

dhi during the October meeting for Commonwealth heads of government in Nassau brought fresh resolve for mutual consideration of the Ganges waters question, at least, and hope that it could be settled within a year.

The Assam question saw no resolution satisfactory to Bangladesh during 1985. India's erection of the border fence between Assam and northern Bangladesh proceeded apace, and Gandhi's agreement in August with Assamese leaders to hold state elections under rules that would disenfranchise for ten years all emigrants to the state between 1966 and 1971 did little to assuage Bangladeshi ire, nor did the agreement's provision for the eviction of all immigrants to Assam after 1971.

If relations with India stumbled over all the old and familiar blocks, Bangladesh-Pakistan relations retained their cordiality of recent years. Bilateral trade between the two continued to mutual benefit, and toward the end of the year Zia ul-Haq indicated his willingness to repatriate the remaining "stranded Pakistanis"—now apparently the official referent for the Urdu-speaking "Biharis" left in Bangladesh after the 1971 war. The fifth meeting of the Bangladesh-Nepal Joint Economic Commission took place in January, resulting in identification of areas of joint venture to be pursued. Nepal continued its status as an ally of Bangladesh on the Ganges waters issue.

For all the year's trials and tribulations, it ended on what can fairly be called a triumphant note for Bangladesh's diplomacy. Dhaka hosted in early December a summit meeting of all seven South Asian nations that produced the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The product of Bangladesh's initiative in 1980 and its perseverance through patient negotiations over the past five years, SAARC is seen by its member states as a forum for collective endeavor in seeking solutions to the region's economic problems—for the time being efforts to resolve its member states' political differences will be prudently placed on the back burner. That this first step has been taken at all is testimony nonetheless to Bangladesh's resoluteness in the face of its storms.³



3. For background on SAARC, see Imtiaz H. Bokhari, "South Asian Regional Cooperation: Progress, Problems, Potential, and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, 25:4 (April 1985), pp. 371-390. The same journal issue has several other articles on the subject.

Asia Survey

AFGHANISTAN IN 1985

*The Sixth Year of the
Russo-Afghan War*



Lee O. Coldren

Though the level of fighting increased, there was no basic change in the Soviet situation in Afghanistan during the sixth year of occupation. Nor was there much change in overall Soviet military policy, which consists primarily of efforts to disrupt resistance supply lines and reactions to substantial threats posed by the resistance. In 1985 to a greater degree than previously, the resistance dictated the tempo and place of major Soviet operations that were conducted without much pretense that the Soviets were only "supporting" the Babrak Karmal regime's military.

In addition to presenting a brief picture of the Soviet situation in Kabul and the major battles of 1985, this article is concerned with identifying demographic and social developments in Afghanistan and trends within the resistance that may affect the course of the war. Among these are the continuing depopulation of the countryside, increasing Afghan nationalism, and the emergence of a younger generation of resistance commanders more willing to act across lines of traditional ethnic and local cleavages and Peshawar group affiliations.

The Capital

Provisioning Kabul

The quality of life in Kabul for rich and poor has clearly deteriorated during the six years of the Russo-Afghan war. In 1985 the Soviets were more successful than in 1984 in providing food, electricity, and fuel to the capital's population, which has increased to over two million by the internal

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refugees fleeing Soviet bombing in the countryside. Electricity remained in short supply in poorer neighborhoods, but the weeks-long outages common during the winter of 1983-84 did not occur. Absent also were the gas and diesel lines. There were few shortages of flour, rice, sugar, and cooking oil, and the Soviets apparently made a greater effort to move fruit and meat to Kabul from the North. Imports from the USSR and heavy regime subsidies kept inflation at around 25%—a less ruinous rate than the early years of the war.

Soviet ability to better provision the capital implies greater success in keeping open the main highway from Kabul to the USSR via the Salang Pass. This achievement was not without cost: as will be noted later, the Soviets had to mount frequent air and ground operations all along the highway from Kabul to the Salang Pass to relieve the pressure of mujahidin (resistance) ambushes on Soviet and regime convoys, which often traveled with armor and air support.

Security

The Soviets did less well with making the capital secure, though Kabul's security did not continue to deteriorate in 1985 as it had in 1984. This was partially the result of greater investment in infrastructure designed to hamper mujahidin infiltration: gun and tank emplacements on roads entering the capital, an additional series of bunkers surrounding Kabul, antipersonnel mines sown on the eastern approaches. There was also increased use of helicopters at night to pinpoint resistance rocket and mortar positions. Frequent droppings of heat flares by aircraft taking off or landing at Kabul airport demonstrated Soviet fears that local mujahidin possessed a greater number of surface-to-air missiles and gave credence to increased reports country-wide of downed aircraft.

The extent of more temporary security measures within Kabul itself varied widely over the year. Tightest security prevailed following major resistance attacks on Soviet targets and on special occasions such as the anniversaries of the founding of the PDPA (Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan), the Soviet invasion, or the "Saur Revolution." Security for the anniversary ceremonies for the "Revolution" on April 27 involved roadblocks and vehicle checkpoints throughout Kabul, preemptive house-to-house searches, and tens of thousands of regime soldiers, police, and secret service personnel. Except for one bomb out of reach of the authorities, Kabul was relatively quiet. The regime was less fortunate in Kandahar, Charikar, and Faizabad where the resistance mounted disruptive mortar and rocket attacks. In Mazar the headquarters of the secret police was attacked on the eve of the celebrations.

There may have been a somewhat lower frequency of routine attacks on Soviet/regime military targets such as Kabul airport and the Ministry of Defense. However, to a greater extent than ever before the resistance planted bombs and used mortars and rockets against regime and Soviet targets well inside the capital. Life became more dangerous for Soviets inside Kabul. On at least three occasions Soviet civilians were stabbed on the streets of Kabul before curfew. In late March, Soviet soldiers and shoppers in the affluent Share Nau bazaar and the shopping center near the Soviet Mikrorayon apartment complex near the airport were killed by bombs. An even larger bomb near Mikrorayon exploded with fatal effect on July 10. Among other installations bombed were the Soviet-staffed Polytechnic University, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Soviet military hospital.

Beginning in April, the resistance began using rockets more frequently inside Kabul. The Soviet Embassy compound was attacked on at least two occasions in July, and took a dozen hits during three attacks in September. For the first time the Soviets, using multiple rocket launchers, returned fire from inside the compound rather than relying only on extensive outside patrols and emplacements. In greater numbers than 1984, rockets also fell on Kabul's wealthier—and usually more secure—neighborhoods which house government offices, secret police hang-outs, and regime officials as well as foreign embassies and diplomats. The rockets are relatively low-explosive and have a small killing radius. They tend mainly to have the effect of announcing loudly to Kabulis that the war is not distant from the center of Soviet power. Even noisier and more spectacular reminders were provided by resistance operations such as two sustained attacks on Kabul airport in July and an explosion that rocked the city when the mujahidin blew up a major Soviet ammunition dump that same month.

The extent of resistance pressure on the capital can also be seen in the numerous and extensive Soviet air and ground operations in adjacent areas: Paghman to the northwest, the Shomali region to the north, and the Logar Valley to the south. Though Paghman is only a few miles from Kabul, the Soviets have been unable to do more than temporarily suppress resistance control of the area and its use as a mujahidin base for attacks targeted on the capital's west side. The Soviets clearly understand the linkage: on several occasions during the summer, Soviet multiple rocket launchers opened up on Paghman at the first sign of attack on targets in western Kabul. Regime claims that Paghman has been cleansed of "counterrevolutionaries and bandits"—asserted about six times a year—are a standing joke in Kabul.

The Soviets continued frequent bombing of Paghman and its villages, destroying fields and livestock. The result has been to partially depopulate

the Paghman area and to swell Kabul's refugee population during major attacks. The same policy has been continued throughout the Shomali and the Logar Valley. According to local residents and foreigners who have been there, the Logar Valley has suffered even greater depopulation from years of savage Soviet bombings. Nonetheless, the Logar mujahidin's ability to attack Soviet/regime military convoys with punishing effect has led to greater use of the alternate route to Paktia via Jalalabad.

Regime Military Forces

Regime military forces remained a major problem for the Soviets in 1985. As before, neither the fighting ability nor the loyalty of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) forces can be assumed by the regime or the Soviets. This was dramatically illustrated at Shindand airbase in June when air force officers sabotaged and destroyed 20 aircraft in what was probably the largest single loss of aircraft in the war. A month later air force personnel defected to Pakistan with two Mi-24D helicopters. The unreliability of regime military forces was probably a major reason for Soviet forces taking a more direct role in fighting against the mujahidin in 1985 and abandoning the pretext of joint Soviet/regime operations.

Though increasingly extreme, regime conscription efforts in 1985 apparently did not add to the size of the DRA military, largely because of widespread individual and group desertions. The military continues to be a major source of weapons and intelligence for the resistance. The regime's unending conscription efforts also serve the resistance in less direct ways. The pressure of roaming press gangs in Kabul and provincial cities reinforces the alienation of the Afghan people from the Soviets and their client regime. Recently forcibly drafted young men, often sent without training to high conflict areas, are the most likely to desert, a significant proportion becoming mujahidin. Moreover, conscription undermines the efficacy of institutions such as Kabul University for Soviet socialization and creation of cadres. In 1985 Kabul University did not announce the male/female composition of the entering class, giving credibility to reports that there were well under a hundred new male students.

The Secret Police

The military has deteriorated under the Soviets, but the KGB-trained secret police, the KHAD (Persian acronym for State Information Service), has flourished to the point where it probably rivals the military services in size. Recruitment is not an apparent problem. Exemption from conscription is a major incentive as are a pay scale ten times greater than ministry clerical workers, weapons, and access to cars, liquor, prostitutes, and ex-

tortion money. There is little evidence of ideological commitment among KHAD agents, but the secret police are not as prone as the military to defection or cooperation with the resistance. While KHAD installations are attacked and suspected KHAD officers and informers often assassinated, being in KHAD is probably safer than being in the military.

Major Military Operations

A manifest Soviet goal in 1985 was the disruption of resistance supply lines. However, the year's major Soviet campaigns were fought in areas where resistance activity seriously threatened Soviet and regime interests. In each case, minimum Soviet goals were temporarily realized, but without apparent lasting effect on mujahidin strength or logistics.

The Siege of Barikot

The regime has long maintained and the resistance long besieged the garrison in Barikot in Kunar Province near the Pakistan border. Early in the year the mujahidin successfully attacked and turned back a major Soviet/regime armored column trying to force passage to Barikot. Resistance attacks increased and by April all regime installations in the area were under attack. The Soviet response began with heavy bombing of the Konar Valley and its side valleys in May followed by a ground operation involving an estimated 10,000 Soviet and regime troops.

In a pattern that was to become familiar in 1985, the Soviets used more heliborne troops and elite commandos (*Spetsnaz*) for assaults on high ground mujahidin positions where they often encountered stiff resistance and took heavy casualties. The column reached Barikot in two weeks, but soon withdrew. While the prospect that the garrison might fall was a major reason for the campaign, the Soviets probably also wanted to cut resistance supply lines early in the year. However, they did not fortify new positions, or leave extra troops, but only mined the garrison area to hamper infiltration and discourage deserters. The effects of the Konar campaign were temporary and Barikot was soon invested once again by the resistance.

Panjsher

The effects, and limitations, of the seventh Soviet assault on the Panjsher Valley in spring 1984 became evident in 1985. By limiting Panjsher Valley leader Ahmad Shah Mas'ud's base to the upper Valley, the Soviets seemed to have found the problem of maintaining the vital ground link between Kabul and the USSR more manageable. Mas'ud was, however, able to strike against the highway. In late March a sixty-vehicle convoy was vir-

tually wiped out and there were further successful attacks in midsummer and late autumn. On numerous occasions during the year the Soviets had to mount air strikes and ground sweeps all along the Shomali from Panjsher to Kabul. In October, Soviet forces cleared remaining structures and trees along the highway on both sides of the Salang Pass and mined stretches alongside the highway.

Increased convoy security aside, Panjsher VII did not destroy Mas'ud's organization or its ability to cause major problems for the Soviets. In 1985 Mas'ud dictated the tempo of fighting in the Valley and succeeded in the first resistance capture of a significant regime garrison. Mas'ud's forces had kept pressure on Soviet and regime garrisons and supply lines in the Valley throughout the winter, increasing operations in the spring. Attacks were further escalated during the Soviet offensive in the Konar Valley through which run supply routes important to the Panjsher. In mid-June Mas'ud's fighters took the Peshgor garrison, capturing 700 regime soldiers and large quantities of weapons and ammunition. In another blow to the regime's self-esteem, an army general was killed in the engagement. Besides the military skills and experience of Panjsheri mujahidin, the capture of Peshgor was made possible by low morale within the garrison, large-scale desertions, and, probably, inside information on the garrison's defenses.

Peshgor was reoccupied by regime forces, but only after some 10,000 Soviet and regime troops were hastily thrown into the Valley. Soviet casualties and material losses in side valley clashes were reportedly unusually high. Regime casualties and defections were also high: the elite 444th Commandos were virtually wiped out during and following air drops in the upper valley. After campaign forces were withdrawn from the Valley, mujahidin once again began to attack outposts and cut supply lines there.

Kandahar, Herat

Observers generally agree that fighting increased in and around Kandahar and Herat in 1985 compared to 1984, largely on resistance initiative. Increased mujahidin pressure on regime installations in Kandahar and against the nearby Soviet airbase did not lead to a division-size operation. As in 1984, the Soviet response continued to be frequent ground sweeps and bombing/shelling of resistance areas within the city and the villages near Kandahar. In Herat, however, the Soviet reaction was quite different.

In June mujahidin attacks on regime installations in and around Herat escalated and a major regime outpost in the city center was mined and destroyed. By July the resistance was close to pushing regime forces out of the city and increasingly able to dictate the locale and tempo of fighting.

The Soviets responded by mounting a large-scale operation which included ground sweeps and bombing of the center of Herat. Reportedly a coalition of mujahidin groups lead by Ismail Khan of the Jamiat-i-Islami coordinated the operations, which threatened the last semblance of regime/Soviet control in Herat. In a province where infighting and occasional defection had characterized the mujahidin previously, such cooperation is extraordinary.

Khost

Paktia Province was again the scene of heavy fighting in 1985. Like the Konar Valley, essential resistance lines of supply traversing Paktia were the target of Soviet and regime operations. In late summer a coalition of mujahidin groups increased attacks on the Khost garrison and its outposts, many of which were overrun. Also attacked were units of tribal militia whose dubious loyalty had been sought by the regime. As with the Barikot, the Soviets were faced with the possibility that a strategic regime garrison would be captured. They responded again with a major air and ground operation. Fighting raged through August and casualties on both sides were reportedly very high. Though the operation momentarily eased pressure on Khost and disrupted mujahidin supply lines, the garrison is once again besieged by mujahidin.

The Soviets were not able to break resistance strength in Paktia, nor did the mujahidin capture the Khost garrison. While militarily inconclusive, the Khost attack was the largest coordinated resistance operation in Paktia, which is justly renowned as the home of Afghanistan's most fractious, touchy, and uncooperative tribesmen. Following familiar historical patterns, the DRA regime has attempted to neutralize the tribes by subsidies and manipulation of traditional rivalries. While the regime's policy has generally been a failure, there were some signs of a willingness to strike a separate peace in parts of Paktia. The targeting of regime-supported tribal militias during the mujahidin attack on Khost may serve to show the dangers of attempting to opt out of the war in Paktia.

Northern Afghanistan

Though information tends to be incomplete, there appear not to have been major Soviet/regime military operations in northern Afghanistan. Contrary to the general trend, the level of fighting appears to have decreased in Balkh province and around its capital and the north's major city, Mazar-e-Sharif. Mujahidin still control the countryside and have been able to mount occasional daring attacks inside Mazar. Nonetheless, there were fewer Soviet air attacks and ground sweeps in Balkh province. Though

reports are fragmentary, the level of fighting in the northeastern provinces of Kundoz and Badakhshan appears to have remained high.

Soviet Military Trends

Emphasis on the temporary effects of major Soviet campaigns may give the false impression that Soviet efforts to complicate mujahidin logistics were totally unavailing in 1985. In fact, Soviet tactics appear to have become more sophisticated and effective. Air attacks on resistance caravans became more frequent and precise, implying greater intelligence on mujahidin movements. Ambushes of mujahidin caravans by small units of *Spetsnaz* commandos positioned days in advance by helicopter also increased. Such stratagems were used not only in border provinces, but also near Kabul where Soviet reaction time appears to have improved. A possible new development may be foreshadowed by reports from Paktia that the Soviets are constructing company-size concrete fortifications on high points near key passes. Apparently all materials for construction, provisions, personnel, and weapons are being helicoptered in, presumably obviating the need for ground supply. The clear aim is interdicting mujahidin supply routes.

At current troop levels (usually around 120,000, but ranging to 150,000 at times of major campaigns), it is unlikely that the Soviets will be able to seriously disrupt resistance logistics even with new and sophisticated tactics. Some of the Soviet gain appears to have been offset by resistance flexibility in changing caravan routes and patterns and by increasing mujahidin skill in counter-ambush. Yet in 1985 Soviet efforts probably resulted in some increase in captured weapons and supplies and greater transportation costs for the resistance.

While the majority of its personnel are resident in Kabul, KHAD is active in provincial cities where there is some Soviet/regime control and in the countryside. In 1985, mujahidin in various parts of the country noted that the Soviets are quicker to respond to resistance operations and more aggressive in setting ambushes. KHAD's system of village informers probably provides the intelligence necessary for such operations. As will be discussed subsequently, KHAD is probably the key agent in increasingly sophisticated work with the local populace to neutralize areas of Afghanistan.

Social and Demographic Trends

Continuing Rural Depopulation

The Soviets have continued, and perhaps intensified, their policy of bombing civilian population centers in rural Afghanistan in areas of high resist-

ance activity. In practice this means areas near major highways and roads, all provinces bordering Pakistan, and the nexus of villages that surround provincial capitals. A few areas, such as central Hazarajat, were relatively untroubled by bombing or ground operations in 1985.

As the level of fighting in 1985 demonstrates, this policy has not resulted in driving a wedge between the mujahidin and rural Afghans nor in suppressing resistance activity in strategic areas. However, it resulted in significant depopulation of large areas of the countryside. Reports by foreign medical personnel and journalists who have traveled in Afghanistan confirm that village after village has been abandoned around Herat and Kandahar and in areas such as the Logar Valley, the Konar Valley, and the once verdant Shomali region. In a country where barely 15% of the land is arable, the depopulation of Afghanistan's fertile river valleys and plains is a development with as yet incalculable consequences for the war and the future of the country.

Rise and Fall of Provincial Capitals

Though external emigration continues, in 1985 Afghanistan's rural refugees moved primarily to Kabul and certain provincial capitals. But not all provincial capitals have increased in population. In particular, Kandahar and Herat—once the second and third most populous cities in Afghanistan—have lost population and have become less important than in preinvasion Afghanistan. Years of savage bombing have destroyed or severely damaged the majority of the shops, homes, and mosques in these two cities. Kandahar probably now has fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. All accounts agree that the cities are virtual ghost towns: bazaars are open only a few hours a day, noncombatants are often caught in crossfire, electricity is available only with expensive private generators, and there are virtually no social services.

It is unlikely that the importance of Kandahar and Herat will further decrease given that they are strategically located astride Afghanistan's main highway and near major Soviet bases. Their reduced populations remain implacably opposed to the Soviets and have increased, not decreased, attacks on remaining symbols of the regime and nearby Soviet targets. As 1985 has again shown, the Soviets will not allow the resistance to push the last remnants of the DRA regime from major provincial cities. Kabul and certain provincial capitals have grown with the influx of internal refugees. As is generally known, the populations of Mazar and Jalalabad have increased greatly. Kundoz and Maimana reportedly have also swelled above preinvasion population levels. Though Mazar and Jalalabad are considered more secure in 1985 than Kabul, the security sit-

uation in and around Kundoz where mujahidin are very active is more uncertain.

Resistance Trends

In 1985 the mujahidin inside Afghanistan appeared to concentrate more on the war with the Soviets than on factional fighting among groups. There were fewer reports of violence between resistance bands or of unwillingness to allow non-local groups the right of passage.

This appears to have been true even in the Hazarajat where there was substantial infighting in 1984. It is now clear that the once-dominant Shura (*Shura-i-itefaq-i-islami*), which was allied with traditional land owners, has been supplanted by pro-Khomeini groups, primarily Nasr (*Sazman-i-Nasr*) and the Sepah (*Sepah-e-Pasdaran*). Unlike 1984, there appears to have been little fighting between the pro-Iranian groups and there are accounts of a written agreement to cooperate. There also were few attacks on the Soviets in central Hazarajat. This may reflect the lack of opportunity since the Soviets have largely neglected the area and are present only in Bamivan. However, according to foreign travelers, Nasr is active against the Soviets in part of Balkh province and cooperates with other groups in the region. Though subject to tolls on weapons and supplies, non-Shia mujahidin groups have been able to travel the Hazarajat without opposition.

There were scattered reports of fighting between mujahidin sparked by local defections. In April at the time of the regime's fake Loya Jirgah (grand council), Ismattullah Muslim Achakzai, who operated in Kandahar Province, defected to the regime with between 100 and 200 fighters. Ismattullah is a Durrani pashtun and his defection reportedly caused bad blood between the Durrani and the Ghilzai and led to attacks on mujahidin from his group who had not gone over.

If the resistance within Afghanistan focused more on attacking the Soviets and less on intramural squabbling, so has there been a trend toward greater cooperation and coordination. As in previous years mujahidin from a variety of local and Peshawar-based organizations cooperated in resistance attacks in and around Kabul. Other examples of large-scale mujahidin activity in 1985 were seen in Herat, Konar, and Paktia where the resistance dictated the timing and locale of major Soviet operations. There are also increasing reports from various parts of Afghanistan, including Shomali and Wardak provinces, of weekly or monthly *jirgahs* to coordinate plans by local commandants regardless of Peshawar affiliation.

Conventional wisdom is that the resistance consists of ethnic, regional, tribal, and subtribal groups willing to fight the Soviets and the regime in

their home area but incapable of cooperating with other groups that may consist of ethnic, tribal, or regional rivals. No one familiar with Afghans would dispute that their reputation for fractiousness, independence, and stubbornness is well earned. Yet the crucible of war has begun to change the sociology of Afghanistan and of the resistance.

In the early years of the war, the resistance in the countryside was largely in the hands of traditional leaders whose position usually derived from age, membership in elite families, religious position, wealth (usually land), and effectiveness as an intermediary with provincial or Kabul authorities. Except for Islam, leaders' allegiances were narrowly defined to include only a particular village or valley, and its tribe or other ethnic kinship network. Many of these local leaders have been killed, have fled the country, or do not have the physical stamina necessary to lead an active mujahidin group. Whatever the reason, local leaders and mujahidin commanders tend now to be younger, and they have begun to define their own loyalties on a national basis.

There are greater signs of a willingness to cooperate and coordinate actions across ethnic, regional, and Peshawar group affiliations. Among the mujahidin commanders inside Afghanistan who are effective in operating along such lines would be Ismail Khan, who coordinated the effective campaign in Herat, Panjsheri leader Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, and Jalaludin Haqani, who coordinated the attack on the Khost garrison. Prior to his death in February, Jamiullah of Balkh Province would have figured in this list. The phenomenon is not limited to commanders who coordinate large operations: there are increasing reports from several provinces of monthly *jirgahs* of small group leaders who meet to compare notes regardless of ethnic group or Peshawar affiliation.

In May the seven major resistance parties based in Peshawar formed a single alliance to speak for the resistance internationally—the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahidin. There may or may not be a linkage between increased cooperation among resistance groups within Afghanistan and the younger leadership and social changes occurring in Afghanistan. While Peshawar squabbling occasionally results in bad blood between affiliated mujahidin in Afghanistan, cooperation in Afghanistan has always been greater than in Peshawar. There is no question, however, that the majority of Afghans welcome the possibility of unity in the international voice of the resistance. The alliance is seen by many as the last, best chance of the Peshawar groups to serve the cause of national liberation internationally as well as the fighters and people within Afghanistan who have resisted the Soviets during six years of occupation.

