO-Friedensplan in Afghanistan gefährdet,’ 16 April 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1134] Andreas Bänziger, *Tages-Anzeiger*, ‘Übergangsregierung für Afghanistan,’ 10 April 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA.
[1135] N.a., ‘Afghanistan: “Too Much Abmition and Ammunition,” Correspondence to FDFA,’ 10 March 1993, E2010-01A#2000/217#5*, CH-BAR, author’s translation from, “Es ist eingetroffen, was fast alle sagten, nämlich dass ein Rücktritt Najibullahs bevor ein Übergangs Mechanismus installiert ist, zum Chaos und Bürgerkrieg führen würde.”
[1136] Ibid.
[1137] *NZZ*, ‘Erbitterter Machtkampf in Afghanistan: Sturz und Fluchtversuch Präsident Najibullahs ,’ 18 April 1992, Press Collection, CH-SBA, author’s translation from, “Das Regime Najibullah ist am Ende.”
[1138] *NZZ*, ‘Erbitterter Machtkampf in Afghanistan,’ Press Collection, CH-SBA; Rubin, *The Search for Peace in Afghanistan,* 132.

self-imprisonment until the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996.[1139] According to Phillip Corwin, he launched into a tirade against Abdul Wakil as soon as he was there, calling him a “coward” and accusing him of having turned “180 degrees” – possibly an indication that Wakil had been undermining Najibullah’s position from within the regime.[1140] In one of the defining moments of the Afghan crisis, he asked aloud: Why, if he had personally been such an obstacle to peace, why was there no peace now that he was gone?[1141]

The director of the Political Secretariat at the FDFA, wrote in 1994 that under these circumstances, “There [was] little that Switzerland could have done in the domain of national reconciliation that would have had a reasonable chance of success.”[1142] Instead of becoming the first step towards the resolution of the war in Afghanistan, Najibullah’s resignation in 1992 had been the last in a poorly coordinated peace effort. Already after the “Negative Symmetries” agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union in September of 1991, events had begun not only to accelerate, but to spiral out of control, leaving both the UN and the FDFA little room to manoeuvre or to coordinate their activities. From then on, both consciously began to pursue their own interpretations of an “Intra-Afghan Dialogue,” the Swiss being more gradualist and the UN’s being more comprehensive. At the same time, the divisions that had existed respectively within the Afghan regime and amongst the *mujahideen* throughout their each of their histories, began to resurface irreversibly in early 1992.

Najibullah’s decision to resign in the absence of a universally accepted transition mechanism proved fatal not only for his regime, but for the mediation efforts both of the UN and of the Swiss government. That is not to say that his resignation was the principal reason behind the failure of either of their efforts to mediate. Between 1988 and 1992, it had become obvious that in the Geneva

[1139] Ibid.
[1140] Corwin, ‘Doomed in Afghanistan,’ 123.
[1141] Ibid.
[1142] N.a., ‘Note au secrétaire d’Etat Jakob Kellenberger,’ 20 January 1994, E2010-01A#2000/217#6*, CH-BAR, author’s translation from, “Il y a peu de chose que la Suisse pourrait entreprendre dans le domaine d’une réconciliation nationale, avec une chance raisonnable de réussite.”

Accords, the United Nations had brokered an agreement which ignored the fundamental issues at stake in Afghanistan. Despite repeated protests from the General Assembly throughout the period of the Soviet occupation, the UN Secretariat implicitly condoned the Soviet presence in Afghanistan by choosing to treat with the Soviet-installed Afghan regime. It consistently refused to include the *mujahideen* and it consciously left the future of the Afghan government unresolved in Geneva. Against this backdrop, both the moderate factions amongst the *mujahideen* and the Najibullah regime sought a diplomatic alternative and in Paul Bucherer, they found an individual who spared no effort to establish the necessary contacts to the Swiss authorities and to bring the conflict parties face to face in dialogue. In fact, Bucherer's role is all the more extraordinary, considering that he was both an individual and a non-state actor, yet that his actions had far-reaching consequences at an inter-state level. Ultimately, Switzerland proved acceptable to both sides, because of its proven record of neutrality and good offices in Afghanistan, as well as due to the fact that despite the 1986 UN referendum, it had not become a member of the UN.

The UN, on the other hand, initially appeared to condone the FDFA's mediatory mandate in Afghanistan. However, there never developed a close cooperation between the two and neither did it appear as though – at any point in time – the UN appreciated the merits of Switzerland's policy of Neutrality and Solidarity. Throughout the period of 1991 and early 1992, Klaus Jacobi, Paul Bucherer and Ulrich Lehner had made multiple attempts to secure the consent of the UN and of the former Cold War superpowers for their activities in Afghanistan, yet it did not appear as though – at any point in time – these actors acknowledged an element of compatibility between the Swiss and the UN engagement. Asked about this in a recent conversation with the present author, Ulrich Lehner cautioned against "drawing the link" between Switzerland's restrained approach to the UN in the Afghan context on one hand and its twin dilemmas of Neutrality and Solidarity on the other. According to Lehner, the FDFA's involvement in Afghanistan necessarily involved securing the consent of all those involved as a matter of procedure.

This assessment is accurate in that it conforms with the mediation criteria set out by former Secretary of State Raymond Probst in 1958. However, given the historical trajectory of the concept of Neutrality and Solidarity, as well as Switzerland's repeated attempts to secure the approval and cooperation of the UN in the Afghan context between 1990 and 1992, it appears not to have been purely a matter of protocol. That would have been an astonishing coincidence. Rather, it also appears to have been a systemic constraint on small-state diplomacy and ultimately the consequence of a foreign policy designed to overcome the threat of diplomatic isolation inherent in permanent neutrality. It could be said that the UN referendum of 1986 was evidence of the fact that the FDFA was aware of the underlying imperative for change, both in light of its changing international environment and in light of the fact that the policy of Neutrality and Solidarity had yet to achieve its desired effect. This being said, the fact that the referendum failed, attested both to the importance of public opinion in Swiss foreign policy-making, as well as to the underlying domestic resistance to major foreign policy change.

FDFA documents, publicly available at the *Fondation Jean Monnet* in Lausanne, show that despite the failure of the 1986 UN referendum and concurrent to the FDFA's involvement in Afghanistan as a mediator, the Swiss government persisted in mulling over its stance on neutrality. In August of 1991, for instance, Switzerland participated in the UN economic sanctions regime against the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.[1143] What was more, between 1991 and 1992, the FDFA set up an internal task force to review the merits of neutrality in Swiss foreign policy altogether. Some of its members, including Marianne von Grünigen, Pierre du Bois and Klaus Jacobi, have also featured in the present thesis and according to their report dated March of 1992:

> The military threat in Europe has decreased considerably. Other forms of external threats on the other hand, are coming to the fore. Neutrality provides none or almost

[1143] Yves Beigbeder, 'La Neutralité Suisse en Question: Isolement ou Solidarité Internationale,' *Revue Belge de Droit International* 1(1991), 37.

> no protection against these. Instead, they demand collective action in show of solidarity at a European and often even at a global level.[1144]

In other words, despite the failed 1986 UN referendum, it appears as though during the early 1990s, internal discussions within the FDFA continued to revolve around the same themes as they had done at the FPD, the FDFA's predecessor organization, during the late 1940s and the early 1950s. They were questions of change versus continuity and neutrality versus solidarity. As during the early post-war period, during the early post-Cold War period, the Swiss government was aware of the need to adapt its foreign policy to its changing international environment. Yet it feared doing so in light of prevailing public opinion in staunch favour of strict neutrality. Hence, on both occasions, as well as in the case of Afghanistan, the authorities appeared to settle for solidarity explicitly whilst retaining the core tenets of neutrality and failing to address the underlying compatibility issues between them.

Some have referred to these issues as tensions, others have argued that they are in conflict.[1145] In reality, however, there simply existed a conceptual gap between Neutrality and Solidarity, one that remained unabridged throughout the Cold War and the early post-Cold War period. The case of Switzerland's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992 reveals the implications of this conceptual gap in practice. In essence, despite being aware of their weaknesses, the Swiss authorities retained the same tried and tested methods of foreign policy that they had originally embraced during the early Cold War period. As a result, in Afghanistan, Switzerland ultimately came into institutional competition with the UN. What was more, ultimately the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Cold War international order once again reminded the Swiss that as a

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[1144] Studiengruppe zu Fragen der schweizerischen Neutralität, 'Schweizerische Neutralität auf dem Prüfstand – Schweizerische Aussenpolitik zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel,' March 1992, PDB 1/12/22, *Fondation Jean Monnet* (FJM-CH), Lausanne, Switzerland, author's translation from, "Die militärische Bedrohung in Europa hat deutlich abgenommen. Andere Formen der äusseren Gefährdung treten dagegen stärker in den Vordergrund. Gegen sie bietet Neutralität kaum oder keinen Schutz. Sie verlangen vielmehr gemeinsames, solidarisches Handeln auf europäischer und oft sogar weltweiter Ebene."
[1145] Ibid., Beigbeder, 'La Neutralité Suisse en Question,' 36.

permanent neutral, they were in no way aloof but in fact incredibly dependent on their international environment, especially at this critical moment of systemic change.

# Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis will revisit the core *problématiques*, the main arguments and the principal findings of the present research project. It will ask, did all this matter? Were there lessons to be learned from Switzerland's engagement in Afghanistan? And if yes, what were they? How do they contribute to the current state of the literature and what gaps do they leave open for further research? The research question behind this thesis was the following: *how did Swiss foreign policy towards Afghanistan evolve between 1979 and 1992 and what does this tell us about Switzerland's role as a small neutral state at the end of the Cold War?* At the core, it is a question about change versus continuity in foreign policy against the backdrop of systemic constraints, but also in view of occasional displays of remarkable agency on the part of individuals. Finally, it has been a question about change in perception. What became clear to the Swiss by 1992 that had been unclear back in 1979, both with regards to Switzerland's engagement in Afghanistan and with regards to its overall role in the international system? How was foreign policy made during this period and did any of it change?

This thesis has argued that, between 1979 and 1992, the Swiss government drew on a variety of foreign policy tools and tactics in Afghanistan, ranging from humanitarianism to protective powers, to personal contacts and ultimately to mediation. The purpose of this thesis has not been to judge the success or failure of these specific tools in one instance, but rather to evaluate their significance in Switzerland's pursuit of defining a role for itself as a small, neutral state in a changing international environment. A sense of concern for this role remained a constant preoccupation for the Swiss . This concern stemmed from two dilemmas inherent in Swiss foreign policy since the early Cold War period. The first was the threat of diplomatic isolation that came with being a permanent neutral outside of the UN. Chapter one shows that especially Switzerland's decision not to join the UN in 1946 was crucial in this respect and as Ulrich Lehner has commented in recent conversation with the present author, this mattered particularly because Switzerland was also a small state and therefore

much less able to enforce its interests unilaterally or even bilaterally.[1146] The second dilemma was that Switzerland's chosen strategy to counter the threat of diplomatic isolation – outlined in the 1947 policy of Neutrality and Solidarity as well as in the 1954 Bindschedler Doctrine – did not appear to work. As discussed, the problem with these approaches was that opting to provide good offices only when asked to do so and opting to join only apolitical multilateral organizations, effectively demonstrated only selective solidarity with – and participation in – the international community.

This thesis has argued that over the course of the 1980s, the Swiss authorities began to see their involvement in Afghanistan as another opportunity to tackle these dilemmas. Ultimately, however, the manner of their growing involvement had the effect of highlighting, rather than rectifying them. In other words, despite employing a variety of foreign policy tools in the case of Afghanistan, this case study has shown that the Swiss ultimately chose continuity over change in the role that they aspired to play as a small neutral at the end of the Cold War. In 1986, the Swiss public declined to join the UN in a nation-wide referendum, giving precedence to neutrality as a defining factor of national identity over solidarity with the international community. Yet while public opinion on change versus continuity with regards to Neutrality and Solidarity appeared to be decisively in favour of continuity, the same was not the case for the FDFA. What was more, the case of Switzerland's good offices in Afghanistan has shown that the 1947 policy of Neutrality and Solidarity as well as the provision of good offices alongside the UN not only failed to legitimize Swiss neutrality in the eyes of UN officials, but ultimately brought the Swiss government into institutional competition with the UN.

This is not to say that Switzerland's involvement in Afghanistan added new complexities to the understanding of Swiss neutrality. Rather, the case of Switzerland's good offices in Afghanistan actually showed the need for change in the relationship between neutrality and solidarity. Performing good offices to demonstrate solidarity with the international community had arguably

[1146] Uhlrich Lehner, interviewed by Liliane Stadler, 22 May 2020.

not sufficed to universally justify Switzerland's strict interpretation of neutrality abroad. To make this argument, this thesis has traced three interlacing strands of narrative: A Swiss narrative, based on these dilemmas, an Afghan narrative – describing the domestic, the transnational and the systemic impacts of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan – and a UN narrative, which essentially reflected both of Switzerland's two fundamental Cold War foreign policy dilemmas.

Chapter one primarily reveals how Switzerland struggled to define a role for itself both outside of the UN and outside of the bipolar Cold War alliance structure during the early post-war period. Yet it also shows that between 1947 and 1979, the Swiss gradually established a reputation for themselves as neutral providers of good offices. During the *détente* period and in the context of the CSCE, Switzerland also began to enter the multilateral domain, through memberships of various technical intergovernmental organizations. The CSCE was particularly important in this respect, because together with other neutral and non-aligned states – collectively known as the N+N – Switzerland was able to provide good offices in a multilateral context for the first time and played a prominent role as a mediator in negotiating the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, described in chapter two, shook the foundations of *détente* especially between the Cold War superpowers and while Thomas Fischer has shown that the N+N continued to play an important role in keeping the CSCE alive over the course of the 1980s, the CSCE did not have the diplomatic tools to address the Afghan crisis. Strangely, as chapter three demonstrates, the Swiss originally saw no role for themselves in the Afghan crisis either and there was no concerted effort amongst the neutrals or the N+N to mediate a diplomatic solution to the crisis themselves. This was despite the fact that the Swiss government, parliament, as well as the FDFA and the Swiss military were initially concerned that the invasion might set a precedent for future invasions of neutral and non-aligned states.

Chapter three also reveals that this fear slowly began to abate as the Soviet Union became bogged down in a fierce stalemate against the Afghan resistance during the early 1980s. As a consequence of this, there also developed an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in the region, involving not only Afghanistan itself, but neighbouring Iran and especially Pakistan. As chapter four demonstrates, this was how Switzerland became involved in the Afghan crisis – as a provider of humanitarian aid, not as a provider of good offices. There was in fact no overarching plan or strategy for Switzerland's good offices in Afghanistan. The Swiss government dispatched both material and financial support for Afghan refugees through a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, most notably including the UNHCR and the ICRC. Both organizations operated outside of Afghanistan at the time – the UNHCR because of its mandate to work only with refugees who had by definition fled their homeland and the ICRC because it had been expelled from Afghan territory in 1980.

Yet in 1982 – in an effort to return to Afghanistan with the consent of the Afghan authorities – the ICRC approached the Swiss government with a request for a protective power mandate on behalf of a small number of Soviet prisoners of war, captured by the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. In agreeing to this arrangement, the Swiss transitioned from the role of a provider of humanitarian aid to one of also providing good offices in Afghanistan. At the same time, however, they also unwittingly agreed to an arrangement that lacked a sound legal basis and as both chapters five and six have demonstrated, this led to a public relations fiasco that embroiled not only the Swiss and the ICRC, but the Soviet Union and the *mujahideen* as well. The Swiss and the international press lamented that only POWs who were willing to be repatriated to the Soviet Union after a two-year internment period were included in the transfer scheme to Switzerland yet that many POWs had reason to fear for their safety at home. What was more, the *mujahideen* began to lament that throughout the early and the mid-1980s, the ICRC continued to be denied access to Afghanistan for the purpose of dispensing humanitarian aid and visiting political prisoners. The Soviet Union meanwhile, relentlessly criticized the internment conditions of the Soviet POWs in Switzerland. After 1984, the *mujahideen* then refused to dispatch any more of their prisoners to Switzerland and despite Swiss efforts to

improve the arrangements of the transfer and the internment, the ICRC was ultimately granted permission to return to Afghanistan, only because most Soviet POWs decided to repatriate to the Soviet Union. A second reason may have been that the Soviet Union itself began to experience a number of significant domestic changes with the 1985 accession of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the CPSU.

Nevertheless, the episode was an important one for Switzerland's future involvement in Afghanistan, because while the *mujahideen* found many faults in the transfer operation itself, they attributed these chiefly to the Afghan authorities, to the ICRC and to the Soviet Union. What was more, as chapter six argues, the moderate *mujahideen* came to appreciate Switzerland's involvement for its strict neutrality. The same could not be said for the UN, which had begun to mediate between the Afghan regime and the Pakistani government in 1982, but which consistently excluded the *mujahideen* throughout the duration of the Geneva Talks, which lasted until 1988. Chapter 7 also argues that at their inception, the Geneva Talks already contained an element of institutional competition over the provision of good offices between the UN and the FDFA. In fact, between 1980 and 1982, a number of intergovernmental organizations, including the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Community, had approached the Swiss government to hold diplomatic talks over Afghanistan.

The reason why these talks eventually went ahead through the UN was that the Soviet Politburo implicitly gave its consent at a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in New Delhi in 1981. It took a number of leadership changes, a drawn-out military stalemate with the *mujahideen* and a gradual turn in public opinion against the war, however, for the Soviet Union to seriously support the Geneva Talks. Chapter seven describes how under Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union finally began to embrace the need to withdraw from Afghanistan and to support the Geneva Talks as a means to do so. Concurrently, in 1986, the Soviet Union announced the symbolic withdrawal of 7'000 troops, replaced the Afghan president, Babrak Karmal, with former KHAD director Mohammad Najibullah

and opened direct diplomatic channels to the Pakistani government of Mohammad Zia ul-Haq. At the same time, in parallel developments, Swiss voters went to the polls over the proposal of UN membership in March of 1986 and issued a decisive rejection.

This eventually made the Swiss more credible in the eyes of the Afghan conflict parties, where their neutrality was concerned, but more importantly, it initially served as a reminder to the FDFA that the public could play an important role in foreign policy making. At a deeper level, the referendum was also an important manifestation of the FDFA's awareness of the need to adapt its foreign policy to its changing international environment. Meanwhile, as chapter eight argues, the UN was similarly forced to recognize the fact that it too was largely dependent on its international environment. In the context of Afghanistan, for instance, the Soviet Union and the United States increasingly began to bypass the UN as a venue for discussion and despite ultimately agreeing to guarantee the Geneva Accords in 1988, neither power agreed to stop supplying arms to their respective clients.

In other words, the Geneva Accords mandated the end of the Soviet Union's military presence in Afghanistan. However, they solved neither the root causes of the Afghan civil war, which had been underway prior to the Soviet invasion of 1979, nor the transnational dimension of the war, characterized by the continued inflow of arms and the outflow of refugees. Against this backdrop, chapter nine shows that both the Afghan regime and moderate elements amongst the *mujahideen* turned first to Paul Bucherer – to whom both sides had maintained personal contacts – and through him to the FDFA, for neutral mediation. What it also shows, however, is that with Switzerland's mandate to mediate in Afghanistan, institutional competition with the UN began to resurface. After all, having been forced to recognize the failure of the Geneva Accords, the General Assembly gave Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar a new mandate in 1989 to mediate in the domestic context of the Afghan war.

Repeated attempts on behalf of the FDFA to secure the endorsement for its involvement from the UN were met with only lukewarm enthusiasm, whilst it became increasingly apparent that in fact, the two organizations were pursuing different strategies in Afghanistan. The UN pursued a comprehensive *Loya Jirga* to secure a transitional arrangement to replace the Najibullah regime and the Swiss pursued the establishment of face-to-face discussion amongst a gradually broadening circle of participants. In doing so, both claimed to pursue a so-called "Intra-Afghan Dialogue." In fact, Paul Bucherer as well as Klaus Jacobi and Ulrich Lehner of the FDFA had gone to considerable lengths to subordinate Switzerland's efforts to those of the UN in public. In the winter of 1991 and the spring of 1992, however, it became clear not only that their respective efforts were not coordinated but that it would become difficult to find a diplomatic solution at all. In August of 1991, the Soviet Union experienced a military coup. In December of 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the CPSU and the Soviet Union collapsed. On 1 January 1992, both the former Soviet Union and the United States halted their arms supplies to the Najibullah regime and to the *mujahideen* respectively. Meanwhile, renewed hostilities broke out amongst the *mujahideen* themselves and on 18 March, Najibullah announced his resignation.

It might appear tempting to conclude from this, that the FDFA had failed in Afghanistan. Thomas Fischer argues this in his 2003 contribution to an edited volume on Swiss Cold War foreign policy.[1147] Yet that would not explain a number of questions that this thesis has raised about the broader significance of Switzerland's engagement in the conflict. It is true that the FDFA was originally slow to identify the Afghan crisis as an opportunity in 1979. They also struggled to find their role in a changing international system after the collapse of *détente*. However, this thesis shows not only that crisis management is difficult when there are no procedures in place. It also shows that throughout the 1980s, the Swiss actually crafted a number of successive opportunities for themselves in Afghanistan by deploying a wide variety of foreign policy tools, including humanitarian aid, good

[1147] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 74.

offices and personal contacts. The principal issue was not that these tools were insufficient to resolve the Afghan crisis. This was self-evident for all those involved. The principal issue was that time and again and especially in Afghanistan, especially at the end of the Cold War, the Swiss were relying on a foreign policy strategy that was both inherently problematic and insufficiently adapted to the changes that rocked the international system over the course of this period. In this sense, Switzerland's foreign policy towards the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992 was reflective of the broader issues underlying Swiss foreign policy at the time; principally the fact that there continued to exist a conceptual gap between Neutrality and Solidarity.

In terms of the literature to which this thesis is addressed, the present analysis has also revealed some of the greater complexities of how the Cold War international system actually worked and how small states, especially neutrals such as Switzerland operated within the system. In this respect, it builds on the work of Sandra Bott, Jussi Hanhimäki, Janick Marina Schaufenbuehl and Marco Wyss, who have argued that, "The involvement of neutrals in general, and of Switzerland in particular, in the Cold War in the Third World, is largely misconceived."[1148] The thesis reveals that in Afghanistan, neutrality gave Switzerland a series of opportunities for manoeuvre and good offices, but that it ultimately constrained Swiss diplomacy at the highest levels, especially in relationship to the UN. It has also shown that whilst the FDFA and the Swiss government increasingly became aware of this issue over the course of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the Swiss public did not. This much became clear during the 1986 referendum on UN membership.

Thomas Fischer and Daniel Möckli have both argued convincingly that over the course of the Cold War, the Swiss government went to "great lengths to emphasize that its neutrality did not mean indifference and indeed could be of service to the polarized international community."[1149] Fischer

[1148] Sandra Bott et al., 'Le rôle international de la Suisse dans la Guerre froide globale,' 5, author's translation from, "L'implication des pays neutres en général, et de la Suisse en particulier, dans la Guerre froide au tiers-monde est encore largement méconnue."
[1149] Fischer and Möckli, 'The Limits of Compensation,' 23.

also develops the claim that, "The argument that permanent neutrality predestined Switzerland to act successfully as an intermediary in conflicts where the UN would be paralyzed and great power interests would be at stake proves to be undeniably unfounded."[1150] Where the literature has thus far given no definitive answer to the question of why that is the case, this thesis has shown that mediation tends to be especially difficult where conflicts have deep historic roots, where conflict parties are themselves plagued by factional in-fighting and where they have transnational support networks. It has shown that mediation becomes even more difficult at times when the international system is itself in flux.

More broadly, this thesis has studied the relationship between systemic factors, inter-state relations and non-state actors such as individuals, NGOs and armed resistance groups. It has also studied the importance of domestic factors, both in relation to how Swiss foreign policy is made and in the origins of the Afghan civil war during the final decades of the Cold War. A particularly important relationship has also been that between the Swiss government and the ICRC. Relying principally on the work of Timothy Nunan, chapter four has discussed for instance, how the relationship between the Swiss government and the ICRC is comparatively different from the relationship between the French government and MSF and between the Swedish government and the SCA. It has been suggested that there exists a certain degree of mutual dependency between the ICRC and the Swiss government, but the present case has shown that they actually operate institutionally independent of each other. Particularly the case of the Soviet prisoner exchange has shown that whilst they initially complemented each other well on the logistical and the operational level, each organization was eventually forced to decide for itself whether or not to comply with the Soviet demand to repatriate each prisoner. On this point, the Swiss government clearly declined, whilst risking to derail the future of the arrangement.

[1150] Fischer, 'From Good Offices to an Active Policy of Peace,' 96.

Finally, in her forthcoming contribution to Peter Ruggenthaler's and Aryo Makko's edited volume on neutral states during the Cold War, Olga Pavlenko has suggested that, "We can see that there was a clear surge in the foreign policy activities of Switzerland against the background of the system-wide collapse that covered not only the USSR, but also the entire Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations."[1151] This thesis, however, has shown that the FDFA also became aware of the need to overcome the conceptual gap between Neutrality and Solidarity in order to reflect on its long-term foreign policy strategy. Over the course of the period under investigation here, it became irrefutably clear that Switzerland's foreign policy constellation of Neutrality and Solidarity was incoherent and that as a consequence, it was unlikely to yield consistent results. The same period also experienced a fundamental shift away from a bipolar system to one in which multilateralism was to become even more important for small states such as Switzerland.

Further research might be able to explore the roles of small neutral states such as Switzerland in multilateral organizations more broadly, to compare the neutrals to each other in organizations such as the UN and to evaluate their ability to work together in times of crisis. As the case of the Afghan crisis has shown, the neutrals were unable to apply their working relationship at the CSCE to external crises at the time. The archival records consulted for this thesis do not indicate any cooperative ventures amongst the neutrals concerning Afghanistan. Neither do they give reason to suspect a parallel engagement on par with that of the Swiss on behalf of any of the other neutrals represented at the CSCE. Hanhimäki has argued that the neutrals and their non-aligned partners "ultimately never produced a coherent alternative that would have challenged the perception of an essentially bipolar world order" during the Cold War.[1152] It is equally unlikely that they would have done so during the immediate post-Cold War period. This being said, if anything, this thesis has shown that throughout both the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period, small neutrals such as Switzerland

[1151] Olga Pavlenko, 'The Soviet Union and Neutral Switzerland,' 102.
[1152] Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Neutrality and Non-Alignment,' https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4218868.

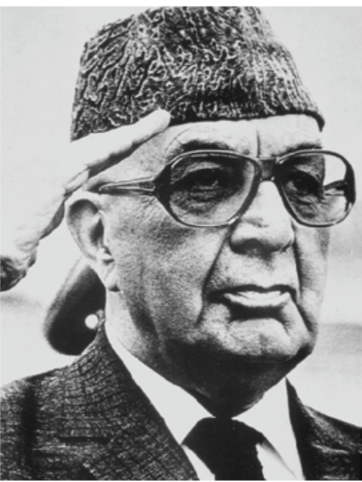
persistently sought to play a role in the international system and it thereby throws a different light on Schaufenbuehl, Bott, Hanhimäki and Wyss' assumption that small, neutral states such as Switzerland were 'in the Cold War but not of it.'[1153]

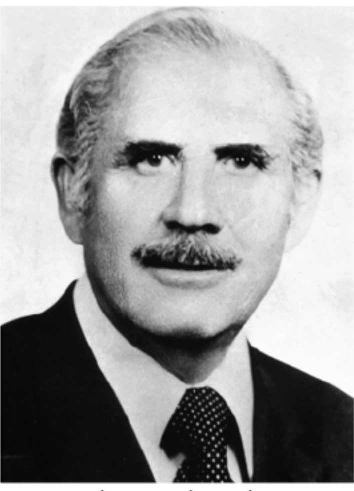
[1153] Schaufenbuehl et al., 'Non-Alignment, the Third Force, or Fence-Sitting,' 901-902.

# Appendix: Photographs of Individual Protagonists

## *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection

Zaher Shah, approx. 1971.


Mohammad Daoud Khan, 1973.


Nur Mohammad Taraki, 1978.

Hafizullah Amin, 1978.

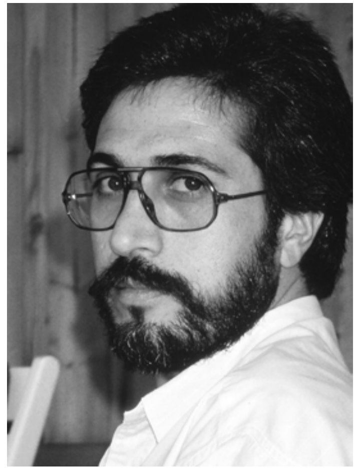
Babrak Karmal, 1980.

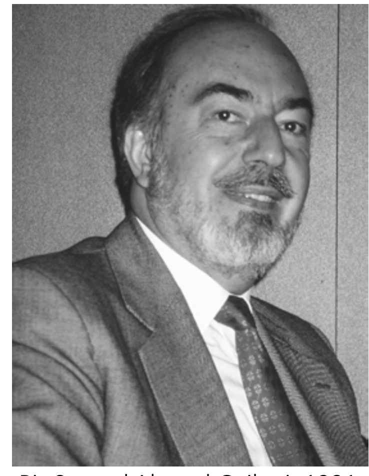
Mohammad Najibullah, 1991.

Abdul Wakil, 1990.

M.D. Shabaz, 1991.

Jalil Shams, 1991.


Sayyed Pir Ishaq Gailani, 1991.


Pir Sayyed Ahmad Gailani, 1991.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, 1989.

Ahmad Shah Massoud, 1997.

Sebghetullah Mujaddidi, 1991.

Mawlawi Yunus Khales, 1989.

Paul Bucherer, 1990.

Ulrich Lehner, 1991.

Peter Sutter, 1991.

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Max Petitpierre.[1154]

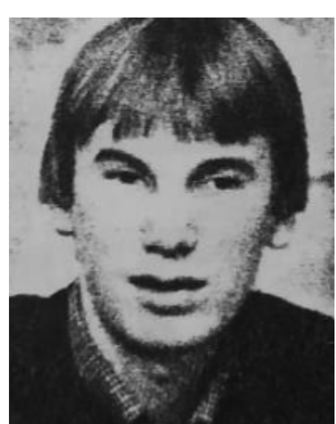
Raymond Probst.[1155]

Edouard Brunner.[1156]

Pierre Aubert.[1157]

## Swiss Federal Archives (CH-BAR)

Yuri Povaritsin, approx. 1982.[1158]


Youri Washenko, 1983.[1159]

[1154] Diplomatische Dokumente der Schweiz (DODIS), 'Max Petitpierre,' accessed 18 June 2020, https://dodis.ch/P5.
[1155] DODIS, 'Raymond Probst,' accessed 18 June 2020, https://dodis.ch/P11.
[1156] DODIS, 'Edouard Brunner,' accessed 18 June 2020, https://dodis.ch/P19047.
[1157] DODIS, 'Pierre Aubert,' accessed 18 June 2020, https://dodis.ch/P23640.
[1158] *24 heures*, 'Demande d'asile à Genève,' 27 September 1984, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.
[1159] *Schweizer Illustrierte*, '"Die Burschen erwartet Zuhause der Tod!"' (sic), 2 March 1984, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR.

# List of Illustrations

## Maps

**Map 1.** Topographic Map of Afghanistan, 1983. Source: University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' accessed 16 December 2019, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_rel83.jpg. Page 87.

**Map 2.** Afghan Ethnolinguistic Groups, 1972. Source: University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' accessed 16 December 2019, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethno72.jpg. Page 89.

**Map 3.** City Map of Kabul, 1980. Source: University of Texas Libraries, 'Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,' accessed 16 December 2019, http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_cities/kabul_80.jpg. Page 100.

**Map 4.** The Administrative Regions of Pakistan. Source: Human Rights Watch, 'Soiled Hands: The Pakistan Army's Repression of the Punjab Farmers' Movement,' accessed on 20 May 2019, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/pakistan0704/index.htm. Page 132.

**Map 5.** St. Jean, Thorberg and Zugerberg Detention Facilities, Switzerland. Source: Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 'Karten der Schweiz,' accessed 19 July 2020, https://bit.ly/2WIZNVw. Page 167.

**Map 6.** Areas of Regime and *Mujahideen* Control in Afghanistan, May 1989. Source: William B. Wood, 'Long Time Coming: The Repatriation of Afghan Refugees,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 79(1989), 358. Page 197.

## Images

Page 135.

**Image 2.** A boy, fitted with an upper-knee prothesis, doing walking exercises with the help of a Danish ICRC Orthopaedist from the ICRC. Source: *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection. Page 143.

**Image 3.** Soviet POWs in Afghanistan, Povarnitsin on the right. Source: Schweizer Illustrierte, '"Die Burschen erwartet Zuhause der Tod!"' *(sic)*, 2 March 1984, E4280A#2017/355#1059*, CH-BAR. Page 163.

**Image 4.** Internment facilities on the Zugerberg. Source: Loosli *(sic)*, 'Das Militärdetachement auf dem Zugerberg,' *Der Fourier* 45(172), 428. Page 171.

**Image 5.** Diego Cordovez in his discussions with the Afghan delegation to the Geneva Talks, led by Shah Mohammad Dost on 29 August 1985. Source: Diego Cordovez, 'The Slow Thaw,' in *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal*, edited by Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 232. Page 213.

[redacted] Page 235.

**Image 7.** Klaus Jacobi and Paul Bucherer meet President Najibullah on 2 July 1991. Source: *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA. Page 255.

**Image 8.** Klaus Jacobi meets Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Peshawar on 4 July 1991. Source: *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA. Page 258.

**Image 9.** Hotel Bad Schauenburg, 1991. Source: *Bibliotheca Afghanica* Photograph Collection, CH-SBA. Page 260.

## Tables

**Table 1.** Swiss Humanitarian Aid to Refugees in Pakistan (in CHF), 1980 to December 1984. Source: N.a., 'Aide Suisse en Faveur des Refugiés Afghans au Pakistan,' E2023A#1993/129#802*, CH-BAR. Page 147-148.

## Graphs

**Graph 1.** Swiss-Afghan Economic Exchange from 1970 to 1993 (in millions of Swiss Francs, CHF). Source: N.a., 'Relations blatérales Suisse-Afghanistan,' 21 September 1992, E2200.141-03#2000/235#2*, CH-BAR. Page 83.

**Graph 2.** Global Number of Refugees per Host Country, 1983. Source: Susan Goodwillie, 'Refugees in the Developing World: A Challenge to the International Community,' 5 August 1983, E2025A#1993/130#1536*, CH-BAR. Page 144.

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Box 36-38

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