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AFGHANISTAN IN 1982: STILL NO SOLUTION

Louis Dupree

> Current joke in Moscow: "Why are we still in Afghanistan?" Answer: "Because we're still looking for the people who invited us in!"

SEVEN OVERLAPPING "R's" describe the patterns in Afghanistan since the April 1978 coup d'etat: revolution, rhetoric, reforms, repressions, refugees, revolts, and Russians. The year 1982 ended with emphasis on repressions, revolts, refugees, and Russians.

The internal struggle for power between the two major leftist parties continued. Parcham (The Banner), favored by the Russians, dominated. A fragmented Khalq (The Masses), its leadership either dead or fled, nursed its wounds. Independent voices in the literati were silenced by the security police, KHAD (*Khidmat-i-Ittlelat-i-Daulat,* literally State Information Service), founded in September 1981 and modeled on the KGB.

The DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) continued to send young Afghans to the USSR for technical training and indoctrination. Many who returned fled to Pakistan with their families. Military police press gangs swept up men of draft age (sometimes over- and underage) from tea houses, schools, bazaars, and even homes in an attempt to maintain a troop level of about 30,000. The pre-1978 coup military successfully maintained a draftee strength of 110,000. The desperate central government tried to draft the tribesmen of Paktya Province, exempt since 1929 because of their support of King Mohammad Nadir during the Saqqaoist War. More than 2,000 tribesmen held a three-day peaceful demonstration (October) in Kabul, and were finally dispersed by police. But the government could not enforce the conscription act in tribal areas.

A public, anti-Soviet demonstration occurred on October 19, when several hundred government factory workers briefly took to the streets in Kabul and shouted "Down with the Russians!" and "Babrak, yes! Russians, no!" A government-sponsored counter-demonstration took place near the U.S. Embassy a few days later. Reportedly, about 3,000 students, teachers, and party members shouted against "American imperialism." And, in October, for the first time, it was confirmed that guerrilla rockets landed inside the Soviet Embassy compound.

The government encouraged all Afghans to join the Party, the National Fatherland Front ("to protect the revolution"), and the urban-oriented Patriotic Militia Forces. The armed Patriotic Militia sometimes turned to banditry, or deserted with their weapons to join the *mujahideen* (freedom fighters).

Afghanistan's economy was greatly affected by increased insecurity in the countryside. Development came to a standstill. However, in May the Soviets completed construction of a road and railway bridge across the Amu Darya to connect Termez with the Afghan river port of Haritan. During the first six months of 1982, trade with the USSR jumped at least 35% over the same period in 1981. Little trade existed between Afghanistan and nations outside the Soviet bloc.

Customs revenue had been one of the main sources of government income in pre-1978 Afghanistan, but in four years customs income shrank about 95%. In spite of this, the DRA continued to issue more money—afghanis 45 million in 1982 compared to afghanis 26 million in 1981. Inflation was rampant, rising to three times the 1981 level, particularly for foodstuffs in urban centers; this is not surprising since an estimated 30% of previously farmed land had fallen out of production. Production of cotton, an important export crop, dropped from 50,000 tons in 1980 to 40,000 tons in 1982. Natural gas exports to the USSR also declined as guerrillas repeatedly blew up parts of the pipelines. Smuggling continued across both sides of the Pak-Afghan border and the Irano-Afghan frontier—not only guns to the *mujahideen,* but Afghan opium, heroin, and marijuana through Pakistan.

The first nationwide congress of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was scheduled for four days in early March. Delegates were to be elected from all 1800 recognized villages in Afghanistan, and meet to elect a 51-member Presidium and approve the Rules of the PDPA.[1] Only those villages along the main roads participated, most reluctantly. Official DRA sources gave three numbers for delegates attending (836, 841, 846) and stated that absentees "had good reasons for not attending." After four months of preparation and propaganda through the government-controlled media, the Congress met for two days (30 hours) on March 14–15. What was to have been a show of unity became an internal struggle between Parcham and Khalq. Violence erupted, not only among the delegates but also among rival factions in the 7th and 8th Afghan Divisions, stationed near Kabul.

Khalq's strength (8,000) is still with the army and civil servants (those that are left), and among the Pushtun and Uzbak ethnic groups. The Russian-backed Parcham (3,000) is strongest among the surviving intellectuals and urban-educated youth who have no tribal or regional loyalties, especially the Dari (Afghan Persian) speakers. The lack of unity in the PDPA is reminiscent of the squabbles among *mujahideen* groups in Peshawar.

Babrak Karmal visited the USSR and East Germany in May and June. Babrak retained his positions as General Secretary of the PDPA and President of the Central Committee but had previously turned over the prime ministership to Sultan Ali Keshtmand, a Parchami Hazara, on June 11, 1981. Rumors spread that Babrak was on the way out. He returned, however, with renewed public announcements of Soviet support.

Babrak also attended the funeral of Leonid I. Brezhnev in November. Many optimists looked for a "liberalization" of Soviet foreign policy and internal programs.[2] Rumors also spread that Yuri V. Andropov, new General Secretary of the Communist Party USSR, had opposed the Afghan adventure, rumors duly reported in Western media. Andropov held private talks with five official mourners: George Bush; Karl Cartens, President of West Germany; President Mohammad Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan; Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India; and Babrak Karmal. General Zia later said he discerned "flexibility" in Andropov's stated position on Afghanistan. But, throughout 1982, the vicious little First Russo-Afghan War (1979–?) ground on.

The War and The Refugees

According to some sources, the Soviets increased their troop level from 100,000 to 110,000 (some estimates go as high as 120,000). Possibly the exchange of units from the 30,000–40,000 man reserves across the border contributed to the revised estimates. The *mujahideen* probably had 90,000 men in the field, scattered throughout the 29 provinces.

Military operations from January through March consisted mainly of aerial attacks by jets and helicopters, followed by ground sweeps. The two-pronged tactics of "rubbleization" of villages from the air, followed by "migratory genocide," were developed by the Soviets in the summer of 1980. Almost three million refugees live in Pakistan (the world's largest refugee population)—plus approximately 500,000 or so in Iran. Pakistan has organized the Afghans in Refugee Tented Villages (RTVs), although many refugees have built their own mud-brick villages on the landscape. There are 282 RTVs in North-West Frontier Province and 60 in Baluchistan.

Pakistan contributed about 45% of the total cost of refugee upkeep, which ran from $1–1.5 million a day. Other organizations involved were: United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 25%; World Food Pro-

gramme, 25%; international and Pakistani volunteer agencies, 5%. The U.S. provides 30% of the UNHCR and 40% of the WFP total budgets, and has also donated an additional $220 million or so for refugee assistance.

Tensions do exist within the camps and between refugees and local populations. In some areas, there is one (or more) refugee for each member of the local population. But Pakistan and the refugees are to be congratulated, for no epidemics have occurred, and in-group and out-group violence has been held to a minimum.

The Afghan population in 1978 numbered about 15.5 million. Refugees (total 3.5 million) and the dead (about 500,000) now total 4 million or so, almost one quarter of the 1978 population. If enough Afghans leave for potentially volatile Pakistan and Iran, the Soviets gain a strategic plus. Then, settlers from the European Soviet Socialist Republics (not from Soviet Central Asia, which would invite trouble) can be transplanted to Afghanistan. In effect, Afghanistan would become the 16th SSR. Unconfirmed reports in Pakistani media indicate that about 30,000 Russian families recently arrived in northern Afghanistan.[3] The process may have already begun.

During 1982, the Soviets destroyed crops and livestock, which will probably cause a food shortage in the winter of 1982–83, drive more refugees into Iran and Pakistan, and squeeze more internal refugees into the urban scene. An estimated 700,000 internal refugees have crowded around Kabul and other cities because of the war.

The *mujahideen* continued their patterns of ambush and retreat, tactics that they have mastered. They dominated the countryside, periodically blocked the main roads, attacked motor convoys, assaulted isolated outposts, and assassinated Party members. Even Soviet troops in Kabul and other urban centers were not immune. In addition, several *mujahideen* leaders in Peshawar agreed to turn Soviet POWs over to the International Red Cross. The POWs were sent to Switzerland for the duration of the war, or for two years, whichever comes first. So far, only about a dozen Soviet soldiers have benefited from this arrangement.

The Soviets initiated a number of offensives that, after initial successes, all ended in Soviet withdrawals. Penetration was always possible, but not pacification. The offensives included the following: the foothills of Farah Province (April); Ghorband Valley north of Kabul (May); Panjsher Valley north of Kabul (April–May; September); Paghman west of Kabul (June; October); Logar Valley south of Kabul (June); Laghman Valley east of Kabul (November). Hit hardest were the main staging areas for *mujahideen* operations inside Kabul, which increased in intensity and ferocity in 1982. Groups of between 40 and 50 guerrillas penetrated Kabul on night raids, and daylight raids became more common toward the end of the year.

The Panjsher spring offensive was the largest combat assault by Soviet troops since World War II, but Panjsher *mujahideen* knew in ad-

vance when the assault would begin, the number of troops to be involved (12,000 Soviet, 4,000 Afghan), and the number of Mi-24 helicopter gunships available for the operation (150 of the total 450-plus in Afghanistan). The intelligence network of the freedom fighters reached high up in the Soviet-Afghan hierarchy. Also, the six or seven freedom fighter radio stations made communications between groups easier.

Another precedent was established. For the first time, other *mujahideen* poured into the valley to help the Panjsheri Tajiks. Groups from the following areas were included: Hazarajat, Anderab, Munjan, Badakhshan, Nuristan, Ghazni, Ningrahar, Kunduz, and as far away as Hilmand, Paktya, and Paktika. Later in the year, a Panjsheri commander, Ahmad Shaw Masood, sent some men to help the Munjani.

Although some weapons have been supplied to the freedom fighters by interested nations, neither the quantity nor the quality have been sufficient to make an impact. President Anwar al-Sadat freely admitted Egypt's role just before his assassination in October 1981. In an American television interview, Sadat stated that the U.S. had purchased old Russian weapons to be shipped to the *mujahideen*. Reports also indicate that Chinese weapons (especially Kalashnikov A-47 assault rifles) have found their way into the hands of freedom fighters. In a State Department briefing on December 22, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, refused to comment on clandestine Western help to the *mujahideen*.[4]

The Soviets, on their part, continued to use the war to test the utility of their training, the performance of their troops, and the effectiveness of their weapons systems. Shortcomings have been found in all three. Lessons have been learned and corrections implemented. But morale of Soviet troops has suffered, for the largely draftee army was not prepared for the stiff Afghan resistance and the continued logistical breakdowns. Soviet casualties are estimated to be at least 15,000, including dead, wounded, and ill (especially with hepatitis). Deaths are estimated between 3,000 and 9,000, depending on which numbers appeal to the individual analyst. Reportedly, many Soviet troops have turned to drugs, mainly *charas* (hashish), to ease fears of combat and boredom. Some have traded weapons and ammunition for the drug.

The defection of two high-ranking KHAD officers in December should contribute greatly to an understanding of what is going on at the upper levels of power in Afghanistan. Both, for example, confirmed the Russian use of "poisonous gas."[5] Lt. Gen. Ghulam Sediq Mirakay, Chief of Intelligence Training at the KHAD Academy, and Brigadier Habibullah Hidayat of the Academy's Pakistan and Iran Branch, have already made some startling statements. They claimed that several Communist countries had armed forces personnel inside Afghanistan: Cuba, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany. They also claimed that Brezhnev had plans to turn Afghanistan into the 16th SSR. Under the scheme, Babrak would hold another Party Congress and have himself

"elected" President. He would then call for more Soviet troops because of the continued "imperialist threat." After that, Babrak would ask the Soviet Union to incorporate Afghanistan into the Soviet Socialist Republic system. But, according to the KHAD generals, even hardline Parchamis could not stomach that, so Brezhnev abandoned the idea—at least temporarily.

Brigadier Hidayat stated that he had sent 20,000 agents to Pakistan and Iran to spread disinformation and stir up trouble [possibly, my Afghan "zero-minus" rule should be applied here—i.e., whenever I read an Afghan statistic, I automatically lop off one zero]. General Mirakay said the Soviets had already established missile sites in the Wakhan Corridor. All South Asia could be targeted from here. Both the defectors will be carefully interrogated and their veracity checked and rechecked. But they are among the more important Afghans who have requested political asylum.

On October 30 an explosion rocked the 2.7 km. Salang Tunnel, which sits astride one of the main Soviet supply routes. Official Afghan sources claimed the accident was caused by a collision between a northbound armored personnel carrier and a southbound petrol tanker. Several guerrilla groups, however, have claimed responsibility. In any event, we know that Soviet troops blocked both ends of the tunnel after the explosion, causing many deaths, mainly from suffocation. Estimates vary, but the usually accepted figure is about 700 Soviets and 400–500 Afghans dead. Finally, unconfirmed reports indicate that *mujahideen* in northern Afghanistan have pulled several hit-and-run raids into the USSR.

The Outside World

Good relations with Pakistan are crucial to the success of *mujahideen* operations inside Afghanistan. In May, the government of Pakistan announced that more than 400 border violations (mainly air) had occurred since the Soviet invasion. Pakistan, however, maintained its cool. The prickly-hedge Afghan frontier has always been a zone of dissidence, and successive governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan (and the British before) have tolerated (to varying degrees) border crossings. After all, more than 230 passes and trails straddle the Afghan-Pakistan border from the Wakhan and Pamir to Baluchistan. In the last six months of 1982, Soviet and Afghan military incursions decreased perceptibly. Some interpret this as a signal that the Soviets are at least ready to enter into preliminary discussions under United Nations auspices, or may encourage the DRA to do so.

In June 1982, Diego Cordovez, U.N. Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, talked in Geneva with Sahabzada Mohammad Yaqub Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, and Shah Mohammad Dost, Foreign Minister of Afghanistan. Cordovez met with each *separately.*

Iran did not participate, but indicated it did not object to Pakistan's presence in Geneva as long as Pakistan did not recognize the DRA.

The Soviets and the DRA have backed away from one of their major original demands for discussions: that Pakistan and Iran recognize the Babrak Karmal regime—an act categorically forbidden in all resolutions passed by international Islamic conferences since the Soviet invasion.

No substantive progress was made at Geneva, but all three participants agreed that Cordovez would initiate a series of round-robin talks (Kabul, Islamabad—and, it is hoped, Tehran) in January 1983. The agenda would include (though not necessarily in the order listed): a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan; the return of the Afghan refugees with honor, and the right to participate in successful reform programs; non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by its neighbors, and vice versa; international guarantees for the above, presumably by the U.S., USSR, and China.

In addition, the talks would be held in secret. Further, the participation by Pakistan would not imply recognition of the Babrak Karmal regime. The shape of any future Afghan government would not be discussed, for this, it was agreed, is an internal affair.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Secretary-General of the U.N. (from 1980–82, Personal Representative of the Secretary-General on Afghanistan and Under Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs), visited Moscow in September, where he discussed Afghanistan. On October 1, in the U.N. General Assembly, Andre Gromyko said that the U.N. initiative was "a move in the right direction." In October 1982, Soviet peace feelers were leaked to friendly "nonaligned" nations, which substantially reported the post-Geneva agenda, with two new provisos: the Afghan people would have "a measure of self-determination"—whatever that means—and any new regime must be "nationalistic" (i.e., not Islamic Fundamentalist), and not hostile to the USSR, Pakistan, or China.

The annual U.N. General Assembly's ritual vote in November continued to condemn the aggression in Afghanistan and call for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. The 1982 resolution pushed for a political settlement. All "parties concerned" were enjoined to reactivate the political negotiations. The vote was 114 for, 21 against, with 13 abstentions.

Two important conferences were held outside Afghanistan. Both gave moral support to the freedom fighters and encouraged all interested nations to provide food, medicines, and money to the refugees. The International Committee of Solidarity with the Afghan Resistance and the Bureau of Internationale Afghanistan, mainly socialist oriented, sponsored the March meeting in Florence, Italy. About 300 delegates from a dozen countries attended the conference, held in conjunction with Afghanistan Day (March 21, the Afghan New Year). Afghanistan Day 1982 was the brainchild of members of the European Parliament: Lord Nicholas Beth-

ell (Conservative-UK); Carlo Ripa di Meana (Socialist-Italy); and Gerard Israel (Gaullist-France). The final communiqué called on all friendly nations to recognize the Islamic Alliance of Afghanistan *Mujahideen* (*Ittehad-i-Mujahideen-Islami*), founded in 1981 by three moderate parties in Peshawar.[6]

Many nations outside the pro-Communist bloc passed Afghanistan Day resolutions, including the U.S. Congress. On March 10, President Reagan signed the resolution, which called for support (unspecified) for the "brave Afghan nation in its fight for freedom," the withdrawal of Soviet troops, and the right of the Afghan people to self-determination. The President also dedicated the March 22 Columbia flight to Afghanistan Day.

The second conference was held in Paris on December 16–20, at which time the Permanent People's Tribunal (formerly the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam and Latin America) condemned the Soviet Union for aggression in Afghanistan, and for violating human rights.

As the year ended, the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate agreed to submit a separate resolution to the Senate floor, sponsored by Paul Tsongas (Mass.) in the Senate. Congressman Don Ritter (Pa.) will sponsor a similar resolution in the House. At the end of the 1982 Lame Duck session of Congress, reportedly 99 of the 100 Senators had agreed to co-sponsor the resolution, which calls on the Executive Branch "to provide the people of Afghanistan, if they so request, with material assistance, as the U.S. considers appropriate, to help them fight effectively for their freedom," and "to pursue a negotiated settlement of the war in Afghanistan, based on the total withdrawal of Soviet troops." The full Senate will consider the resolution in its next session.

Whether the Soviets have sincerely begun to think the unthinkable (i.e., withdraw from Afghanistan under certain conditions) remains for the future. Some specialists have suggested the "Finlandization" of Afghanistan—i.e., that Afghanistan be independent in internal affairs but tie itself to Soviet foreign policy.[7] However, the question is: Will the Afghans themselves accept Finlandization? Or, has the fighting reached the point of non-return? Or, if the Soviets do ultimately withdraw, what will happen as the Afghans try to seek a political identity acceptable to all parties and ethnolinguistic groups? Therefore, is civil war inevitable?

Some parties in Peshawar are known to be hoarding arms for just such a contingency. Or, is it true, as some cynics suggest, that the U.S. and its allies *do not want* a negotiated political settlement, because the little war in Afghanistan is a plus for American military strategy and foreign policy? The Soviets suffer casualties and loss of materiel daily. They have lost—and to continue to lose—prestige and credibility in the Third World, nonaligned, and Islamic nations.

Few thought the *mujahideen* could successfully resist the Soviet military, but, after three years, the vicious little war continues with no light at the end of the tunnel. Outside commitments strain the capability of the

Soviets to raise the troop level necessary (about 500,000) to gain control. The 50-plus divisions along the Sino-Soviet border, the Warsaw Pact divisions, and the troops responsible for internal security probably cannot be shifted.

Therefore, Afghanistan's future depends partly on what happens *outside* the country. The U.N. door for a negotiated settlement remains open. But other questions must be considered. Will interested nations make weapons *available to* (*not* delivered, or physically involved with) the *mujahideen*? Will Pakistan, the basic frontline nation, continue to accept refugees, realizing (as do the Soviets) that many will slip back and forth across the border to fight? Will Iran survive its coming civil war after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the Shatt al-Arab War with Iraq? And how will the Soviets respond to the outcome of these questions?

Two official statements, one from *Pravda* and one from Babrak Karmal in a Moscow interview, undercut the notion that the Russians are ready to extricate themselves from Afghanistan in the near future. Both *Pravda* and Babrak reconfirmed that Soviet troops would not leave Afghanistan until the "bandits" either were defeated or surrendered.

So the First Russo-Afghan War ends its third year in a military stalemate, while a glimmer of hope (real or cosmetic?) looms on the diplomatic horizon. The *mujahideen* receive some outside help but need more effective weaponry. The freedom fighters have begun to cooperate regionally, and communications between groups have improved. Urban guerrilla warfare escalates. In Peshawar, the moderate Islamic Alliance appears to be holding. The first three years passed rapidly, but the next three may witness more violent explosions in the areas surrounding Afghanistan.

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NOTES

1. Complete text can be found in *Afghanistan Newsletter, The Afghanistan Forum* (201 East 71 Street, 2K, N.Y., N.Y. 10021), 10:4, October 1982, pp. 25–37.

2. The reaction to Brezhnev's death by several Afghan *mujahideen* with whom I spoke in November was: "So What? Another Communist dead!"

3. *Free Afghanistan Report,* published by The Committee for a Free Afghanistan, No. 3, August 1982, Washington (1237 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003).

4. Carl Bernstein elaborated in "Arms for Afghanistan," *The New Republic,* July 1981. He listed five nations engaged in the Afghan weapons gambit: the U.S., China, Pakistan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

5. Also see "Chemical-biological warfare in Afghanistan," *Wall Street Journal,* June 7, 1982; and " 'Unequivocol' evidence of Soviet toxin use," *Science,* No. 219, April 9, 1982.

6. The three moderate parties are (in order of conservatism): *Jabha-yi-Nijat-Melli* (National Liberation Front), led by Sibgbratullah Mojadidi, a traditionalist faction whose chief support comes from among Naqsbandi Sufis, plus south and east (Kandahar, Logar) Durrani subtribes, including Popalzai, Karzai, Barakzai; *Harakat-i-Inqilabi Islami* (Islamic Revolutionary Movement), Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, middle-of-the-road modernist-traditionalist, north and southeast support; and the *Islami Melli Mahaz* (National Islamic Front), Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, modernist, Pushtun support in Paktya, Paktika, Ghazni, Wardak. A loose fundamentalist coalition includes: *Hizbi-Islami* (Islamic Party), led by Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, mainly Pushtun; *Hizbi-Islami* (breakaway from Gulbuddin), led by Maulvi Mohammad Yunis Khalis, support from Ningrahar (Jalalabad, Surkhab); *Jamiat Islami Afghanistan* (Islamic Society of Afghanistan), Professor Burhanuddin Rabani, moderate fundamentalist, Tajik and Uzbak in north and northeast; *Itehad-i-Islam-i-Baray-Azadi-Afghanistan* (Islamic Front to Liberate Afghanistan), Professor Abdul Rasul Saif, traditionalist; and several splinter groups—Maulana Mohammad Mir, split from National Liberation Front; Maulvi Nasrullah Mansur and Maulvi Mohzen, both split from Islamic Revolutionary Movement.

7. Selig S. Harrison, "Rough plan emerging for Afghan peace," *New York Times,* July 13, 1982; Selig S. Harrison, "Pakistan's role in Kabul," *New York Times,* December 6, 1982; and Jagat S. Mehta, "Afghanistan: A Neutral Solution," *Foreign Policy*, No. 47 (Summer 1982), pp. 139–153. For another view, see Zalmay Khalilzad, "Abandoning Afghan resistance solves nothing," *New York Times,* December 16, 1982.