

South Asia

Canada's relations with the countries of the South Asia region were enhanced significantly in 1981, when a number of senior level bilateral visits took place and economic and political consultations were intensified. This focus on Canada's relations with South Asia reflected the continuing importance of the region in terms of global stability and economic development. 1981 was the second year of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, where the Babrak Karmal régime continued to be sustained only by Soviet forces, in the face of heavy resistance by a large majority of the population. Canada continued to support efforts through the United Nations to achieve an acceptable solution to the crisis, which would encompass a Soviet withdrawal and a restoration of freedom to Afghanistan. Canada also contributed to international humanitarian relief for the two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Pakistan's vulnerability in the aftermath of the Soviet move into Afghanistan continued to be a source of concern, while India has shown unease at the danger of the Afghanistan situation leading to increased super-power involvement in South Asia. In addition to Canada's focus on the Afghanistan situation, the over-all peace and security of the South Asia region continues to have implications in terms of Canadian nuclear non-proliferation policy. South Asia continued to face enormous problems of poverty and underdevelopment and remained the largest recipient of Canadian development assistance. The participation of Bangladesh and India in the Cancun North-South Summit was an important indication of South Asia's major involvement in issues related to the North-South dialogue.

Efforts continued in 1981 to achieve a settlement to the Afghan crisis, with the third full scale United Nations General Assembly debate on the situation taking place in November. Again Pakistan, with other Islamic Summit countries, led in promoting a resolution which condemned the invasion of Afghanistan, called for the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops and reaffirmed the right of the Afghan people to self-determination, free from outside interference. Canada lent strong support to the resolution. The General Assembly endorsed the resolution with the highest vote yet (116 in favour, 23 opposed and 12 abstentions).

In addition to its strong stand in the United Nations, Canada, in concert with its allies, continued to condemn in other forums the Soviet invasion and insisted that the prerequisite to a solution of the crisis must be the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Regrettably, in defiance of the overwhelming weight of international opinion, by the end of the year the Soviet Union had increased its troop strength in Afghanistan to over 90,000. The Soviet presence and the Karmal régime, however, continue to be opposed by a vast majority of the Afghan people and the struggle of the resistance fighters against the occupation remains strong. The impact on Pakistan of the Afghan situation became more severe during the year. By the end of 1981 it was estimated that some two million refugees had fled into Pakistan, placing a severe strain on the Pakistan economy and on the fabric of the social structure in Pakistani regions bordering on Afghanistan. Canada's humanitarian concern about this situation was demonstrated through its