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ODD ARNE WESTAD

Prelude to Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978-1979

THE SOVIET INVASION of Afghanistan, which began on Christmas Eve 1979, dramatically intensified the cold war and, in the early 1980s, became a symbol of international tension. The war that followed destroyed many Afghan provinces, and caused 50,000 Soviet and over 1.2 million Afghan casualties. Ultimately, it has been argued, the effects of the war undermined the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) and contributed to the collapse of the Soviet state.[1]

We already know much about the conduct of the war and the terrible consequences for a generation of youth in both countries.[2] Until recently, however, we have known less about the events which led to the invasion. Basing their views primarily on evidence from party defectors, some scholars trace the invasion to the turmoil in the Afghan Communist party – the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA);[3] others have analysed the stages of the Soviet

I am grateful to Ilya Gaiduk and Maxim Korobochkin for their assistance in locating materials in Moscow, and to Tatiana Teliukova for her assistance in Oslo. My thanks also to the head of the State Archives Service of the Russian Federation, Professor Rudolf G. Pikhoia, and to the staff of the *Tsentr khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii* [Centre for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation] in Moscow for their help during my research; and to Fred Halliday, Michael Hunt, and Geir Lundestad for their comments on early drafts.

1 For the international effects of the Afghan intervention, see Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC, 1985), pp. 938-65; for the casualty figures, see Guy Arnold, *Wars in the Third World since 1945* (London, 1991), pp. 131-2; for a view of how the Afghan war influenced the Soviet collapse, see Anthony Arnold, *The Fateful Pebble: Afghanistan's Role in the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Novato, 1993).

2 Some of the best books on these aspects of the Afghan war are Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1988); David Gai and Vladimir Snegirev, *Vtorzhenie: Neizvestnye stranitsy neobiavlennoi voiny* [Invasion: Unknown Pages of an Undeclared War] (Moscow, 1991); Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal* (Durham, NC, 1991); Swetlana Alexijewitsch, *Zinkjungen: Afghanistan und die Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992); British Refugee Council, *The Afghan Tragedy* (London, 1988). For an overview, see Odd Arne Westad, 'Afghanistan: Perspectives on the Soviet War', *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, xx (1989), 281-93. Good general works are Henry Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*, 2nd ed. (Durham, NC, 1985); Anthony Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964-91*, 3rd ed. (London, 1992).

3 Fred Halliday, 'Revolution in Afghanistan', *New Left Review*, no. 112 (1978), pp. 23-44, 'A Revolution Consumes Itself', *Nation*, no. 229 (1979), pp. 492-4, 'War and Revolution in Afghanistan', *New Left Review*, no. 119 (1980), pp. 20-41; Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-*

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military buildup.[1] But all of their accounts are flawed by the lack of primary sources, and tell us little about Soviet-Afghan relations.

With the opening of the Moscow archives and the fall of the Najibullah regime in 1992, scholars can now draw not only on testimony from the surviving Soviet and Afghan leaders, but also on the records of the Soviet mission at Kabul.[2] This article attempts, by using newly available evidence, to explain the role in the events leading up to the Soviet invasion in 1979 of the Soviets' relationship with their Afghan clients.[3]

After the PDPA coup in April 1978, in which the Soviets were only involved after the event, relations quickly soured between the two: most Soviet attempts to influence the PDPA failed. The benefit to the Afghans was short-lived. While the Iranian revolution in the winter of 1978–9 led the Soviets to increase their military commitment to the new regime, they also stepped up their diplomatic and covert attempts to replace the faction in power in the PDPA by one more manageable. After repeatedly failing, the ageing Soviet leaders decided late in the autumn of 1979 to use force to gain control of the regime.

The Soviet Union, and Russia before and after it, has played for several centuries an important role in Afghanistan's domestic and

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Party Communism (Stanford, CA, 1983); Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Afghan Syndrome: How to Live with Soviet Power* (London, 1982), esp. pp. 30–41; Beverley Male, *Revolutionary Afghanistan: A Reappraisal* (London, 1982).

1 A thorough survey is in Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War* (3 vols; Boulder, CO, 1990–1), I: *The Afghan and Falklands Conflicts*, pp. 3–237.

2 This article is in part based on the archives of the International Department (M[ezhdunarodnyi] o[tdel]) of the Central Committee of the CPSU. These archives are now part of the Ts[entr] kh[raneniia] s[ovremennoi] do[kumentatsii] [Centre for the Preservation of Contemporary Documentation], which has taken over all CPSU Central Committee [CPSU CC] materials dating after 1953. The International Department archives is a large collection of materials important to our understanding of Soviet foreign-policy history – among them embassy reports, documents created for the Politburo or the party secretariat, intelligence summaries, and records of conversations with foreign leaders. A small portion of this material – documents which the Politburo or the heads of the MO wanted to have available for reference purposes – is held in so-called 'special files', most of which is still unavailable to scholars. For the significance of the International Department, see Jan S. Adams, 'Incremental Activism in Soviet Third World Policy: The Role of the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee', *Slavic Review*, xlviii (1989), 614–30.

3 There is still not enough archival evidence to chart the Politburo decision-making process on the Afghan invasion in the last two months of 1979. Most of the documents dealing with the decision are held either in the TsKhSD 'special files' or in the Presidential Archives, neither of which have so far been opened for research. The Soviet politicians and high officials from the late 1970s who are still alive all deny having taken part in making the decision. Puzanov, Tabeev, Kapitsa, and Ponomarev all claim that they were not even informed of the invasion in advance. Our knowledge of this issue perhaps reflects both the Soviet decision-making process of the late 1970s and how large the Afghan failure looms in today's Russian society.

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foreign affairs. Traditionally, Afghan rulers have tried to balance Russian influence with that of the other great powers – in the twentieth century first Great Britain, then, after the Second World War, the United States. Muhammad Daoud, who came to power in a palace coup in 1973, was no exception; as his regime became more authoritarian, Daoud sought support against his rivals from both Washington and Moscow.[1]

The Soviet ambassador at Kabul between 1972 and 1979, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Puzanov, was as surprised by the successful PDPA coup against Daoud in April 1978 as were the other diplomats posted there.[2] In his first comprehensive report to Moscow, he gave only a guarded welcome to the new regime. Its leaders – Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin – were too fond of ultra-left rhetoric, though they did represent the interests of the 'labouring masses' against a regime which had become increasingly bourgeois. Perhaps more important to Puzanov than the new government's ideology, it would likely be 'more sympathetic towards the Soviet Union, further consolidating and strengthening our position in Afghanistan'. The PDPA seemed to have the whole country under its control, and had 'taken measures' against Daoud's supporters.[3]

The main handicap to the new regime, according to Puzanov, would be the endless faction-fighting within the PDPA itself. The two main factions of the party – the *Khalq* and the *Parcham* – were more like two separate parties, their leaders divided by years of mutual suspicion and animosity. The 'revolution' had not eliminated these divisions, as the most powerful members of the new regime, Taraki and Amin, belonged to *Khalq*. Although Puzanov promised Moscow that he would at once 'take steps to overcome the differences in the Afghan leadership',[4] his efforts did not lead to harmony. They led to

1 For the Daoud regime, see Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination*, pp. 52-72.

2 Puzanov was quite senior in the Soviet diplomatic establishment. He had had several ambassadorial postings before coming to Kabul, and was a member of the CPSU Central Committee. For the American reaction to the coup, see Harold H. Saunders to Cyrus R. Vance, 'Briefing Memorandum: The Coup in Afghanistan', 27 Apr. 1978, National Security Archives (comp.), *Afghanistan: The Making of US Policy, 1973-1990* (Alexandria, VA, 1990), microfiche. Saunders was the asst. sec. for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in the US state department. For general Soviet policies, see Steven R. David, 'Soviet Involvement in Third World Coups', *International Security*, xi (1986), 3-36.

3 Puzanov to MO, 5 May 1978, 'Politpismo: O vnutripoliticheskom poloshenii v DRA' [On the Domestic Political Situation in the DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan)], f[ond] 5, o[pis] 75, d[elo] 1179, pp. 2-6, 16. Most of Puzanov's reports went both to the foreign ministry and to the International Department of the party. A *politpismo* is the periodical political report which Soviet ambassadors were required to send to Moscow.

4 Ibid., p. 13-14, 16. The initial reaction of the Soviets to the Afghan coup seems to have been

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the murder of two Afghan presidents and, eventually, to the Soviet invasion in 1979.

The PDPA was too divided ever to become a functioning political unit; *Khalq* and *Parcham* had, after all, only united officially in mid-1977 after almost ten years of conflict. The *Parcham* claimed that *Khalq* and its leaders were revolutionary dreamers with little understanding of Afghan politics. The *Khalqis*, on the other hand, thought of the leader of *Parcham*, Babrak Karmal, and his followers, as 'royal Communists', tainted by their previous alliance with Daoud.

The personalities of the leaders strengthened the divisions. Taraki, born in 1921 and president after the April coup, was a mild-mannered poet from a poor rural family. As a politician, however, he was doctrinaire and authoritarian, believing himself to be the natural leader of the Afghan Communists. Amin, born in 1929, the son of a low-ranking civil servant in a village close to Kabul, was described by his enemy Puzanov as clever, energetic, and hard-working.[1] Having become a Marxist while studying in the United States, Amin saw himself as the main organizer within the party. His ambition quickly led to conflict with Karmal, who had founded the *Parcham*. The same age as Amin, Karmal was a gifted orator and popular student leader whose family belonged to the old Pashto aristocracy. Karmal thought Amin reckless and brutal, and believed that the PDPA needed to form alliances with other groups in order to gain and hold on to power.[2]

The two groups had been jockeying for Soviet support for years, and their competition did not end with the April coup. Amin, who became vice-premier and foreign minister, contacted the Soviets clandestinely to seek support for his faction, claiming that it was the obvious choice: it would be 'easier for the Soviet Union to work with the people from *Khalq* [as] they are brought up in the spirit of "Sovietism". If the leaders of *Khalq* and their Soviet comrades should disagree, the *Khalqis* would, without a moment's hesitation, say that their Soviet comrades are right.' 'In such a situation,' Amin added wryly, 'the *Parchamis* would say that *their* leaders are right.'[3] Amin then

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very favourable, with some hoping to make Afghanistan into the Outer Mongolia of the 1980s (see Georgii M. Kornienko, 'Kak prinimalis resheniia o vvode sovetskikh voisk v Afganistan i ikh vyvode' [How the Decisions to Dispatch and to Withdraw Soviet Forces to Afghanistan Were Taken], *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, no. 3 (1993), p. 108.

1 Puzanov, in David Gai and V. Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie: opyt zhurnalistskogo rassledovaniia' [Invasion: The Experience of Journalistic Investigation], *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 200.

2 For more biographical information on Taraki, Amin, and Karmal, see Male, *Revolutionary Afghanistan*, pp. 20-51. On Karmal's background, see also the interview with him in *Trud*, 24 Oct. 1991.

3 Simonenko, Gankovskov, and Smirnov to MO, 23 May 1978, TsKhSD f 5, o 75, d 1181, p. 7.

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passed on to the Soviets his own plan for reorganizing the PDPA, a plan which excluded the *Parchamis* from every influential position.[1]

In his first official conversations with Puzanov on 29 April, Taraki showed how the *Khalqi* leaders expected to cultivate close relations with Moscow. He explained that 'Afghanistan [will] follow Marxism-Leninism, embark on the road of building socialism, and belong to the socialist camp.' The policy would have to be pursued 'with care', however; for a while, the party would need to disguise its real intentions. Although Taraki offered the Soviet Union a close political and economic relationship, he saw no reason for conflict with the West – only with 'reactionary Muslim countries'.[2] At another meeting with Puzanov on 17 May, Taraki asked for Soviet help in buttressing the party's position, particularly in the armed forces. He needed Soviet experts on 'state security', whom Puzanov promised to provide promptly.[3]

The *Parchamis*, meanwhile, were also soliciting Soviet support. On 11 June, the minister of the interior and Karmal's closest collaborator in *Parcham*, Nur Ahmad Nur, warned Puzanov that Amin was usurping Taraki's position as president and preparing to purge the *Parchamis* from the government: 'In the Politburo, everybody fears Amin,' Nur said, and without Soviet support, nobody could stand up to him, not even Karmal, who now filled the inconsequential post of vice-premier without portfolio. 'There is one leading force in the country – Hafizullah Amin.'[4]

A week later Puzanov met with another of Karmal's closest allies, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, who warned him that the political crisis inside the PDPA was now acute: 'Unfortunately, some people believe that the party organs are themselves and nobody but them. These people', Keshtmand stated – meaning Amin and Taraki – see 'the strengthening of ties with the Soviet Union as a temporary policy, or as a tactical device'. Both Nur and Keshtmand appealed to Puzanov to save Karmal, who was in great danger.[5]

Puzanov agreed to try. The next day he met with Taraki to discuss Karmal's position. He told him of a recent conversation with

1 Amin to CPSU CC, 23 May 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1182, pp. 1-8. Amin visited Moscow briefly in mid-May.
2 Puzanov to MO, 5 May 1978, 'Politpismo: O vnutripoliticheskom poloshenii v DRA' [On the Domestic Political Situation in the DRA], TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1179, pp. 7, 9-10.
3 Puzanov to MO, 17 May 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 1-3.
4 Puzanov to MO, 11 June 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 10-11, 13.
5 Puzanov to MO, 17 June 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 18-19, Puzanov to MO, 11 June 1978, ibid., p. 13.

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Karmal, in which Karmal had praised Taraki and Amin and conceded that it was 'his duty towards the revolution not to create problems'. Taraki, determined to undercut the *Parchamis*, replied angrily that 'the party is united and its unity is being strengthened ... we will run over those who oppose unity with a steamroller.'[1]

The purge, planned by Amin and endorsed by Taraki, was announced soon afterwards, on 1 July. Karmal, Nur, and Keshtmand were removed from their cabinet posts, and Karmal named ambassador to Prague, virtual exile for someone who regarded himself as a leader of the revolution. But Karmal could probably thank Puzanov and the Soviets for escaping death. Late in the night of 1 July, Karmal, fearing for his life, sought refuge with his family in the apartment of one of his Soviet friends. Although Puzanov refused to meet him in the morning and told Amin of his whereabouts, he did use his influence to save Karmal's life and see him safely off to Czechoslovakia.[2]

But Puzanov was to get no peace from PDPA infighting. Having claimed in reports to Moscow that he had successfully managed the cabinet crisis, Puzanov had to admit in August to the Soviet foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, and the head of the Communist Party's international department, Boris Ponomarev, that the *Khalqis* had begun a purge of all the *Parchamis* in government. Claiming to have discovered a plot organized by Karmal's followers to unseat the *Khalqi* regime, Taraki and Amin arrested Keshtmand and several other leading *Parchamis*; in the following weeks, they hunted throughout Afghanistan for *Parchamis* and suspected *Parcham* sympathizers.

Although the Soviets had always had closer relations with Karmal and his group than with the *Khalqis*, Puzanov knew that as the *Parchamis* were momentarily in eclipse, nothing could be gained by trying to intervene on Karmal's behalf.[3] He made no formal protest during his meetings with Taraki and Amin, limiting himself instead to explanations of several of the arrests and executions that took place during the autumn.[4] On instructions from Moscow, however, he did convey the Soviets' displeasure. As he explained to Taraki, 'when there is a difficult situation in the country of our close friends, we have a time-honoured practice of sending one of our leaders, a member of our Politburo, on an unofficial visit.' Taraki had little choice but to offer the required invitation.[5]

1 Puzanov to MO, 18 June 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 25-7.
2 Puzanov to MO, 26 Aug. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, p. 77.
3 Ibid., pp. 75-7.
4 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 201.
5 Puzanov to MO, 26 Aug. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, p. 77.

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The emissary from Moscow was Ponomarev, who had been head of the Party's international department for more than twenty years and was a key Soviet decision-maker on foreign affairs. He arrived at Kabul in mid-September and asked Taraki and Amin to halt the purge. He later recalled: 'This confrontation worried us. It was clear that nothing good would come of it ... He [Amin] might have had reasons for punishing the others, but not in such a drastic way. It made the revolution itself seem unattractive.'[1] As if this was not worrisome enough, Ponomarev had, before his departure, received a report from the KGB suggesting that Amin had ties with US intelligence services.[2] From Moscow, the Afghan Communist party seemed 'a fine mess'.[3]

Ponomarev's visit did not change anything at Kabul: 'He [Taraki] agreed that my displeasure was justified [and] thanked me for my advice. And everything continued as before.'[4] The Soviets had to work with the *Khalqi* regime, and in the late autumn and winter of 1978, Puzanov was instructed to offer Taraki and Amin a limited increase in military and economic aid, in preparation for the signing of a Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty in Moscow in December.[5] The *Parcham* leaders remained in prison, or in exile in Eastern Europe.

In discussions with the PDPA concerning Soviet aid to Afghanistan, the Afghans often asked for more equipment and technical assistance than Puzanov was willing to recommend. In one instance, when Taraki asked for a large-scale training programme for officers and border-guards, Puzanov told him bluntly that the request was inflated: if he persisted, he would have to ask the Soviet government himself. Unperturbed, the Afghans hinted that they might seek other sources of supply. In mid-November, Amin told Puzanov that the *Khalqi* regime was 'seeking actively to attract other socialist brother countries to wider co-operation, as well as other friendly states which will give us such support ... But the Afghan leadership in such matters naturally counts primarily on the Soviet Union.'[6]

In mid-December 1978, Taraki and Amin visited Moscow, a watershed in Soviet relations with the *Khalqi* regime. Their

1 Ponomarev, quoted in Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 201.
2 Ibid. For the KGB's suspicions of Amin, see also Aleksandr Morosov, 'Kabulskii resident' [Kabul Resident], *Novoe vremia* (1991), no. 41, p. 29. Morosov was KGB deputy resident in Kabul between 1975 and 1979.
3 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 201; Mikhail Kapitsa, author's interview, 7 Sept. 1992.
4 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 201.
5 Puzanov to MO, 14 Nov. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 123-9.
6 Puzanov to MO, 17 Dec. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, p. 8; Puzanov to MO, 14 Nov. 1978, f 5, o 76, d 1181, p. 125.

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conversations with Puzanov after their return show that the Soviets' new willingness to co-operate with them was explained by developments in Iran, where the revolution entered its decisive phase in late 1978-early 1979. Convinced of Leonid Brezhnev's personal support, Taraki and Amin, immediately upon their return from Moscow, asked Puzanov for more aid and justified it by pointing to the political developments in the region. Amin explained on 28 December that the 20 million rubles budgeted for 'special assignments' was 'to cover the expenses of the organs of security and intelligence services abroad' – especially in Iran.[1]

Puzanov doubted the sense of the Soviet leadership's new eagerness for long-term agreements with the *Khalqi* regime. He told Taraki on 30 December that the regime was not efficient; for instance, applications for economic aid were sent to the embassy after 'great delay' and with such muddled calculations that much time was lost in putting them right. 'One could feel that Taraki did not understand these issues,' Puzanov reported, 'and [that he] cannot imagine how complex decision-making is on the Soviet side.'[2]

The Kremlin, however, was not willing to act as cautiously as Puzanov advised. In a meeting of the Politburo on 7 January 1979, the prime minister, Aleksei Kosygin, proposed that Puzanov should be instructed to prepare plans for more military and economic aid to Afghanistan.[3] Many of the new programmes, which turned Afghanistan into one of the top recipients of Soviet foreign aid, were drawn up during the visit of the vice-premier Ivan Arkhipov to Kabul in late February. Taraki, however, still pressed for more and for a shift in focus: he wanted to suspend some of the development plans in order to use the assigned funds for security, and he asked for more loans to be made directly to the Afghan ministry of defence.[4]

For most of the time since the coup, the PDPA leaders, preoccupied with the party's internal problems, had done little to strengthen their hold on the provinces. The Soviets had repeatedly tried to persuade them to do more to win adherents in the countryside – advising them not to interfere with local customs – and to build

1 On Iran, Puzanov to MO, 28 Dec. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 4-5; Puzanov to MO, 15 Jan. 1979, ibid., p. 13. On technical advisers and assistance, Puzanov to MO, 17 Dec. 1978, ibid., pp. 1-3; on intelligence, Puzanov to MO, 28 Dec. 1978, ibid., p. 5.

2 Puzanov to MO, 30 Dec. 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 6-7, 9.

3 Excerpt from the protocol of the 137th session of the Politburo of the CPSU CC on 7 Jan. 1979, o[sobaia] p[apka] [special file], TsKhSD, f 89-kollektsiia, perechen 14, dokument 24. The materials in this file were transferred from the Kremlin Presidential Archive to the TsKhSD in late 1992.

4 Arkhipov to MO, 28 Feb. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 20-7.

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closer ties with local notables regardless of their political affiliation. By late February 1979, even Taraki and Amin recognized that the adherents of political Islam challenging them along the borders with Iran and Pakistan could become a serious military threat.[1]

The threat was obvious to everyone – outside or inside Afghanistan – after the rebellion at Herat which began on 15 March. An alliance between townspeople, guerrillas, and defectors from the local garrison fought for four days against the best troops of the Afghan army and their Soviet advisers. The fighting left 5,000 dead, among them some Soviet advisers and their families, about fifty in all, massacred by Heratis. Most of the dead were Afghan civilians killed when Soviet-equipped aircraft bombed the city on Amin's orders.[2]

On 19 March, the day the rebellion was put down, Puzanov, accompanied by a group of Soviet army officers who had served with the Afghan troops, met with Taraki. They tried to convince him of the seriousness of the threat in the countryside, and urged the PDPA leaders to change their policies. At the end of the meeting, Puzanov 'tactfully' advised Taraki to take steps 'with the same energy as in the conduct of the armed struggle, to develop education and propaganda in order to attract the population to their side'.[3]

The uprising at Herat was a shock both to the PDPA and to the Kremlin. While the central committee secretariat met in Moscow to consider how to strengthen the PDPA, Puzanov became more critical of Taraki and Amin. Particularly worried by the *Khalqis*' claim that the rebellion was the result of Iranian 'interference', he warned Taraki not to provoke an open Afghan-Iranian conflict while the Soviet Union took 'new initiatives' with the Ayatollah Khomeini. Taraki should try to stop the flow of Soviet arms from government units to the guerrillas, and train the Afghan army to use the equipment which the Soviets supplied.[4]

Ignoring Puzanov's blunt criticism, Taraki, seeking an alliance and the use of Soviet troops, flew to Moscow for a secret meeting with Kosygin, Gromyko, Ponomarev, and the defence minister, Dmitri Ustinov, on 20 March. Kosygin began by criticizing Taraki for depending too heavily on Soviet support against both Afghan rivals

1 Puzanov to MO, 1 July 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, p. 31; Puzanov to MO, 22 Aug. 1978, ibid., pp. 64-9; Puzanov to MO, 19 Feb. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 23-4.
2 Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination*, pp. 100-1.
3 Puzanov to MO, 19 Mar. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 36-8.
4 Kartoteka Sekretariata TsK KPSS (card files of the secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU; hereafter KSTsK), 151 session (20 Mar. 1979), item 25, in TsKhSD; Puzanov to MO, 25 Mar. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 40-1.

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and foreign enemies, and reminded him that Vietnam had defeated both the United States and China by mobilizing its own people: 'The Vietnamese themselves steadfastly defended their country against aggressive encroachments.' The use of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was out of the question, owing to the international repercussions, and unnecessary. Iran could not provoke a war with Afghanistan even if she wanted to, owing to the political chaos at Tehran.

The Soviets also told Taraki frankly that the rebellion at Herat had tarnished the regime's image at home and abroad: nothing similar must happen. At a meeting with Brezhnev that evening, Taraki was again lectured in a patronizing manner on how to govern Afghanistan; on the need for a 'patriotic front' and a loyal army. Brezhnev cited recent examples of the way in which armies could be used to promote socialism in Asian and African countries – at one point, he even implied that armies by their nature contained 'particular conditions' suited to the growth of socialist ideas. And he urged Taraki to strengthen his following among the masses, patterning his efforts on the Soviet Union immediately after the October revolution.[1]

Nevertheless, despite the rebuke and the refusal of a formal Soviet-Afghan alliance, Taraki returned to Kabul armed with a series of new Soviet commitments. Kosygin and Ustinov had presented a detailed plan for Soviet aid to the Afghan army, aimed at preventing further mutinies, which gave Taraki everything he sought, except the use of Soviet troops, including a promise of aid against an Iranian or Pakistani attack.[2] The Soviets had also agreed to speed up their deliveries of weapons; to suspend indefinitely all payments on their loans; and to supply Afghanistan with 100,000 tons of wheat. Taraki gleefully informed Puzanov that he was very satisfied.[3]

Along with their increased involvement, the Soviets tried to reduce the tension between Afghanistan on the one hand and Iran and Pakistan on the other. After Kosygin met in Moscow with the foreign minister of Pakistan, Yakub Khan, Puzanov warned Taraki against carrying out a plan for operations in Pakistani territory, and 'tactfully' urged him to follow Moscow's lead.[4]

1 Record of conversation, Brezhnev-Taraki, 20 Mar. 1979, OP, TsKhSD, f 89-kollektsiia, perechen 14, dokument 25.
2 Record of conversation; Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov, Ponomarev, Taraki, 20 Mar. 1979, OP, TsKhSD, f 89-kollektsiia, perechen 14, dokument 26.
3 Puzanov to MO, 22 Mar. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, p. 29. Taraki used the new direct phone link with the Kremlin often during the Herat crisis. The record of one of his telephone calls (to Kosygin on 18 Mar.) is published in *Moskovskie novosti*, 7 June 1992, p. 12. On the telephone link to Moscow, see TsKhSD, KSTsK, 150th session (13 Mar. 1979), item 10.
4 Puzanov to MO, 10 Apr. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 43-6.

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After the Herat rebellion, the conflict between the Afghan government and the opposition developed into a full-scale civil war. From the start, the war went badly for the government; thousands of its troops defected to the guerrillas, and the army lost a series of minor battles. In the west, and in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Paktia, the army was slowly forced on the defensive, limiting itself to defending its major strongholds. The government even began to lose control of parts of the Old City of Kabul to the opposition.[1]

The Soviet Politburo first formally discussed the situation in Afghanistan on 12 April, when Gromyko, Ustinov, Ponomarev, and the head of the KGB, Iuri Andropov, presented a joint report underlining the danger: 'The flare-up of religious fanaticism in the Muslim East [and] the actions and events in Iran incite and activate the anti-government clergy in Afghanistan.' Although the opposition was not yet well organized, it was attracting large numbers of recruits in the countryside. The *Khalqi* regime had outmanoeuvred its rivals at Kabul, but it would face severe difficulties unless it strengthened its position; dissatisfaction in the army was running high, and there was a risk of new mutinies during the summer.

The report recommended new training programmes and an increased supply of arms to improve both the military performance and the political reliability of the Afghan army. It recommended an extension of the economic aid programmes, and the development of new ones for rural areas. And it recommended that the international department and the embassy at Kabul draw up a plan for broadening the political base of the PDPA government.[2]

The Soviet embassy responded to the Politburo's directives and the visible decline in the fortunes of the *Khalqi* regime by trying to form a new coalition government, to include several *Parchamis* and members of the former regime. According to the embassy counsellor in charge of 'political assistance', Vasilii Safronchuk, the Soviets even thought of including some of the adherents of political Islam. But the *Khalqi* regime refused to budge, and vetoed the Soviet initiatives: 'We are among enemies,' Amin told Puzanov. 'We must be vigilant.'[3]

1 Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, pp. 32-6.

2 Excerpt from the protocol of the 149th session of the CPSU CC Politburo on 12 Apr. 1979. Political report, 'O nashii dalneishei linii v sviazi s polozheniem v Afganistane' [On Our Future Line in Connection with the Situation in Afghanistan], signed by Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev, OP, TsKhSD, f 89-kollektsiia, perechen 14, dokument 27.

3 Safronchuk to MO, 2 July 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1046, pp. 38-40; Bruce J. Amstutz to state department, 25 June 1979, confidential cable 4888; Amstutz to State et al., 18 July, 1979, confidential cable 5433, Amstutz to State, 19 July 1979, confidential cable 5463, all on microfiche in National Security Archive (comp.), *Afghanistan: The Making of US Policy, 1973-1990*

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The Soviet attempts to force the *Khalqis* to invite members of *Parcham* and outsiders to join the government was followed by an attempt to provoke a confrontation between the two leaders of *Khalq*, Taraki and Amin. After listening to Amin's complaints that he had no control over the army and that Taraki was concentrating power in his own hands, Puzanov in late July suggested that Taraki should be excluded from day-to-day responsibility for the civil war and replaced by a group headed by Amin. As Puzanov thought Amin to be dangerous, he probably intended merely to arouse Taraki's suspicions in the hope that he would purge Amin from the Afghan leadership.[1]

In the late summer of 1979, Puzanov took two other steps designed to persuade Taraki to pay more attention to his suggestions. He asked for two battalions of Soviet troops to be stationed at Kabul airport and at the old castle, the seat of the *Khalqi* government. The plan was vetoed by Ustinov, who said that 'under no circumstances' would he agree to send Soviet troops to Kabul. Puzanov then arranged for yet another visit by Ponomarev, probably in early August. But Ponomarev was no more successful than Puzanov in convincing Taraki of the need for change.[2]

Instead of the *Khalqi* leaders conceding that they must broaden their power base, Puzanov learned in August that Amin was planning to execute Keshtmand and the other imprisoned *Parchamis*. Puzanov at once appealed to Taraki. The *Parchamis* were 'prominent leaders of the revolution, members of the PDPA, and of the Afghan leadership. The leaders of the Soviet Union draw Taraki's attention to the necessity of caution in carrying out repressions, in particular against leaders of the party.'[3]

In support of Puzanov, Moscow had sent two military missions to Kabul to put pressure on Taraki. The first, which had arrived in mid-April, led by the head of the political administration of the Soviet army, General Aleksei Epishev, made a series of suggestions for improving the fighting capacity of the Afghan troops. The second, headed by the vice-minister of defence Ivan Pavlovskii – who in 1968

(Alexandria, VA, 1990). Safronchuk informed Amstutz, the US chargé d'affaires, about the Soviet plans for a 'restructuring' of the Afghan government, probably in an attempt to defuse US criticism of Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan. See also V. Safronchuk, 'Afganistan vremen Taraki' [Afghanistan in Taraki's Time], *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn*, no. 12 (1990), pp. 86-96; Puzanov quoting Amin, in Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 201.

1 Puzanov to MO, 21 July 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, p. 94.

2 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), pp. 218, 223; Puzanov to MO, 21 July 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 95-7; Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4 (1991), p. 201.

3 Puzanov to MO, 6 Aug. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1044, pp. 81-4.

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had commanded the Soviet task-force that invaded Czechoslovakia – arrived at Kabul on 17 August and stayed for two months. Pavlovskii was authorized to propose the complete reorganization of the Afghan army, and to threaten to withhold Soviet military aid if Taraki did not agree to do as he suggested.[1]

By late August, Taraki seems to have understood that something would have to be done to convince the Soviets that he was following their suggestions. His solution was to get rid of Amin. The events that followed cannot be documented in detail, but this is the most likely outline.

On 9 September, Taraki arrived in Moscow on his way back from a meeting of the heads of non-aligned states in Havana. Brezhnev and Gromyko promised him increased Soviet military aid if he would soften the *Khalqi* regime's approach to land and educational reform, dismiss Amin, and appoint some prominent *Parchamis* to cabinet posts. Taraki agreed. Learning that Amin had prepared his counter-moves, however, Taraki refused upon his return to Kabul to make the changes the Soviets demanded.[2]

The Soviets now lost patience. Acting on Gromyko's instructions, Puzanov, Pavlovskii, and the heads of the Soviet military and KGB missions at Kabul sought out Taraki at his home after midnight on 12 September. They demanded an immediate meeting with him and Amin, who was already in the palace, and who came to Taraki's rooms to listen while Puzanov read out a long list of charges of military inefficiency, political incompetence, and personal ambition. When Puzanov finished, Taraki looked at him and said calmly: 'Tell our Soviet friends that we thank them for their concern and agree with their views; everything will be all right.' Amin joined in: 'I agree with dear comrade Taraki ... If I have to depart this life, I will die with the word "Taraki" on my lips.'[3]

The parade of unity was a charade. The next day, after finding

1 On the Epishev mission, see National Security Archives (comp.), *Afghanistan: The Making of US Policy, 1973-1990: Guide and Index* (Alexandria, VA, 1990), p. 77; see also Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4, pp. 221-2; Gorelov to Ogarkov, 14 Mar. 1979, ibid., p. 216; on the Pavlovskii mission, see Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4, pp. 218-19; Pavlovskii to Ustinov, 20, 25 Aug., ibid., p. 217. For the military's viewpoints, see Artem Borovik, 'Afganistan: podvodia itogi' [Afghanistan: The Conclusions], interview with General Valentin Varennikov, *Ogonyok*, no. 12 (1989), pp. 6-8, 30-1.

2 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), pp. 204-8; Kapitsa, author's interview, 7 Sept. 1992; see also Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Afghanistan: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London, 1986), p. 82.

3 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3, p. 205. The Soviet military attaché was Lieutenant-General Lev Gorelov, the KGB resident was Lieutenant-General Boris Ivanov.

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that Amin had asked several generals in the Afghan army for support, Taraki turned to the Soviets. Puzanov recalled later: 'He spoke in a bitter tone about Amin, making the same charges which we had made earlier without any result.'[1] The following morning, the 14th, Taraki's men tried to assassinate Amin as he arrived for a meeting at the presidential palace. Puzanov, who was also supposed to attend, claims to have had no knowledge of the plans.[2]

When the assassins missed their target and Amin escaped, he summoned troops loyal to him to surround the palace and called a meeting of the Politburo, which duly expelled Taraki and proclaimed Amin the new head of the PDPA. Then he began a purge of Taraki's supporters and other likely rivals. A number of prisoners from Daoud's regime and the *Parchami* wing of the PDPA were executed, followed by Taraki himself on 9 October.[3]

The Soviets' plan to rid themselves of Amin had backfired, leaving them with Amin as the head of both the party and the state. To make things worse, Amin, who in the early days of the regime seemed genuinely to admire the Soviet leaders, now had good reason to distrust them. Meanwhile, as the Afghan Communists engaged in yet another round of fratricide, the rebels were moving closer and closer to Kabul.

In Moscow, a top-level group consisting of Ustinov, Andropov, Gromyko, and Ponomarev was formed to report on Afghanistan to the Politburo. The group at first recommended patience with Amin and an increase in the number of Soviet military advisers in Afghanistan. In Kabul, relations between Amin and Puzanov remained frosty; at a meeting on 27 October, Puzanov tried to force Amin to break off his campaign of terror by threatening to withhold Soviet aid. As a result, Amin formally requested Puzanov's recall, while Puzanov at the same time asked Gromyko to transfer him.[4]

Before leaving Kabul, Puzanov called on almost every powerful member of the *Khalqi* government, primarily to remind them of their dependence on Soviet support. He told the minister of finance, Abdul Karim Misaq, that Moscow was worried about the cost of aid in the next year; the minister of planning, Mohammad Siddiq Alemyar, that Afghanistan should learn from the experience of a developed socialist

1 Ibid.

2 Morosov, 'Kabulskii resident', *Novoe vremia* (1991), no. 41, pp. 28-31.

3 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), p. 210.

4 Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 3 (1991), pp. 205, 210; Puzanov to MO, 27 Oct. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, p. 112; Kornienko, 'Kak prinimalis resheniia', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, no. 3 (1993), p. 109.

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country – the Soviet Union; and the head of the general staff, Major Yaqub, that the Soviet Union might be willing to train more Afghanis. The message was clear: only if relations with Moscow improved could the *Khalqi* regime expect to receive the favours it depended on.[1]

Amin knew that the Soviets were losing patience. Foolishly, he tried to strengthen his hand by opening relations with the United States while appealing to the Kremlin to work with the new PDPA leaders – apparently not understanding the likely result of such a step in the cold war of the late 1970s.[2] In Moscow, Ustinov, Andropov, and Gromyko – who now managed foreign policy for an increasingly frail Brezhnev – repeatedly refused to meet with Amin. In his last conversation with Puzanov, on 19 November, Amin underlined how much had been achieved in his country with Soviet assistance. But Puzanov offered no departing gift.[3]

The Soviets calculated that the recent developments in South-Central Asia were threatening. The Iranian-American hostage crisis did nothing to dispel their fears that Iran would become increasingly hostile. The KGB reported in mid-October that the Iranian leaders were convinced that 'the Soviet Union will not give up the ideological struggle and its attempts to set up a leftist government in Iran.' In response, the Iranian government aimed to weaken the PDPA regime in Afghanistan, and to prevent the spread of Communism partly by exerting its own influence in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union.[4]

In Afghanistan, victory over the PDPA seemed ever closer. The rebels strengthened their positions throughout October and November, as the morale of the Afghan army was undermined by the coup and by Amin's relentless persecution of his enemies. The Kremlin began to receive unauthorized reports from Soviet

[1] Conversation with Abdul Karim Misaq, Puzanov to MO, 5 Nov. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 125-6; conversation with Mohammad Siddiq Alemyar, Puzanov to MO, 10 Nov. 1979, ibid., pp. 134-6; conversation with Major Yaqub, Puzanov to MO, 13 Nov. 1979, ibid., pp. 140-3. Puzanov also met with Mahmoud Soma (minister of higher education), Faqir Mohammad Faqir (interior minister), and Shah Wali (minister of foreign affairs).

[2] Amstutz to state dept., 30 Sept. 1979, cable no. 7232, and Archer K. Blood to state dept., 28 Oct. 1979, cable no. 7726, both in National Security Archives (comp.), *Afghanistan*; in one conversation with Safronchuk, Amin particularly emphasized his contacts with the Americans; see Safronchuk to MO, 29 Oct. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1046, pp. 67-70.

[3] Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4 (1991), p. 221; Puzanov to MO, 19 Nov. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 144-6.

[4] KGB (G. Tsinev) to MO, 10 Oct. 1979, report: 'Rukovodstvo Irana o vneshnei bezopasnosti strani' [The Iranian Leadership on the Country's Foreign Security], TsKhSD, f 5 o 76 d 1355, pp. 18-20.

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commanders in Afghanistan explaining how bad the situation really was. The chief Soviet military adviser to the Afghan 12th army division, V. P. Kapitanov, then in Paktia province, reported that the opposition was on the offensive, that the brutality of the Afghan officers had antagonized the local population, and that Soviet military equipment was being routinely destroyed or sold.[1]

The new Soviet ambassador, Fikrat Tabeev, arrived at Kabul late in November, just as the Soviets were finalizing their plans for an invasion. Tabeev, a Tatar and a member of the CPSU Central Committee, had his first and last meeting with Amin on 6 December. When Amin stated that he had to go to Moscow to discuss long-term co-operation between the PDPA and the CPSU with Brezhnev, Tabeev put him off. As he later recalled, the country was falling into chaos: 'Kabul was weakened. The army was deprived of a head after Amin's purges and reprisals. The clergy was against [the regime]. The peasants – against. The tribes – who had to endure much from Amin – against. Around Amin there were only a few lackeys, who like parrots repeated after him all kinds of nonsense about the "build-up of socialism" and the "dictatorship of the proletariat".' On the 10th, Tabeev left Kabul.[2]

The Soviets' invasion on Christmas Eve 1979 ended their two-year relationship with the *Khalqi* regime. Though never equal partners, the *Khalqis* at times exercised substantial leverage on the Kremlin, especially early in 1979. And, in spite of the Soviet preponderance of military power, international standing, and technical prowess, Moscow did not succeed in forcing the *Khalqis* to revise their notions of Communism, short of armed intervention.

Why were the Soviets so unsuccessful? Why had they, in the end, to intervene *against* a regime on which they had spent so much effort and money? The answers lie both in Soviet foreign-policy ideology and in the actions of their agents on the spot, for neither dealt effectively with the Afghan civil war and revolutionary Islam.

Puzanov and his assistants thought they were in Kabul to help the Afghans to turn away from feudal oppression and dependence on the West, and to develop a socialist state with a socialist economy.

1 Vasilii Safronchuk, 'Afganistan vremen Amina' [Afghanistan in Amin's Time], *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn*, no. 1 (1991), pp. 124-42; V. P. Kapitanov to MO, n.d. (late fall 1979), TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1337, pp. 5-7. For the military situation, see Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, pp. 36-7.
2 Tabeev to MO, 6 Dec. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 152-3; Tabeev quoted in Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4 (1991), p. 224; Pavel Demchenko, 'Kak eto nachinalos v Afganistane' [How It Began in Afghanistan], *Ekho planety*, no. 46 (1989), pp. 26-32.

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Achieving these aims would also strengthen the Soviet Union and increase Soviet influence in the region; the PDPA 'revolution' could, with the infusion of Soviet aid, become a 'cheap' victory for socialism and for the Soviet state. However, in order to be recognizable to the Soviets, the route towards socialism in Afghanistan had to be marked out by a precise set of symbols and events. The sequence and rhetoric of the 'April revolution' would have to be patterned on the 'October revolution' – or, rather, on the late-1970s image of it. Likewise, being independent of the West meant to Puzanov and his colleagues being closely allied with the Soviet Union. 'Socialism' equalled present-day Soviet society – or, more specifically, the role of the party in society.[1]

From the start, Soviet advisers in Kabul found little they could recognize in Taraki's regime. The faction-ridden party leadership; the unruly countryside where the 'revolution' was only the latest in an unending series of ethnic and clan rivalries; the touch-and-go reform plans derived from both western and Soviet ideas: none of this encouraged Soviet sympathy with the regime, and all of it was reported to Moscow. But in spite of the visible failings of the Afghan Communist party under Taraki and Amin, its rhetoric helped to convince the Soviets that, ultimately, there would emerge from within the PDPA a 'true socialist' leadership. Until this happened, the Soviet embassy, the political and military advisers, and the technical experts were the custodians of Afghan socialism: they would not only have to plan its development but also direct the implementation of the plans.[2]

The embassy's frank reporting from Kabul must have left the Kremlin in no doubt that after the summer of 1978, as the Afghan leaders repeatedly disregarded Soviet advice, Soviet aims in Afghanistan were becoming less and less tenable. The feud between Puzanov and the *Khalqis* might have led the Soviets to curtail or discontinue their aid to the Afghans in the late fall of 1978 but for the dramatic developments elsewhere in the region. The Iranian revolution increased the importance of Afghanistan to the Brezhnev

1 For a most useful examination of how Soviet officials understood another of their Third World alliances, see Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 197-207. In contrast to my discussion here, Halliday stresses the influence formal ideological categories had on the actions of Soviet leaders with regard to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

2 See, for instance, Puzanov's political reports of 4 Apr., 27 June 1979, 'O nekotorikh momentakh vnutripoliticheskogo polozheniia v Demokraticheskoi Respublike Afganistan' [On Some Aspects of the Domestic Political Situation in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan], and 'Ob osushchestvlenii v DRA zemelnoi reformi i ee vliianii na razvitie vnutripoliticheskoi obstanovki' [On the Implementation of Land Reform in the DRA and Its Influence on the Development of the Domestic Political Situation], TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1042, pp. 1-15, 16-27.

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Politburo. Even though the Kremlin had not expected a left-wing take-over in Iran, nor had it expected the radicals to dominate the new government. By March or April 1979, the Soviets had come to regard the new Iranian government as a threat. The Soviet missions in Afghanistan thereby acquired a new significance, both strategically and as listening posts and spy bases.

The primacy of regional foreign policy over socialist ideology accelerated in mid-1979, as the Soviets watched the events in Tehran with growing alarm, and led them to increase their aid to the *Khalqi* regime. This, in turn, increased the Soviets' stake in its survival, but did little to increase their leverage.

The Soviets' preoccupation with foreign policy gave Taraki and Amin an opportunity to exploit their own conflicts with Iran and Pakistan to demand ever more Soviet aid. Neither Puzanov nor his advisers seem to have understood the historical and cultural origins of *Khalq* enmity towards Afghanistan's neighbours. Influenced in their youth by Pashto nationalism, hopes for control of the Pashto minority in Pakistan, as well as fears of Iranian influence over the Shiite minorities in Afghanistan, were among Taraki and Amin's political staples. In conversations with the Soviets, however, they would play up Iranian radicalism and Pakistan's links with the United States in order to justify requests for more military support.[1]

In addition to a lack of understanding of traditional Pashto foreign-policy aims, the Soviets failed to notice how the Afghan élites regarded the Soviets' relationship with the PDPA. The patronizing and often confrontational style adopted by Soviet advisers – including Puzanov, whose behaviour earned him the nickname 'the little tsar' – helped to erode the regime's hold on local loyalties, thus making it easy for the opposition to exploit resentment of 'foreign' dominance.[2]

In part a consequence of this, Soviet representatives consistently overrated their influence over the PDPA. Puzanov's ardent, but dour, proclamations were no match for the passionate pleas of Amin, who could draw on personal and political loyalties developed over decades. In spite of its promises to Moscow, the embassy could prevent neither the purge of the *Parchamis* in the autumn of 1978 nor the toppling of Taraki one year later. Both events, the Soviets rightly predicted, were disastrous for the regime.

1 Male, *Revolutionary Afghanistan*, p. 28; Puzanov to MO, 19 Feb. 1979, TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1045, pp. 23-4. For a comparative discussion of the alliance policies of revolutionary parties, see Odd Arne Westad, 'Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World', *Journal of Peace Research*, xxix (1992), 455-64.
2 Hyman, *Afghanistan*, p. 106.

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At the outset, in 1978, the Soviet agents at Kabul did *not* think of Soviet support to Afghanistan primarily in terms of arms and military training. Puzanov, in his reports to Moscow, specified technical and, more important, educational assistance. In this, Afghanistan makes an interesting contrast to the pattern of Soviet support for Marxist regimes in the Third World. The reason may be that the embassy in Kabul believed that military assistance would tempt the *Khalqi* regime to alienate the population by even more radical reforms: when Taraki asked for arms, usually he was lectured by Puzanov about the need to strengthen the party by broadening its base.[1]

The Soviets overcame their reluctance to provide large amounts of military assistance early in 1979, owing to the threat to the regime's survival and to events in Iran. But the Soviet general staff, represented by Epishev and Pavlovskii, meant by assistance weapons, training, and advice about how to run 'special operations' (including air strikes) – but not Soviet troops.

The alternatives to invasion, as the Kabul embassy, the military mission, and the KGB saw them in late 1979, were either to negotiate a settlement between the *Khalqis* and some of their rivals, or to support Hafizullah Amin's ruthless, but energetic, conduct of the war. Some of the Soviet agents, notably Safronchuk, tried to begin negotiations not only with the *Parchamis* and supporters of Daoud and the former king, Zahir, but also with groups of the moderate Islamist opposition. They were defeated, however, by *Khalqi* intransigence and by lack of support from the Kremlin. Amin was jettisoned primarily because of the personal antipathy felt towards him. As the former Soviet vice-foreign minister in charge of Asian affairs, Mikhail Kapitsa, remarked: 'Taraki's ghost was in the way.'[2]

Although none of the senior Soviet agents in Afghanistan recommended an invasion or even the threat of one, Soviet officials differed on how to force the Afghan regime to change. Puzanov and the embassy staff toyed with the idea of deploying Soviet troops in key positions in order to underline their 'suggestions' to Taraki, but concluded that political pressure would eventually carry the day. The

[1] Puzanov to MO, 1, 18 July 1978, TsKhSD, f 5, o 75, d 1181, pp. 29-33, 36-40. See also his political report of 27 June 1979, 'Ob osushchestvlenii v DRA', TsKhSD, f 5, o 76, d 1042, pp. 16-27. For a good comparative discussion of Soviet interventions, see Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 1984). Samuel P. Huntington has attempted a typology of Soviet and US interventions which emphasizes Moscow's preparedness to offer military assistance; see, for instance, his 'Patterns of Intervention: America and the Soviets in the Third World', *National Interest* (Spring 1987), pp. 39-47.

[2] Kapitsa, author's interview, 7 Sept. 1992.

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KGB heads of station in Kabul, Boris Ivanov and Aleksandr Morozov, seem to have opposed the use of troops, and recommended a Soviet-engineered coup to bring the *Parchami* to power. The heads of the military missions and the Soviet military attaché, General Leonid Gorelov, argued that, with Soviet military training and equipment, the Afghan army would ultimately become powerful enough to correct the political mistakes.[1]

In spite of similarities between the Soviet entanglement in Afghanistan and the US entanglement in Vietnam – in perceptions, conduct, and outcome – one should not strain the comparison. While successive US administrations were guided in South-East Asia by an image of a pervasive Soviet threat, the Kremlin's decisions about Afghanistan were not guided primarily by the image of a hostile United States but by one of a regional challenge from militant Islam. Despite the intense Soviet-American rivalry over Afghanistan during the 1980s, the Soviet intervention itself was not so much an aspect of the cold war as a response to the first signs of change in the international system.

On the Afghan side, the *Khalq* was, at its core, a home-grown Communist movement, its leaders Pashto nationalists and extreme modernizers whose anger at the 'feudal' social structure of Afghanistan was more intense than their reflections on how to change it. The *Khalqis* were quick to announce general, but fundamental, reforms, and found in Soviet history one of their arguments for the use of terrorism to speed up the process. Many of their reforms, however, never went far beyond slogans; from the start, they were so preoccupied with faction fighting that they developed only a rudimentary set of domestic policies and a foreign policy which did not achieve much beyond antagonizing all of Afghanistan's neighbours.

At the outset, Taraki and Amin assumed that the Soviet Union would come to their aid because of a common ideology and a related world-view. Although their conversations with Puzanov soon revealed that the price of Soviet aid was an alliance advantageous to both parties, they hoped to exploit what they took to be their principal asset: Afghanistan's 'strategic location'. But as soon as the Afghan Communist party started to disintegrate, the Soviets became participants in the struggle for power. The victorious *Khalqis* had to

[1] On the KGB, see Morosov, 'Kabulskii resident', *Novoe vremia* (1991), no. 38, pp. 36-9, no. 39, pp. 32-3, no. 40, pp. 36-7, no. 41, pp. 28-31; Ponomarev, quoted in Gai and Snegirev, 'Vtorzhenie', *Znamia*, no. 4 (1991), p. 226. On the military, see Ivan Pavlovskii, quoted in ibid., p. 218.

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defy, sometimes openly, the Kremlin's advice, justifying their defiance by 'local conditions', 'vigilance', or parallels in Russian history. Even so, they never understood the differences separating them from the Kremlin, and assumed that Brezhnev would support them even if Puzanov would not.

By the end of the summer of 1979, well ahead of the Soviet invasion, Afghan Communism had self-destructed. Confronted by a far more potent and popular revolutionary force – the Afghani adherents of political Islam – and unable to reshape its domestic and foreign policies in such a way as to gain stable alliances of any kind, the regime could not win the civil war. The basic policy failure of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was the belief that foreign power could secure the survival and ultimate success of a regime which demonstrably could not survive on its own.

Norwegian Nobel Institute

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