Almost a year has passed since the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. To all parties involved, the year has been costly. Afghanistan's population has been faced with severe hardships; more than a million refugees have fled to Iran and Pakistan; a state of war governs life in the cities, with curfews and food shortages; badly needed experts, from diplomats to airline personnel, have left the country; and substantial civilian and partisan casualties have been sustained. As for the USSR, its standing in the Third World has suffered from its first direct invasion of a Third World country since World War II. Relations with the West have also worsened, and embargoes have been imposed. Despite the costs of maintaining some 85,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan and of incurring as many as 15,000 casualties among these forces, Moscow has not yet succeeded in subduing the Afghans. Indeed, only if one assumes that the sole purpose of the intervention was to avert the imminent emergence of a hostile regime in Kabul or to get rid of Hafizullah Amin, can Soviet strategy be deemed to have achieved its ends.

What factors led to the Soviet effort to take control of Afghanistan? What is the Soviet strategy for pacification of the country and for minimizing external support for Afghan partisans? What is the nature of the Afghan opposition, and what are the prospects for unity or division among partisan groups? The answers to these questions provide some basis for hazarding an assessment of the possible future course of the Afghan conflict.

The Political Context

The Soviet invasion marked a major escalation in the USSR's long and persistent involvement in Afghanistan. As a result, today it is essentially the Soviets who govern Afghanistan—deciding on major appointments, setting policies for dealing with the national insurgency, and determining major internal and external policies (including major speeches by Afghan representatives at the United Nations). What circumstances brought this major shift?

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan increased substantially after April 1978, when a coalition of the two rival factions of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) overthrew the Mohammad Daoud regime in a military coup. Both factions, Parcham (headed by Babrak Karmal) and Khalq (headed by Nur Mohammad Taraki), were Marxist-Leninist and sympathetic to the Soviet Union, but on other matters, they had major conflicts. Less than three months after the coup, these dissensions had reached the level of a total break, from which Khalq emerged victorious. Some of Parcham's leaders were jailed; others, including Karmal, formed a rival group in exile in Eastern Europe.

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3 Soviet control over Afghanistan's diplomacy was reported to the author by a private source.
Khalq embarked on a radical shift in the country’s external and internal policies. Externally, the new government moved Afghanistan decidedly closer to the Soviet Union. Internally, fundamental reforms were introduced. Some of these reforms, such as laws dealing with marriage and the situation of women, were long overdue. However, the reforms were badly planned and were combined with unpopular symbolic acts such as the adoption of a red flag. Despite regime denials, these acts convinced many traditional Afghans of the Marxist nature of the government and contributed to large-scale popular opposition. Over time, this opposition turned into a major antiregime insurgency.

As Afghanistan’s internal situation began to deteriorate seriously and Islamic fundamentalists took power in Iran, the Soviet Union started to look for a way to salvage the Afghan situation. Their initial plan was to eliminate Hafizullah Amin, Khalq’s strong man; blame the excesses of the regime on him; abandon some of the more unpopular policies; and establish a broadly based government, including Parchamis. This plan failed and resulted in the elimination of Taraki by Amin in September 1979.

While Amin tried to salvage the internal situation and even improve relations with the West and Pakistan, the Soviets began to lay the groundwork for their invasion. Moscow gave refuge to those who had backed Taraki against Amin, stepped up contact with the Parchami exiles in Eastern Europe and brought Babrak Karmal to Moscow, increased the Soviet military presence inside Afghanistan by persuading Amin that he needed greater Soviet assistance in the conflict with the Afghan guerrillas, and bolstered Soviet military capabilities in areas of the USSR near the Afghan border. These actions were clear warning signals of a major Soviet military move against Afghanistan’s President Amin. After the invasion, several Western leaders expressed surprise at this Soviet move. In fact, however, information about the Soviet Union’s preparatory steps was available to Western governments and to the public through press leaks.

But much of the international community, including the United States, either misinterpreted or ignored these signals for a great deal of the period prior to the invasion. There is no evidence than any major steps were taken by other states to induce a change in Soviet calculations and plans.

On December 27, 1979, the USSR made its move. On the pretext of an invitation from a regime that had allegedly overthrown Amin (and whose leader, Babrak Karmal, was not even in Afghanistan), the Soviet
Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan

Union entered the country in force. Soviet troops air-lifted to Kabul captured major military installations, toppled Amin (who was killed in the confusion), and installed Karmal in power. Other forces moved to seize military bases in Mazar-e Sharif, Gardez, Jalalabad, Qandahar, Qonduz, and Herat (see map). 11

Soviet Strategy in Afghanistan

Once in Afghanistan, the Soviets initiated a multi-pronged pacification strategy. This strategy has included a substantial emphasis on Islam; a major propaganda effort to blame the Afghan crisis on the United States and China; an attempt to keep the rival factions of the pro-Soviet PDP together; an effort to moderate some unpopular economic policies; an attempt to build a loyal Afghan armed force; the use of some 85,000 Soviet troops against a variety of religious, ideological, regional, and tribal opposition; and persistent intimidation of neighboring countries to prevent them from providing the Afghan opposition support and sanctuary.

Islam in Soviet tactics. Since the invasion, the Soviets have been engaged in a major ideological effort to win popular support for the new Kabul regime. They recognize the political power of Islamic revival in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and have tried to prevent it from taking an anti-Soviet character and to give it an anti-US orientation. In Afghanistan, emphasis on Islam has been a major part of the Kabul government's official statements. Karmal's all-red flag has been changed to one featuring the Islamic color of green. The government has established an office of "Islamic teachings," under Karmal's direction. Some religious leaders jailed under Amin were released after the invasion. Kabul's new rulers have also sponsored a series of meetings with local religious leaders from various parts of the country and have organized a national conference of "religious scholars and clergy" to persuade them that "respect for [the] sacred religion of Islam" is part of the government's program. 12

Babak Karmal himself has tried to outdo Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran in "dedication" to Islam. Each of Karmal's speeches begins with a reference to Allah and is interspersed with quotations from the Koran, chants of "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great), and references to Afghanistan's Islamic tradition. 13

Karmal has accused the United States, among others, of only pretending to be friendly to Islam:

My compatriots, it is the countries of America, Britain, and China who are falsely talking in the name of Islam. Is it not written in the holy Koran that the Jews no longer have the right to own a home? Is it not written that the Jews are the enemies of Islam? The US, Britain, and China, who are strengthening Israel, have become the friends of the Jews. 14

Karmal has also argued that true Islam exists in Soviet Central Asia, and offered to pay expenses for Afghan ulemas and clergy who wished to see for themselves. 15 A delegation of 88 Afghan religious leaders was sent to the Soviet Union to "visit

13 See, for example, Karmal's speech to Afghan elders, broadcast on Radio Kabul in Dari on June 18, 1980, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: South Asia (Washington, DC—hereafter FBIS-SAS), June 20, 1980, pp. C/1-5.
14 Ibid., p. C/2.
15 See Karmal's address to a conference of Afghan ulemas and clergy on July 1, as broadcast by Kabul Radio in Pashto, July 2, 1980, in FBIS-SAS, July 7, 1980, p. C/3.
mosques, miscellaneous places and to hold meetings with Muslims of the USSR" to see for themselves that the USSR is Islamic. Karmal has even said that the "date of December 27 represents the intervention of God Almighty," and has called the Soviet "help" for the Afghans "an act of God." A propaganda blitz. Since the invasion, Soviet media have paid enormous attention to events in Afghanistan. The same themes are repeated, and the analysis is predictable. The goal has been to win popular support for Soviet actions, both in the USSR and in Afghanistan. This effort has become especially important as the military difficulties have increased.

Moscow's 42-hour-a-week broadcasts to Afghanistan in Dari and Pashto (the country's two main languages) and the Soviet-controlled Afghan propaganda machinery have tried to convince the Afghans and others that only a "limited Soviet military contingent" was sent to Afghanistan and then only at the repeated request of the "legitimate Afghan government"; that the overthrow and execution of Amin were carried out "by the Afghan army itself, supported by broad strata of the population"; and that the sole function of Soviet "assistance" was to defend Afghanistan against outside attacks. Those accused by Moscow of attacking Afghanistan include the United States, China, Pakistan, Egypt, and Israel. President Amin is declared to have been a CIA agent. The US response to the Afghan invasion was described as part of a continuous effort by Washington to sabotage détente, to revive the cold war, and to take up a "hegemonist course." President Carter's State of the Union message in January 1980 was characterized as a declaration that the United States had the right "to intervene in practically any region of the globe where they see fit." In a February 1980 speech, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev argued that the "US and Chinese interference in Afghanistan" was a threat not only to that country, but to the USSR as well—a theme that has been persistent in Soviet propaganda.

President Karmal has charged that the US and its allies had "worked out" a plan "so that 3-4 million people of Afghanistan would have been killed. Their designs," said Karmal, "were to have Afghanistan torn to pieces and divided into several parts. One part was to go to Pakistan, one part to China, and Kabul and its surrounding area were to go to Amin.... The Soviets have asserted on many occasions that their troops will be withdrawn as soon as the causes for their presence (outside interference) are eliminated. Delay in the departure of the troops is blamed especially on the US. (Soviet behavior belies such assertions. Moscow has rejected as "illogical" the British-sponsored proposal of the European Common Market for neutralization of Afghanistan with international guarantees if the Soviets withdraw, and has refused to enter into negotiations about the fate of Afghanistan with a three-person committee appointed by the Islamic Conference. It has shown a similar attitude toward several Iranian proposals. And, as we shall see below, the Soviet military presence shows no signs of being a short-term phenomenon.)

In their propaganda efforts within Afghanistan, the Soviets and the Karmal regime have focused their attention particularly on Afghan youth. A new weekly publication known as Darafshe Jawanan (Youth Flag) has appeared, aimed at gaining support among the youth. The government has established a new school named the "Faculty of Workers" to train Afghan youth ideologically, and hundreds of Afghan students have been sent to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. One important Afghan-Soviet undertaking is an agreement to send some 350 ninth graders a year to the Soviet Union for "vocational training."

Elusive PDP unity. A major Soviet goal since the occupation has been to harmonize relations between the rival PDP factions—Khalq and Parcham—and to broaden the base of support for the regime by bringing-

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17 See Karmal's June 18, 1980, speech, loc. cit.
18 Pravda (Moscow), Jan. 7, 1980.
21 Ibid., Jan. 18, 1980.
23 Ibid., Jan. 25, 1980.
25 Izvestiya (Moscow), Feb. 25, 1980.
27 Amin has also been accused of establishing contact with one of the main religious opposition groups, the Islamic Party, and of plotting to carry out another coup against the PDP. See Kabul New Times, Jan. 22 and 27, 1980.
28 Brezhnev has stated: "The United States loudly demands a withdrawal of Soviet troops when in fact, they do everything to eliminate this possibility. Let the USA, together with Afghanistan's neighbors, guarantee this [stopping outside interference] and then the need for Soviet military assistance will disappear." Izvestiya, Feb. 25, 1980.
29 Ibid., Feb. 21, 1980.
Sanguinary Amin band ousted

United PDPA ends reign of terror; murderer meets his fate

The January 1, 1980, issue of Kabul New Times, announcing the installation of a new regime in Afghanistan headed by Babrak Karmal, of the Parcham wing of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Pictured below Karmal were leading figures of the Revolutionary Council, including Assadullah Sarwari and Lt. Col. Mohammad Aslam Watanjar of the PDP's Khalq faction.

Part of page 1 of the January 1, 1980, issue of Kabul New Times, announcing the installation of a new regime in Afghanistan headed by Babrak Karmal, of the Parcham wing of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Pictured below Karmal were leading figures of the Revolutionary Council, including Assadullah Sarwari and Lt. Col. Mohammad Aslam Watanjar of the PDP's Khalq faction.

ing some nonparty members into government positions. Babrak Karmal, upon being installed as President, claimed the leadership of a united party. Several Khalqis, especially those who had been loyal to Taraki, were appointed to high positions in the regime. These included Assadullah Sarwari, who was named First Deputy Prime Minister and Vice President of the Revolutionary Council; Sayed Mohammad Gulabzoi, Minister of the Interior and Member of the Central Committee of the PDP; Lt. Colonel Sher Jan Mazdooryar, Minister of Transport and member of the Central Committee of the PDP; and Lt. Colonel Mohammad Aslam Watanjar, Minister of Communications and member of the Central Committee.

However, there are many indications that the Soviets have not been successful in effecting complete integration of the two groups. Factional conflicts have been reported at all levels of the civil and military bureaucracy. At the highest level, Sarwari—like Karmal himself in 1978—has been dismissed and relegated to the post of ambassador to a pro-Soviet capital, in this case Ulan Bator. There have also been accounts of feuds and shoot-outs between the

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28 There are various roots of the traditional conflicts between Khalq and Parcham. For one, Khalq is largely dominated by persons of Pashtun background, whereas Parcham has a greater Tajik representation. Khalq has also tended to favor a more radical social and economic program than Parcham. See Zalmay Khalilzad's "The Return of the Great Game: Superpower Rivalry and Domestic Turmoil in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey," Los Angeles, CA, California Seminar on International Security and Foreign Policy, 1980.

33 The Economist (London), Aug. 30, 1980. Sarwari was replaced by an unknown Khalqi figure, Abdorrashid Arian.
two factions at lower levels of the military. For example, the appointment of a Parchami officer to replace a Khalqi one to command the 14th Armored Division in Ghazni reportedly contributed to that division's mutiny in August 1980.\(^3^4\) In October, there were reports of shootings between the rival factions in the 4th and 15th armored brigades in the Puli-charkhi garrison near Kabul.\(^3^5\)

Many Parchamis who suffered under Khalqi rule seem bent on taking revenge on those who had supported Amin and even Taraki.\(^3^6\) For their part, Khalqis, who reportedly constituted two thirds of the PDP civilian membership and four fifths of the party's military wing,\(^3^7\) regard Parchamis as usurpers and unqualified to rule.

Internal conflict has demoralized the PDP and further complicated the crisis of legitimacy and security for the Kabul regime. It is also a persistent headache for the Soviets. Too close an identification by Moscow with the Parchamis might bring Khalqis to unite in active opposition to the Soviet presence in the country.\(^3^8\) The Soviet Union, on the other hand, may be trying to maintain ties with the Khalq wing as a reserve should Karmal fail to cope with the situation in Afghanistan. There is, for example, nothing to prevent Moscow from trotting Sarwari back from Ulan Bator or putting some other Khalq leader at the helm in Kabul should circumstances dictate.

Karmal's effort to broaden his regime's base has also failed. Initially, he argued that his government would be based upon a "national united front under the leadership of the working class." He also promised the establishment of "revolutionary tranquility" and elimination of arbitrary arrest and executions, and assured Afghans that in his "New Model Revolution" citizens would be allowed to form "progressive and patriotic parties."\(^3^9\) Karmal stated, too, that a Loya Jirgah (Grand National Assembly) would be called to ratify a new constitution for the country, and he appointed more than a dozen nonparty members to high government positions.\(^4^0\)

Like the other elements of the Soviet strategy, this base-broadening has not been successful. For one thing, the establishment of opposition groups has not been allowed. For another, Afghanistan remains in a state of war, with the large majority of the population opposed to the Soviet occupation, an opposition expressed with varying degrees of activism. Karmal's efforts to win support have fallen largely on deaf ears because of the presence of Soviet troops. Until or unless the troops depart, the government in Kabul will suffer from a lack of legitimacy.

**Economic policies.** The Soviet-installed regime has attempted to win popular support by undoing some of the "radical" policies introduced by the previous government in the economic realm and by encouraging the private sector through extension of credit and increased payment for goods delivered to the government by private firms. Karmal has argued that "it is not our duty to practice socialism."\(^4^1\) According to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the government has returned "illegally confiscated" capital and shares. In addition, it has permitted direct business links with foreign firms under state control, and has lowered customs tariffs.\(^4^2\) To encourage private-sector participation in trade, the government has reportedly turned 20 state-controlled import associations over to private merchants.\(^4^3\) Afghan sources claim that imports by the private sector during the first four months of 1980 totaled US$88.3 million, an increase of more than 50 percent over imports of US$55.6 million in the comparable period of 1979.\(^4^4\)

Afghanistan's main trading partners reportedly continue to be the Soviet Union, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, and India. In the early part of 1980, trade with Japan was running at three times the level for the comparable 1979 period. As for the USSR, one of its first acts after invading Afghanistan was to announce conclusion of a new agreement with the Karmal government to triple the export of natural gas to the Soviet Union (to 2.3 billion cubic feet a year). As in the past, the Soviets are getting Afghan gas at a price far below the international level. (After 1973, Iran charged the Soviets more than 50 cents a 1000 cubic feet, while as late as 1976, the USSR was paying only 34 cents a 1000 cubic feet to the Afghans.) It is estimated that at present the Soviets are giving US$2.83 a 1000 cubic feet for Afghan gas.

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\(^3^4\)Ibid., Aug. 8, 1980.


\(^3^6\)Among the Khalqis executed were 10 associates of Amin, including his brother and nephew. Ibid., June 19, 1980.

\(^3^7\)The Economist, Aug. 8, 1980.

\(^3^8\)There is already evidence of some isolated Khalqi opposition to the occupation. The New York Times, Oct. 16, 1980.


\(^4^1\)Kabul New Times, Jan. 1, 1980.


\(^4^4\)Shchedrov interview, loc. cit.
which is substantially below the US$3.97 Moscow has offered the Iranians. The Iranians, in turn, have been demanding more than US$5.00 a 1000 cubic feet for their natural gas.\textsuperscript{45} (The natural gas agreement, incidentally, lends some weight to the argument that "hunger for Afghanistan's important and strategic minerals was an incentive for the Soviet invasion and attempt to annex Kabul to the Soviet bloc."\textsuperscript{46})

Occupied by Soviet forces and in a state of civil war, Afghanistan continues to face major economic problems which have contributed to the regime's continued unpopularity. There are serious shortages of essential items, such as wheat, rice, and meat, in many parts of the country.\textsuperscript{47} Remittances from Afghan workers abroad have declined. Work on several development projects financed by international organizations such as the Asia Development Bank has been suspended. Many months of turmoil, a Soviet military strategy that involves the destruction of villages harboring partisans, and the departure of many agricultural workers to Pakistan have contributed to a breakdown in the country's agriculture, a process set in motion earlier by a poorly planned land reform. Some have speculated that starving the population in the areas of greatest resistance through destruction of the region's agriculture might be a calculated Soviet strategy.\textsuperscript{48}

Opposition to the Soviets has included shopkeeper strikes, the most important of which took place in February in Kabul and Herat. There have also been such strikes in Qandahar and other towns.\textsuperscript{49} The insurgents often interrupt land transport. One road that has been frequently cut is the one linking Kabul to Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{50} In addition, Ariana Afghan Airlines recently suffered the defection of nearly 250 personnel, including the country's chief pilot.\textsuperscript{51} All these factors cumulatively have increased the country's economic problems, resulting in shortages and substantially higher prices.

\textbf{Building loyal Afghan armed forces.} A major element of the post-invasion Soviet policy has been to reconstitute an Afghan armed force of pre-1978 size.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Asiaweek} (Hong Kong), May 16, 1980.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Business Week} (New York, NY), Sept. 29, 1980.
This analysis also argues that the Soviet-sponsored coup of 1978 was itself designed to halt President Daoud's attempts to weaken Afghanistan's ties—including economic ones—with Moscow and to improve ties with Iran and the West. The basis for this judgment is a three-year-old geological study by Soviet experts that showed Afghanistan to possess substantial quantities of copper, oil, gas, barite, bauxite, beryl, iron ore, fluorospar, coal, and chrome ore. According to \textit{Business Week}, this study has been translated by the UN Development Program.
\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Afghanistan Times} (Los Angeles, CA), March 1980, and \textit{Asiaweek}, Feb. 15, 1980.
\textsuperscript{48}See, for example, \textit{The Wall Street Journal} (New York, NY), July 21, 1980.
difficulty in maneuvering in the mountainous terrain that the partisans use as bases for hit-and-run operations against the occupying Soviets and the Kabul regime. Consequently, the Soviets have increasingly deployed helicopter-borne commandos, backed by columns of motorized infantry. Moscow has also employed fighter-bombers to soften up partisan targets ahead of commando strikes. There have been a number of charges that Soviet forces have used napalm, nerve gas, booby traps, antipersonnel cluster bombs (filled with thousands of needle-sharp arrows), and internationally outlawed dum-dum bullets. The

Colonel Abdul Rauf, a former leader in the Afghan Army, who joined the Islamic rebels in Kunar Province with 2,000 men. Before defecting, Rauf called in a Soviet helicopter, which was shot down by rebel forces.

—Steve McCurry/Gamma-Liaison.
new Soviet strategy has caused the destruction of many Afghan villages and has contributed to a substantial increase in the flow of Afghan refugees to Iran and Pakistan.

It has been reported that the Soviets, apparently uncertain of how to contain the counterinsurgency, have called in Cuban and Vietnamese experts to help in the war against the fast-moving Afghan guerrillas.60 Moreover, as the conflict has dragged on, the Soviet Union has gradually brought in “older and more experienced” troops to replace the young and largely inexperienced draftees who make up the bulk of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.61

As of September 1980, the USSR had deployed in Afghanistan some 85,000 men and 320 combat aircraft (including more than 70 Mi-24 helicopters, the weapon most feared by the partisans; more than 100 MiG-21’s; some 30 MiG-23’s; and several Ilyushin bombers).62 In addition, the Soviets maintain a substantial force in Soviet Central Asia near the Afghan border for possible use in Afghanistan.

Initially, the Soviets took control of Afghan military bases in the Kabul area, and at Mazar-e Sharif, Gardez, Jalalabad, Qandahar, Qonduz, and Herat. Later the Soviets divided the country into seven military commands. Moscow’s 201st Motorized Rifle Division, located in Qonduz and Feyzabad in the northeast, is largely responsible for that region’s security. The 16th Motorized Rifle Division, based in Mazar-e Sharif, is responsible for the security of Balkh Province and the surrounding region. The 275th Division, operating out of Jalalabad, is responsible for the east-central region. The 105th Airborne Division and the 360th Motorized Rifle Division are responsible for the security of Kabul and its neighboring areas. The 54th Division (located in Herat) and the 68th Division (stationed at the airbase in nearby Shindand) are responsible for the security of much of western Afghanistan. The 357th Motorized Rifle Division looks after security in Qandahar.63 In each of these military regions, the Soviets have several hundred commando forces as well. Although all such regions have a local PDP leader, they are in fact governed by Soviet generals.64

In addition, it would appear that the war against the Afghan insurgents has given the Soviet Union an opportunity to test in combat a variety of new weapons, including a new type of armored personnel carrier, new helicopters, new assault rifles, and new automatic grenade launchers. See The New York Times, Sept. 11, 1980.

60The Times (London), Sept. 19, 1980.
63Ibid.
64Daily Telegraph (London), Sept. 3, 1980.

Soviet armored personnel carriers at a strategic point along an Afghan road.

—Barrie Penrose/Camera Press.
Other signs of increased Soviet capability for an indefinite stay in Afghanistan include the reported establishment of separate Soviet military headquarters and the construction of permanent underground storage facilities for fuel and ammunition. They are building at least one permanent bridge across the Amu Darya at Termez. They have constructed permanent communication facilities, upgraded Afghan airfields, enlarged existing helicopter gunship maintenance workshops, and begun construction on new airports. They are also reported to be considering plans to construct a railroad in Afghanistan linking Kabul with the Soviet rail system. Finally, to “legitimize” the Soviet presence, Moscow has signed a status-of-forces agreement with the Karmal regime. This agreement is similar to those in effect between the USSR and several East European countries.

**Soviet pressure on Afghanistan’s neighbors.** The USSR has exerted both implicit and explicit pressure on Afghanistan’s neighbors in an attempt to limit their reaction to the Soviet invasion.

The Islamic countries were clearly shocked by the Soviet decision to intervene. Many regarded Moscow’s actions as belying Soviet claims to be a supporter of national liberation movements. In the United Nations and in the Islamic Conference, they condemned the Soviet aggression against a small, nonaligned member of the international community. When various efforts to resolve the crisis on a regional basis came to no avail, the Islamic Conference voted, on January 29, 1980, to suspend Afghanistan from membership until Soviet troops are withdrawn from that country. Pakistan and Iran joined the boycott of the Moscow Olympics.

Some regional actors are even providing limited assistance to the Afghan resistance movement. Saudi Arabia has announced it will extend US$25 million to the insurgents. Pakistan is sheltering more than a million Afghan refugees and is furnishing sanctuary to several partisan groups (see the discussion below). Egypt has reportedly also been providing some military equipment and training to the Afghans.

At the same time, many states in the region, particularly Arab states, tend to view the Afghan crisis as of secondary importance compared to the Palestinian problem. They regard a Soviet role in the Arab-Israeli dispute as beneficial to the cause of the Palestinians and hence do not want to jeopardize relations with Moscow because of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union has played on this sentiment by encouraging the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to seek to mediate between the Kabul regime and several Muslim states. Countries dependent on Moscow for substantial economic and military support, e.g., Syria (one could also mention India), have been careful not to antagonize the Soviet Union in their reactions to the Afghanistan intervention.

Other states have been restrained in their responses out of a feeling of intimidation. This is true of Pakistan and Iran, both of which the Soviets have explicitly warned against helping the Afghan opposition.

Pakistan is particularly critical in this regard. The position that Islamabad takes regarding the Afghan partisans will have an important bearing on the success or failure of Soviet policy in Afghanistan. By continuing to provide sanctuary and limited support for groups fighting the Soviets, Pakistan can be an obstacle to the Soviet pacification strategy. On the other hand, Pakistan could help the Soviet cause if it acted to make things very difficult for the partisans.

Recognizing this, the Soviet Union has applied considerable pressure on Pakistan. Soviet aircraft have frequently violated Pakistan’s airspace, and Moscow has threatened to support political groups inside Pakistan opposed to the government of President Zia-ul-Haq, with an eye toward installing a government that would be hostile toward the Afghan partisans. Several leading members of the opposition Pakistan People’s Party, including Morteza Bhutto, the son of the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, have visited Kabul and New Delhi. There is also the possibility of Soviet support for ethnic nationalists in the Pashtun (Pathan), Baluch, and Sind areas of Pakistan. The Kabul regime has been in touch with opposition groups in these areas, especially those unfriendly to the Afghan partisans, and Karmal has threatened open support for Pakistan’s Baluch and Pashtun nationalists. Finally, the USSR could conceivably

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66 Some PLO members have openly praised Kabul’s Soviet-installed regime. The author heard this expressed in an interview with Dr. Mohammad Ashahir, head of the PLO office in Moscow, broadcast on Radio Moscow’s Persian-language service on Mar. 27, 1980.
68 According to Pakistan President Zia-ul-Haq, there have been 200 violations of Pakistan’s airspace by Soviet and Afghan aircraft. Ibid., Sept. 27, 1980.
move against Pakistani territory proper, for “defensive” reasons.

While the Pakistanis have generally held back from challenging Soviet air incursions militarily, they have protested shelling of Afghan refugee camps by the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Recently, Islamabad expelled the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan, Sarwar Azimov, on charges of subversion. It also closed the Soviet press and information office in Karachi and asked the USSR to reduce the number of its embassy diplomats in Pakistan. New restrictions on travel by foreign diplomats inside Pakistan likewise seem aimed primarily at persons from Soviet-bloc countries.

But faced with various forms of Soviet pressure, the government in Islamabad has shown itself reluctant to allow significant amounts of Western weapons to reach those fighting Babrak Karmal’s government and Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it is unlikely to meet Soviet demands that it stop Afghan partisans from entering Pakistan. Indeed, it would have serious difficulty—as would a government hostile to the partisans—in completely controlling its border with Afghanistan.

Iran, too, seems intimidated by Soviet pressure. For example, Tehran has refused to permit establishment of a partisan-controlled Afghan radio station on Iranian territory. Moreover, Iran’s state of war with Iraq is not likely to increase Tehran’s willingness to incur Soviet displeasure regarding the Afghan situation.

Moscow’s Afghan Opposition

So far, we have focused on Moscow’s strategy for Afghanistan. However, this strategy’s success or failure, or at minimum the cost of pursuing it, will depend to a considerable measure on the nature of the domestic opposition to the Karmal regime.

—Jim Sbeldon/Contact

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This resistance to the Soviet occupation and the Karmal regime has taken many forms. We have already mentioned strikes by shopkeepers. Students and pupils also have demonstrated against the government, beginning in Kabul at the time of the February shopkeepers’ strike. There were student demonstrations of a more violent nature in Kabul on April 25–30, 1979. Students have continued to express their displeasure by boycotting classes and participating in the distribution of “shabnana” (literally, night letters—mimeographed or handwritten statements critical of the occupiers and distributed secretly under cover of darkness).

In addition, there has been substantial open violence, ranging from spontaneous assaults on solitary Soviet soldiers in towns and attacks against Soviet and Afghan government personnel and offices in Kabul and other centers, to interruption of transport through acts of sabotage and harassment, to organized partisan operations against Soviet and “loyal” Afghan forces.

Although violent opposition to the occupation has spread all over the country, it has varied in intensity from region to region over time. Immediately after the invasion, some of the fiercest fighting took place in Badakhshan Province and the surrounding region, home of a number of anti-Soviet Central Asian Muslims who had fled the Soviet Union after the Russian revolution. Soviet forces have tried to isolate Badakhshan from the rest of the country, causing serious food shortages there, and have used some of their forces based in Central Asia in attacks against Badakhshi fighters. Another region where considerable fighting took place early on after the Soviet intervention was in the Konar valley of eastern Afghanistan.

From Badakhshan and Konar, the fighting spread, although in an uncoordinated way, to other parts of the country, including the areas surrounding Kabul. The opposition has in fact managed to maintain control of many parts of the countryside. It has also at times challenged Soviet control of major cities. For example, Jalalabad and Herat came under partial opposition control during August and September 1980.

However, it is in the Panjsher valley where the most serious fighting involving Soviet air and ground forces has taken place recently. As elsewhere in the Afghan countryside, the Soviet pacification effort in Panjsher has been a failure to date. Reportedly, the Soviets withdrew from the valley in September 1980 after suffering major losses.

Principal Insurgent Groups

The groups leading the insurgency today are basically the same ones that attacked the Khaqani regimes of Taraki and Amin, calling them “Stalinist” and declaring their decrees null and void because of a lack of “an Islamic foundation.” The Soviet intervention has lent greater legitimacy to the opposition groups by giving them the role of fighters for the liberation of their homeland from foreign occupation. It is no longer an internal conflict, but a war for freedom and independence.

Although there are numerous groups involved in the struggle against Moscow, the best-known ones are motivated by Islam and headquartered in areas of Pakistan and Iran close to the Afghan border. Some of these have been active for many years against the spread of secularism and Marxist ideologies in Afghanistan. In the 1960’s, they organized Jawanami Musalman (Young Muslims) and Nedai-Haq (Voice of Truth) groups and the Islamic newspapers Gahiz and Nedai-Haq. Leading members of Jawanami Musalan were Abdul Rahim Niazi, Gulam Mohammad Niazi, Abdul Rasul Sayyef, Rabbani Paghmani, Habibur Rahman, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, Sayyuddin, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Gul Mohammad.

At present, the chief Islamic groups headquartered in Pakistan number six. One is the National Liberation Front, headed by Sebqullah Mojadedi. He is from an old and well-known Afghan family, and has strong ties with some of the members of the traditional Afghan power elite. Another is the National Front for the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan, led by Ahmad Gailani, who was the main force behind a limited and largely unsuccessful Loya Jirgah meeting earlier this year in Pakistan. Gailani also claims to be a descendant of the prophet and was until recently an important businessman. He has strong ties with the former

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80 Ibid.
Leaders of five of the six Afghan Islamic groups that formed an Islamic Rescue Front at the January 1980 Islamic Foreign Ministers’ Conference in Islamabad. Pictured from left to right are Gulbuddin Hikmatyar of the Islamic Party, Mohammad Nabi Mohammad of the Islamic Revolutionary Movement, Burhanuddin Rabbani of the Islamic Association, Ahmad Gailani of the National Front for the Islamic Revolution of Afghanistan, and Sebqatullah Mojadedi of the National Liberation Front.

monarch, Mohammad Zahir Shah. There are two factions of the Islamic Party. One group is headed by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, the other by Mohammad Yunus Khalis. Hikmatyar has been in Pakistan since before the overthrow of Daoud and opposed the former president. He has a well-organized party and set of cadres. The fifth group is the Islamic Association, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. He is a former theology professor at Kabul University with a long record of involvement in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which has ties with similar movements in other Islamic countries. Another body with a small following is the Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Mohammad Nabi Mohammad.

The key group in Iran is the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan, led by Mohammad Asef Mohseni Gandahari. He claims to be the leader of the Afghan Shiites and is ideologically influenced by the Khomeini revolution in Iran.

There are also several small secular groups active —largely within Afghanistan itself — against the Soviets. These include the National Socialists and the Maoists. Also, some prominent politicians of the pre-1973 period such as former Prime Minister Mohammad Yusuf have tried to become involved with those opposed to the Soviet occupation, **perhaps hoping to become a compromise candidate to head a future Afghan government if the Soviets withdraw.**

The major Islamic groups—despite their common antipathy toward the Soviet Union and sympathy for Islam—have failed to form a stable front. Under pressure from the Islamic world, especially Saudi Arabia, the six major Pakistan-based groups formed an Islamic Rescue Front toward the end of January 1980.

**This was communicated to the author by private sources.**
Rasul Sayyef was accepted as the president of the new alliance. But it was not long before Hikmatyar withdrew from the alliance. Major disagreements persist, and it is uncertain how long the other members will remain in the Front.

The reasons for lack of unity among Moscow's Afghan opponents are many. Besides personality conflicts, there are disagreements over leadership, the shape of a future Afghanistan, the role that the former king and former high-level Afghan officials should play, and relations with other political groups and countries.

Both Hikmatyar and Gailani have claimed to enjoy the largest number of supporters. Hikmatyar's group is the best armed in terms of quantity and quality of weapons, and he is apparently unwilling to share these arms with others unless he dominates the alliance. His drive for leadership is opposed especially by Gailani, Mojadedi, and Nabi. By contrast, Rabbani and Khalis (who is known to have participated in actual fighting inside Afghanistan) are more sympathetic to Hikmatyar.

Ideologically, Gailani's group is the most liberal. The groups led by Mojadedi, by Nabi, by Rabbani, and by Khalis are successively more conservative. Hikmatyar is religiously the most orthodox. The ideological differences among the partisans are most pronounced with regard to the shape of a future Afghan government.

Hikmatyar wants to establish an Islamic Republic in Afghanistan, similar to that in Iran. He opposes any role for the royal family in the conflict with the Soviets or in a future Afghan government. He has accused ex-king Zahir Shah (who is in Italy) and his family of being at least partially responsible for the current crisis in the country. He, at times, talks about a possible trial of the former king and some of the king's associates if an Islamic Republic is established in Afghanistan. Rabbani and, to a lesser extent, Khalis are sympathetic to these views.

The other three groups have not specified the shape of a future Afghan government, preferring to concentrate on first getting the Russians out of Afghanistan. Gailani, however, is known to have close contacts with Zahir Shah and his family and to favor a political role for the former ruler in a future Afghanistan. Mojadedi and Nabi are not opposed to this idea in principle, but have repeatedly argued that they are not fighting for the role of the former king, relations with other countries, and prospects for a negotiated settlement of the Afghan crisis.

Of all opposition leaders, Hikmatyar is the one whose position has been most misunderstood. For example, analyst Richard S. Newell has mistakenly called Hikmatyar's group "secularly oriented." "Revolution and Revolt in Afghanistan," The World Today, November 1979, p. 441. Similarly, an article in Third World (Mexico City), February-March 1980, refers to a Hikmatyar "plan" to bring "Nadir Shah" back to the Afghan throne. Beyond ignoring Hikmatyar's antimonarchist positions, this assertion is preposterous; for Mohammad Nadir (the father of Zahir Shah) was assassinated in 1933.
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the royal family.

Differences on relations with external powers and groups are substantial. Hikmatyar has close links with Pakistan's Jamaati-Islami and wants external support to come largely from the Islamic world. Rabbani and Khalis are sympathetic to this matter. Gailani, on the other hand, does not oppose assistance from and contact with non-Islamic powers. He has repeatedly called on Western powers to support the Afghan partisans in their conflict with the USSR. He is also known to have friendly ties with Saudi Arabia. On this issue, as on many others, Mojadedi and Nabi sympathize with Gailani. These differing orientations breed suspicion among the partisan groups regarding the amount of financial aid each group receives from external sources and what happens to that aid.

With regard to the Soviets, Hikmatyar avers that there can only be a military solution to the Afghan crisis and that a peaceful resolution involving negotiations with the Soviets is unlikely and undesirable. Khalis and Rabbani have expressed similar views. Gailani and the other two leaders have opposed "closing the door" on a possible negotiated settlement.

While the Pakistan-based groups receive considerable coverage in the international press, most of the fighting in Afghanistan has been conducted by localized ethnic, tribal, and sectarian groups, poorly armed and with rather tenuous links with the groups in Pakistan and Iran. It is possible that new leaders might emerge from the ranks of those fighting inside the country. These internal groups come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Representing the dominant Pashtun elements are tribes such as the Waziris, the Momands, and the Mengals of eastern Afghanistan. Other ethnic elements that have been active include the Nuristani, the Uzbeks, the Tajiks, and the Hazaras of central Afghanistan. The Hazaras are Shiite and constitute some 10 percent of the population.

The successes of the non-Pashtun groups, it should be noted, have introduced a new element into the Afghan political scene. Afghanistan's various ethnic and tribal groups have traditionally been suspicious of their central government, especially when it seeks to centralize the country. The Pashtuns, including those Persianized and those not, have dominated Afghan politics largely because of greater military capability (they have generally controlled the state's armed forces). However, the recent turmoil in Afghanistan has encouraged the emergence of several new centers of military power that any Afghan government will now have to take into account. The Hazaras, Tajiks, and Nuristanis are likely to push for a federal political system that would afford the various regions a large degree of internal autonomy. Failure to meet such demands might well lead to conflict among the various groups. This development would provide opportunities for manipulation by outside powers.

Politically, disunity has been costly to the partisans. It has posed impediments to winning international recognition and aid, to forming a broad-based government-in-exile, and to challenging, in forums such as the United Nations, the legitimacy of the Karmal government.

In military terms, lack of unity has had more ambiguous consequences. On the one hand, it has made coordinated military efforts among the various opposition groups difficult. On the other hand, the decentralized and sporadic nature of the opposition has made partisan forces less vulnerable to large-scale ground operations and quick defeat by the Soviets. While the Soviets control the Afghan state apparatus, it is Moscow's opponents who control much of Afghan society.

Militarily, the resistance has grown in effectiveness throughout the period of the occupation, compounding Moscow's problems. There are several indicators of this greater partisan effectiveness. For one, the opposition has recently moved from its bastions in the countryside to challenge Soviet control of several cities. Sustained fighting for control of Jalalabad and Herat took place in August and September respectively. There has also been fighting over smaller towns, including Sorubi and Aybak.

Other indicators of greater effectiveness have been the appearance in partisan hands of better weapons and the demonstration by the partisans of an ability to build some rudimentary equipment inside Afghanistan. The partisans now have a few antiaircraft guns and antitank weapons, acquired either from defecting Afghan units or from purchase in the unofficial international weapons market. In addition, the Afghans have been producing and employing such simple weapons as Molotov cocktails.

There have also been reports of increased Soviet losses. For example, in recent fighting for the Panjsher valley, Soviet forces reportedly lost several aircraft and

92Discussion of the outlook of the various opposition groups is based on a number of direct conversations between the author and opposition sources.

93According to resistance sources, the latter do provide weapons to some of those fighting inside the country.

94See AFP (Hong Kong) dispatches of Sept. 12 and 16, 1980, in FBIS-SAS, Sept. 17, 1980, pp. C/4-5. Sorubi is a strategic town midway along the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad. Aybak is the capital of Samangan Province, northwest of Kabul.
tanks without gaining control of the area. The change in Soviet military strategy for dealing with the Afghan opposition, noted above, itself suggests greater Afghan effectiveness and failure of the initial pacification program.

Prospects

Several factors will play critical roles in determining whether the Soviet Union succeeds in liquidating or neutralizing the Afghan partisans. These include the policies adopted by Pakistan toward the insurgents, the extent of external support for the partisans, the success or failure of Soviet attempts to convert divisions among the insurgents into open conflict, Soviet efforts to establish a government in Kabul which commands a large armed force and has a wide base of support, and the scope and duration of the Soviet military commitment.

We have already seen that Pakistan is likely to continue to allow Afghan refugees to enter but to limit the amount of military aid going to partisan forces. Moreover, the Afghans face food shortages. Pakistan was not prepared for a flood of more than a million refugees, and international assistance has not always reached the Afghans. These problems could seriously affect the fortunes of the resistance movement in Afghanistan.

If the various rival partisan groups, whether externally based or in Afghanistan, begin to fight each other on a substantial scale, that, too, could have an adverse impact on insurgent forces. Recently, Kabul

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95 On the fighting in the Panjsher valley, see Daily Telegraph, Sept. 5, 1980.
97 Up to now there have been very few reports of fighting among Moscow's Afghan opponents. FBIS-SAS, Aug. 1, 1980, p. C/1.
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has made a considerable effort to exploit conflicts within the opposition. Tribal leaders have received the greatest attention. Besides intimidation, Kabul has also used bribery. This approach has not worked so far. In fact, Lt. Colonel Faiz Mohammad, Minister of Frontiers and Tribes, was killed recently while visiting local tribal leaders in Pakta Province.

Should the resistance's effectiveness increase because of greater organization or the obtaining of arms such as portable antiaircraft and antitank weapons from abroad, its prospects might improve significantly. The Soviets might be forced to make an increased military commitment to the Afghan venture or accept a compromise settlement of the crisis. In the first case, the USSR might suffer reduced capability in other parts of the world as a result of commitment of new troops and materiel to the Afghan front. The USSR might also experience domestic repercussions in regions where there exist, to borrow a Soviet term, Soviet "internal colonies"—i.e., among the Islamic populations of Soviet Central Asia. In these areas, despite Soviet assimilationist policies, Islamic consciousness continues to form a type of Islamic counterculture. Third, rising costs of the invasion might exacerbate factionalism in the context of a possible Soviet succession.

In the second case, Soviet willingness to reach a compromise is likely to be reciprocated by at least some of the groups fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Such a move might in fact set the Afghan groups against one another.

99FBIS-SAS, Sept. 24, 1980, p. C/3. Afghan sources have suggested to the author that Faiz Mohammad was attempting to bribe local officials on this trip.
100The implications of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan for Moscow's ability to intervene in Poland have been suggested in Howard Teicher, "The Soviet Union in Afghanistan: The Political-Military Costs," Leviathan: Middle East Inquiry (Boston, MA), Fall 1980, p. 31.

The Soviet Union has yet to establish a stable government in Kabul with a substantial Afghan armed force. Indeed, as long as the Russians continue to occupy Afghanistan, Moscow may have serious difficulty in achieving these goals. Conflict within the ruling PDP and defections from the armed forces continue.

In Afghanistan, the USSR faces the following broad choices: (1) to annex Afghanistan, making it the 16th "Soviet Socialist Republic," (alternatively, the USSR might annex only parts of Afghanistan, especially those north of the Hindu Kush mountains—a region dominated by Turkic populations similar to those in Soviet Central Asia) and keep up the military effort until the opposition is destroyed; (2) to continue the military effort while attempting to establish a stable and servile government; (3) to reach a compromise with all or some of the Afghan opposition groups (some of whom are willing to negotiate with the Russians) and accept an Afghanistan that, although independent and ruled by non-Communists, would follow a policy of neutralism tilted toward Moscow. Soviet policies so far show a preference for the second alternative. But as the war drags on, the Soviet Union might eventually choose one of the other two.

There are a number of conceivable outcomes to the Afghanistan crisis. These include a Soviet-dominated, pacified Afghanistan, a protracted war lasting many years, a neutral Afghanistan, or even the spread of conflict to Pakistan. Moreover, there are varying degrees of uncertainty concerning all the factors affecting the likelihood of each of these outcomes. However, no matter what ultimately emerges in Afghanistan, events there will probably have a substantial impact on Soviet strategy in the surrounding area, on regional politics, and on the internal situation of Afghanistan's Islamic neighbors.

101 This Soviet option was mentioned by Alexandre Bennigsen in "Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam," Problems of Communism, March–April 1980, p. 49.
102Reported to the author by private sources.
103I have dealt with some of these issues in "Afghanistan and the Crisis in American Foreign Policy," loc. cit.