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Our Foreign Policy

Sir,

This is with reference to the article “Why India stands marginalised” by Jagat S Mehta (IE March 30).

While one cannot but agree with Mehta’s conclusion that India’s Afghan policy has been faulty and least related to our national interests, some of his assumptions do not seem to be quite correct.

Firstly, it may not be correct to assume that the Soviet intervention was entirely defensive in intent and that India could have helped in assuring the World of the genuineness of the Russian cause. Russian imperialistic designs against Afghanistan date back to the Czarist times and Russia’s present policy is only a continuation of the old. As a matter of fact Russia’s southward march is a result of some geographical compulsions. The east-west lie of the Soviet Union in the extreme north has always been a strategic handicap. Besides having been denied by nature the use of warm waters for navigation, Russia, due to its latitudinal shape, stands deprived of the advantages of the variety in climate and natural resources which are enjoyed by countries shaped longitudinally. Making this point of inequitable distribution of World resources and permanent disadvantages of location, Karl Haushofer, the famous German geo-politician, even suggested the division of the World into four regions, clubbing South America with North America, Africa with Europe, West Asia and the Indian sub-continent with Russia and South East Asia with China – giving each country the advantages of both the north and south locations. The Soviet move into Afghanistan could, therefore, have been under the dictates of geopolitics, while the decision to withdraw was made on having been able to distinguish between what is politically advantageous and what can be supported by the force of arms. Secondly, Mr Mehta seems to give too much credit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for formulating the country’s Afghan policy. We probably ceased to think independently on such matters the day we signed the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union. This explains why we activated our diplomacy only in 1988 after the Soviet Union changed course.

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