AFGHANISTAN:
SOCIALISM IN ONE GRAVEYARD

by

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We should like to dedicate this work to four Professors who contributed vastly to a clear understanding of Afghan affairs—Khalilullah Khalili (1907-1987), Bahauddin Majrooh (1928-1988), Leon B. Poullada (1913-1987) and Louis Dupree (1925-1989)—and to the heroic Mujahideen commanders whose struggle they supported.
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So it has finally happened. On 15 February 1989, Lieutenant-General B.V. Gromov crossed the land frontier between the USSR and Afghanistan, putting an end to almost a decade of direct combat involvement by Soviet forces on the territory of its tiny neighbour. The withdrawal of Soviet forces was widely welcomed in the Soviet Union and met with extravagant praise from certain circles in the West. Yet when Gromov walked across the bridge to Termez, he turned his back on a country in ruins, one of the purest examples in our times of the tragedy which a combination of utopian ideology and power politics can inflict on an unsuspecting people. We owe it to the Afghans, as to the other innocents of history, not to let the memory of their loss grow dim.

The fact that Soviet combat forces are now out of Afghanistan has created the impression that the problems of Afghanistan have been resolved. Nothing could be further from the truth. The April 1988 Geneva Accords on Afghanistan, far from bringing peace, have set the scene for further bloodshed and sorrow. General Secretary Gorbachev recently described Afghanistan as one of ‘our old sins’, but this seems rather too mild an expression to capture just what the USSR accomplished. R.H. Tawney once remarked that war must be either a crime or a crusade. While for the Afghan resistance (Mujahideen) it was certainly a crusade, it is hard to see it as much more than a crime on the part of the Soviet forces. This is especially worth mentioning at the moment, for the coverage of the Soviet withdrawal has been profoundly disappointing. It seems too often to have been overlooked that the Soviet Union has withdrawn from Afghanistan because the

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Soviet leadership deemed it in the USSR's interests to withdraw; and that for the Afghans the war has been a horror of infinitely greater magnitude than for the Soviets.

It is important to pursue both these points in a little more detail. It is often implied that Gorbachev was opposed to the invasion. It is less frequently noted that some of the most ferocious assaults on the Afghan civilian population occurred while Gorbachev was at the helm. According to a major study carried out by Dr Marek Sliwinski under the auspices of the Bureau International Afghanistan and Médecins sans Frontières, the number of Afghan war-related deaths per annum under Gorbachev was roughly double the annual rate during the Brezhnev period, until the arrival of US-supplied Stinger missiles at last provided the population with some protection against aerial bombardment. The ferocity of the Soviet attack on defenceless Afghan civilians during this period is utterly inconsistent with the sentimental arguments of those who would have one believe that moral sensitivity underpinned the Soviet decision to withdraw. There are indeed Soviet citizens who deserve the highest praise for adopting a principled stance over Afghanistan. Vladimir Danchev was reportedly incarcerated in a Tashkent psychiatric institution after surreptitiously broadcasting candid material about Afghanistan on Radio Moscow, and the reason for Dr Andrei Sakharov's exile to Gorky was his condemnation of the invasion. And beneath these famous figures were others less well-known, but equal in courage, especially in the Ukraine and the Baltic States.

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We have yet to see a shred of evidence that Gorbachev disavowed the invasion before it was politically safe for him to do so.

The completion of the withdrawal has brought a new burst of silliness from Western circles. One of the most dispiriting manifestations has been the pilgrimage to Moscow and other Soviet cities of Western war veterans proclaiming solidarity with the Soviet war veterans, the Afgantsy.8 This is especially regrettable given the authoritarianism and chauvinism of the Afgantsy's sub-culture.9 Do the pilgrims grasp, one wonders, how disgusting their antics seem to the Afghan war victims whose villages the Afgantsy plundered? When a US veteran embraces a Soviet veteran, just how much can he claim to know about the wartime activities of that particular Afganets? The notion of the Soviet soldier as victim deserves some tough-minded scrutiny. War, as anyone who has ever been near a battlefront would realise, is something quite dreadful, and the young Soviet conscripts sent to Afghanistan were given a horrible assignment. But let it not be forgotten that the bulk of them carried it out with lethal dedication, in ways which we shall detail in a moment. The psychological problems from which many Afgantsy now reportedly suffer may be no more than they deserve. We should not waste our tears on them.

If we must weep, let us weep for the Afghan people. Ten years of bitter conflict have left the delicate equilibrium of Afghan society rent to pieces, the economy in tatters, a vast number of Afghans dead, and the survivors profoundly traumatised. There is now abundant evidence, albeit scattered through somewhat recondite sources, on both the dimensions of this tragedy, and the specific contribution of the Soviet Union to its emergence. It merits the most careful attention. After examining

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8 For a particularly mawkish report of such a pilgrimage, see The Observer (supplement), 12 February 1989.
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this material, we shall conclude with some remarks about where we should go from here.

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Afghanistan is often depicted as historically a turbulent society in which violence served as the routine means for the resolution of disagreements. This image is highly misleading. Before the coup of 27 April 1978 staged by the communist 'People's Democratic Party', the country had experienced nearly fifty years of comparative political stability, during which the relations between state and society were relatively harmonious. In rural areas there were occasional outbreaks of violence, such as the Safi Pushtun revolt of 1947 and the Panjshir uprising of 1975, but these were contained with little difficulty; and the state moved to rectify the local grievances which had prompted them.

The political stability which prevailed from 1929 to 1978 was largely the outcome of an unwritten compromise between state and society. In 1929, King Amanullah, a social reformer who saw himself in the same mould as Attaturk, was ousted in a popular uprising led by a Tajik bandit called Bacha-e Saqao ('The Son of the Water Carrier'). The Bacha had no basis upon which to secure his rule, and was overthrown within a matter of months by a Pushtun aristocrat, General Nadir Khan. After only four years on the throne, Nadir was assassinated by a Najat High School student, Muhammad Abdul Khaliq, in November 1933. The new monarch Zahir Shah, who occupied the throne until he was ousted by his cousin Mohammad Daoud in July 1973, proved understandably cautious in his politics, and throughout

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11 For a detailed account of Amanullah's rule, and his overthrow, see Leon B. Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1973)
his rule tried to avoid antagonising the sentiments of his rural subjects. Until 1953, he was completely dominated by his two powerful uncles. Daoud, who ruled as President from July 1973 until his murder during the communist coup, was equally careful. The society over which these rulers presided was not in crisis, and exhibited a degree of order which was quite remarkable given its complexity.

Afghanistan had always been highly pluralistic. The population, although overwhelmingly Muslim, was fragmented on ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and tribal lines, in extremely complex ways. The bulk of the population, nearly 90%, was located in rural areas, engaged in agricultural activities. This pluralism extended to local politics, especially amongst the largest ethnic group, the Pushtuns. Important issues were remitted for decision to the local council (known as the jirgah or shura) in a way which confounds the attempts of superficial observers to depict Afghan society as feudal. Yet despite its heterogeneity, Afghan society was remarkably robust. Customary law and the Shariat provided rules governing the interaction of different social groups, and the society as a whole proved resistant to interventions perceived by its components to be inimical to their fundamental values. It was this robustness which induced caution from prudent central rulers.

Following the communist coup and the Soviet invasion in December 1979, different elements of society united in face of the common threat to the religion and culture of the Afghan people and rendered support to the Mujahideen. Yet in a number of ways, this indomitable determination has masked vast underlying damage

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to the social fabric of Afghanistan, which will certainly be felt once the threat of communist domination, which has hitherto produced unity, is no longer present.

First, a huge number of Afghans have been physically displaced, and driven from their homes either to neighbouring countries—mainly Pakistan and Iran—or to areas within Afghanistan less exposed to direct attack. While no one can be certain just how many Afghan refugees there are, 5.7 million *external* and 2 million *internal* refugees seems a plausible estimate. A very large proportion of these refugees, probably in the vicinity of 76%, are women and children. The position of Afghan women is particularly grievous. In traditional Afghan society, women performed a range of complex roles within the household economy. The veiling of women was informally abolished in urban areas in 1959, and in the countryside it frequently fell into desuetude because in a small village, a woman was unlikely to encounter men to whom she was unrelated by either blood or marriage. One of the sad aspects of the refugee experience is that it has led to a recrudescence of purdah as women find themselves in a new and—from the point of view of their husbands—hostile

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Where the skeletal structure of the extended family remains to some degree intact, it is likely that the women members (including widows) will be able to resume traditional occupations within the household economy. However, the fate of widows who have been detached from their extended families remains unclear. Some will obtain assistance from brothers, to whom Afghan women have characteristically looked for support, but others will be left very much to their own devices.

Second, the education system within Afghanistan has been wrecked. It is infrequently appreciated that quite a deal of progress had been made towards improving education in Afghanistan before the communist coup. This was all cast aside in the aftermath of the coup, when the school curriculum was restructured to reflect the crude ideology of the coup-leaders, and Kabul University was sovietised through a vicious purge of the staff and student body (during the course of which one of the authors of this paper experienced severe physical attack.) Many students over the subsequent years ended up in the USSR, where the ‘educational’ process seemed mainly directed at detaching them from the characteristic values of Afghan Islamic culture so that they would be loyal communist functionaries in the future. This was also the objective of the regime’s educational ‘reforms’ in Kabul.

Furthermore, the haemorrhage of talent has continued. The most able members of the Afghan intelligentsia have all been driven from the country, and others have been killed in exile, the most tragic example being the late Bahauddin Majrooh. The loss

of the educated elements of Afghan society will be painfully felt in the long-run, as the skills of these professionals are vital in easing the process of postwar reconstruction.

Third, the effects on the health system of ten years of Soviet domination have been catastrophic. Afghanistan, of course, had considerable health care problems before the coup, but the advent of communist rule made them far less manageable than would otherwise have been the case.\textsuperscript{21} There are now many handicapped Afghans whose problems may overwhelm the family units to which they traditionally could have looked for support—if indeed those units are still intact. Furthermore, tuberculosis and malaria, which were effectively under control before the coup, now are on the increase, and the disintegration of social units means that effective campaigns of prevention may be difficult to mount. These problems also affect the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan. The general health of this refugee population is marginal,\textsuperscript{22} and could deteriorate suddenly and unexpectedly.\textsuperscript{23}

Finally, the functioning of traditional political institutions has been disrupted. Even before the Soviet invasion, the communist massacres of village notables had eliminated important individuals who mediated between different social groups and produced the accommodations and compromises which preserved local order. Local leadership frequently came to be exercised by younger and more highly educated individuals who often served as charismatic leaders of \textit{Mujahideen} groups. However, it is far from clear that this new authority structure can effectively be used

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Fazel Haq Saikal, 'Health care problems in Afghanistan', \textit{The Medical Journal of Australia}, vol.142, no.7, 1 April 1985, p.385
\item \textsuperscript{22} We have discussed refugee health problems in some detail in Fazel Haq Saikal and William Maley, \textit{Afghan Refugee Relief in Pakistan: Political Context and Practical Problems} (Canberra: Working Paper, Department of Politics, University College, The University of New South Wales, Australian Defence Force Academy, May 1986).
\end{itemize}
to manage social reconstruction in peacetime, especially as a wide variety of conflicts are certain to arise as refugees attempt to re-establish themselves in localities which they had abandoned years before. Furthermore, Afghanistan is now awash with weaponry, which will place the remnants of the traditional system of conflict resolution under still greater strain. War and diaspora have changed the relative strengths of different groups within the Afghan population, as the impact of casualties has been felt disproportionately amongst tribally-organised Pushtuns.24 This will add to the difficulty of re-establishing political order. In the long run, the destruction of informal systems of political interaction may be the most intractable problem of all, as political order is a prerequisite for most other forms of reconstruction.

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The Afghan economy has suffered massive dislocation, although the extent of damage varies greatly between localities. There has been immense physical damage to land, livestock and equipment, and a tragic de-skilling of the refugee population. Many of the refugees have been detached from traditional institutions of socialisation, and will encounter great difficulty in fitting into useful social roles when they return to Afghanistan. The area in which this problem will be felt most acutely is agriculture, for the environment of the refugee camp has proved utterly inappropriate for the inculcation of farming skills.

The magnitude of physical damage is hard to overstate. As leading French specialist Olivier Roy recently observed following a UN-sponsored visit to Herat, 'visiting western Herat is like a visit to Verdun in 1919: for 20 kilometres there is nothing but ruins; the roads and fields are overgrown with weeds. In a landscape churned up by shells and bombs, people frequently uncover the remains of peasants

24 Sliwinski, 'Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People', p.46
buried in their houses. The hulls of tanks lie rusting on the verges. Unexploded 500 kilogram bombs lie stuck in the ground like beetroots.\textsuperscript{25} Another observer, visiting the once-fertile countryside, remarked that it was as if a bomb had gone off in the Garden of Eden.\textsuperscript{26}

The effects of this destruction on agriculture have been profound. Before the communist coup, Afghanistan was largely self-sufficient in food production: as Brigot and Roy concluded, it was 'a poor country but not a country of hunger'.\textsuperscript{27} This is no longer the case. The transport networks which permitted the efficient delivery of produce to rural markets, and from one region to another, have been severely disrupted. But more seriously, the overall level of output has dropped dramatically, as a result of the killing or exodus of members of the labour force, damage to farmlands and irrigation systems, and the destruction of animal stocks. This was clear within a few years of the start of the war,\textsuperscript{28} and by 1987, agricultural output was only one third of what it had been in 1978. Yields from the land which remained under cultivation had fallen by up to a half, and 40\% of draught oxen had been killed.\textsuperscript{29} This was not simply an \textit{unintended} offshoot of conflict. As a number of scholars have noted, the destruction of the rural economy was an integral part of Soviet strategy for denying the resistance access to the food resources on which the continuation of their struggle depended. Incendiary devices were specially deployed

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Annick Billard, 'Afghanistan: Operation Salam', \textit{Refugees}, no.61, February 1989, pp.11-14, at p.12.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Gavin Bell, 'Paradise lost in Afghan valley of death', \textit{The Times}, 21 July 1987, p.7.
\item \textsuperscript{27} André Brigot and Olivier Roy, \textit{The War in Afghanistan} (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988) p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Grant M. Farr and Azam Gul, 'Afghan Agricultural Production: 1978-1982', \textit{Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies}, vol.8, no.1, Fall 1984, pp.65-79. See also Mohammad Qasim Yusufi, 'Effects of the War on Agriculture', in Huldt and Jansson (eds.), \textit{The Tragedy of Afghanistan}, pp.197-216.
\item \textsuperscript{29} 'The scorched Afghan earth', \textit{The Economist}, 4 June 1988, p.26.
\end{itemize}
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to set fire to crops; irrigation systems were deliberately blown up; and orchards were razed.30

As well as suffering direct damage, the Afghan economy has suffered through Soviet exploitation of Afghanistan’s natural resources. Natural gas exports to the Soviet Union were metered on the Soviet side of the frontier, and even then ‘purchased’ at prices well below those prevailing in the world market.31 In 1980, as Shroder and Assifi have reported, the Soviet Union ‘took the uniquely obscene step of crediting its imports of Afghan natural gas against the cost of maintaining the “friendly, fraternal assistance” of its “limited military contingent” in Afghanistan’, thus forcing the Afghans ‘to pay with their natural resources for the brutal invasion and occupation of their own country and the destruction of their own people’.32

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Estimating the number of Afghans who have perished in the course of the war is a difficult but not insuperable task.33 Dr Andrei Sakharov in a recent Soviet publication claims that 600,000 Afghans died as a result of what he calls ‘the war of the villages’, and concludes that when one adds the victims of hunger and epidemics, one arrives at a figure of ‘close to one million’ dead.34 The work by Sliwinski which we mentioned earlier, based on detailed research carried out in refugee camps in

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33 Discovering the number of Soviet soldiers killed may prove a trickier task. While the official position is now that ‘up to 15,000’ were killed, an Estonian Komsomol newspaper, Noorte Haal, claimed on 29 January 1989 that 50,000 had died: see Valerii Konovalov, ‘Legacy of the Afghan War: Some Statistics’, Report on the USSR, vol.1, no.14, 7 April 1989, pp.1-3, at p.1. Who knows what the true figure might be?
Pakistan between August and December 1987, goes still further towards filling the
gaps in our understanding. On the basis of the survey, he concluded that some 9% of
the Afghan population had perished through war-related conditions since the
communist coup. This he assessed to represent 1.24 million deaths, although
uncertainty about the exact size of the pre-coup population meant that the margin of
error associated with this figure was ± 15%.35 Taking into account expected
population growth between 1979 and 1987, Professor M.S. Noorzoy of the
University of Alberta has arrived at an even higher figure, of a population loss of
1,705,304.36

Sliwinski’s study also sheds light on the cause of casualties. ‘Aerial bombing of
civilian houses or of refugees fleeing the area’, he writes, ‘was reported to be the
major cause of death or injury’,37 amounting all-told to 46% of casualties. Bullets
caused 33% of reported casualties, followed by shelling, at 12%. Mines, exhaustion
and other causes made up the balance. These basic figures, however, tell only a
fraction of the story. Stalin, who was in a position to know, once remarked that one
death is a tragedy and a million are a statistic. Thanks to the work of a number of
dedicated researchers—the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in
Afghanistan,38 Amnesty International investigators,39 and a number of other

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scholars—we are now in a position to grasp the human as well as the statistical side of Soviet activities in Afghanistan.

Even from Soviet sources, the truth is beginning to trickle out. Soviet soldiers themselves were not protected from atrocities: Dr Sakharov recently stated that a number of them were machine-gunned by Soviet helicopters to prevent them from being captured by the Mujahideen—a statement he reiterated despite almost frenzied denunciation by General Gromov.40 But more interesting are reports appearing in the Soviet press about maltreatment of Afghan prisoners, and the persecution of civilians. Thus, in early February it was reported that a Soviet journalist watched while three interrogators tortured a captured Mujahed,41 while the middle of the month saw a grisly account of the deliberate slaughter of a carload of Afghan civilians, including two children, who had failed to stop at a Soviet roadblock.42

There is now abundant evidence of direct Soviet involvement in numerous atrocities in Afghanistan. This involvement began well before the invasion of December 1979. Earlier that year, in the village of Kerala in Kunar province, male residents were summoned by soldiers and Soviet advisers to a field outside the village, where they were denounced as resistance supporters and machine-gunned. The dead and wounded were then buried with a bulldozer.43 This was by no means the only atrocity of its kind before the invasion. At the end of April 1979, over a thousand young Hazaras were bound, blindfolded, and thrown into the Oxus river, where they drowned; and in the same region, between two and three hundred elders


40 See 'Pravda li eto?', Komsomol'skaia pravda, 2 March 1989, p.3.
were trucked into the desert and flung from a cliff into a ravine. Witnesses attested to the involvement of Soviet advisers on each of these occasions. Soviet advisers were also present when on 8 August 1979, 650 residents of the village of Qal’a-e Najil were buried alive in sixteen trenches.44

With the Soviet invasion, the number of atrocities escalated sharply. The following are typical examples. In the village of Mata lived two blind brothers, aged 90 and 95. According to a native of the village, ‘they stayed behind when the rest of the villagers fled during the spring offensive. “The Russians came, tied dynamite to their backs, and blew them up”’.45 On 20 October 1984, in a village near the Kabul-Gardez road, twelve men and four women were driven from their houses, doused with kerosene, and set on fire. ‘We aren’t going to squander our ammunition for the Afghans’, remarked one of the Soviet soldiers responsible.46 This gruesome sense of economy, which Eichmann would have understood all too well, did not commend itself to other Soviet soldiers. A Turkmen woman from the northern part of Afghanistan near Mazar-i Sharif reported harassment by a Soviet search party in August 1985: ‘They asked me if I knew where the mojahedin were hiding. I had my little boy in my arms. I said I didn’t know. So they took a kalashnikov and just shot my little boy in front of me’.47

The systematic character of these atrocities has been captured in a number of sources, notably Jeri Laber and Barnett R. Rubin’s book “A Nation is Dying”: Afghanistan under the Soviets 1979-87. Resistance attacks on Soviet military convoys usually were met with reprisals against civilians. Massacres, according to

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45 Laber and Rubin, “A Nation is Dying”, p.xi.
Laber and Rubin, were ‘invariably the work of Soviet soldiers, sometimes accompanied by a few Afghan party members who serve as guides.’ They documented a number of massacres and reprisal killings in searing detail. On 12 October 1983, a reprisal was carried out in the village of Kolchabad, and described by a farmer, Sardar Mohammad, who hid during the sweep by Soviet forces before going to the home of a friend, Ahadar Mohammad: ‘Everyone was dead. Ahadar, his wife, and his baby were lying on the floor covered with blood. His nine-year-old daughter was hanging over the window, half in the house, half out. It looked like she was shot as she tried to run away. The young son of thirteen years lay crumpled in another corner with his head shot away. I threw up.’

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The traumatisation of the survivors of the Afghan war is not hard to fathom in the light of such accounts. Yet it is often overlooked. Psychological problems have always been difficult to diagnose in Afghanistan, where the Persian and Pushto languages do not permit precise articulation of the concerns which signal profound depression, and too often the courage of the survivors hides their anguish. This is well captured in a remark which a young member of the Mujahideen made to a Western journalist: ‘I died five years ago when I left Kabul. My soul has gone to heaven; this is just my body’. Many who have survived the war psychologically because of the sense of purpose provided by the struggle against a repulsive ideology may face extreme stresses as they embark on the heartbreaking task of rebuilding from scratch, deprived forever of the companionship of their loved ones. This point deserves particular emphasis. Afghans are no different from any other humans: they

48 Laber and Rubin, “A Nation is Dying”, p.22.
49 Laber and Rubin, “A Nation is Dying”, p.20.
love their family members, experience acute anxiety when they are in danger, and grieve for them when they suffer. In this war, as in many previous, the survivors often experience such an aching sense of loss that they envy the dead.

A number of specific traumas have been experienced by those Afghans who were tortured during the years of the USSR’s presence in Afghanistan. The Psychiatry Center for Afghan Refugees, directed by Dr Mohammad Azam Dadfar, has been at the forefront of efforts to identify and treat those suffering from such traumas. Many victims, of course, suffer from continuing physical illness as a result of abuse at the hands of prison authorities. However, even those who escaped unscathed in a physical sense remain all too often haunted by the horror of their experiences, and this problem will take years to overcome. As Dadfar himself has written, his centre can contribute ‘a small drop where a river is needed.’

Finally, a more sinister source of trauma should also be mentioned in a little more detail at this point. The thirty million anti-personnel mines which the Soviet Army has left in its wake have booby-trapped a nation. We have frequently seen children in Pakistan maimed with antipersonnel mines deliberately disguised by the USSR as children’s toys—surely one of the grimmest forms of atrocity found in a particularly wicked war. The Soviet Union, despite a great deal of sickeningly hypocritical rhetoric about the need for ‘peace’ in Afghanistan, has not yet produced a single map showing the location of the mines which it put in place around the country. At least fifteen different types of mine have been identified in Afghanistan, and for many years to come, the threat to civilians from many of these mines will remain serious, as the passage of time tends to make them more

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rather than less hazardous. The trauma which this will induce hardly needs to be elaborated.

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We cannot rebuild the past. The old Afghanistan is gone for ever. However, the mere fact that this is the case does not oblige us to remain passive. There are numerous steps, open to both individuals and governments, which can be taken to salvage as much as possible from the wreakage which the Soviets have left behind. The following proposals are not intended to be exhaustive.

First, we must not forgive and forget. In the era of glasnost', it is enormously tempting for Western leaders to overlook what the Soviets did in Afghanistan, and to pretend that Soviet involvement ended on 15 February 1989. It needs therefore to be emphasised that this date marked only the end of direct combat involvement by Soviet forces, not Soviet involvement itself. Despite the candid assessment by Soviet television journalist Mikhail Leshchinskii in November 1988 that the People's Democratic Party 'has no support in the people', the USSR in the wake of the withdrawal continued to supply the Kabul regime with vast quantities of weaponry, which could only serve to prolong rather than terminate the anguish of the Afghan people. This should particularly be borne in mind by those who are disposed to accord the Soviet Union moral kudos for ending its direct combat involvement.

The temptation to forgive the crimes of the Afghan War is also strong. The Soviet soldiers who carried out the massacres are now beyond easy reach. Nonetheless, we can see no reason why there should not be a serious effort to compile from witnesses the testimony on which prima facie cases of violations of international humanitarian law would be based. If the Soviet Union then declined to

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act upon the accumulated evidence, which appears highly likely, a non-communist Government in Afghanistan could seek the constitution of a tribunal to hear the cases *in absentia* in accordance with appropriate treaty provisions. The definitions of 'War Crimes' and 'Crimes Against Humanity' in Article 6 of the *Charter of the International Military Tribunal* seem to embrace a great deal of what members of the Soviet Army attempted or accomplished in Afghanistan.\(^5^5\) Furthermore, it is virtually beyond doubt that Article 3 of the 1949 *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*\(^5^6\) applied to the conduct of parties to the war in Afghanistan, and at the very least strongly arguable that the provisions of this and associated Geneva Conventions applied much more extensively.\(^5^7\) It could also be argued that the indiscriminate mining of Afghanistan violated Article 23 of the 1907 *Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land*, and a number of provisions of the 1981 *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects*. Finally, despite the weaknesses of the 1948 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*,\(^5^8\) Article II (e) referring to the act of forcibly transferring children from one group to another is undoubtedly relevant to Soviet activities in Afghanistan.\(^5^9\)

Second, we should support a new *Marshall Plan for Afghanistan*. The UN has appointed Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan as Co-ordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes Relating to Afghanistan, but the resources sought

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56 This convention, and other conventions noted in this paragraph, are collected in Adam Roberts and Richard Guelff (eds.), *Documents on the Laws of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
for his programmes, US$2005.7 million, represent only a fraction of what is needed. (It is often written that the USSR has pledged ‘$600 million’ to the UN Appeal. This claim is quite misleading, for the Soviet contribution is in fact a rouble sum which will be of use only in importing the low-quality output of Soviet-bloc enterprises, surely the last thing that the Afghans presently need.) It is also unfortunately the case that the UN is distrusted by large elements of the Afghan resistance, and that the Co-ordinator’s Office has at times had a tense relationship with the highly experienced Voluntary Organisations which are best placed to assist postwar reconstruction.\(^60\) Furthermore, even for 1989, the Co-ordinator has reported a funding shortfall of US$185.85 million.\(^61\) For all these reasons, aid programmes are required beyond those which the UN can be expected to put in place.

Third, we should support worthwhile individual programmes. A particularly deserving scheme is the Afghan Medical Programme of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, which has given hope to hundreds of badly injured Afghans whose rehabilitation depends on complicated medical treatment which cannot be supplied in Pakistan. Under the scheme, victims are transported to developed countries for treatment, and then returned to Pakistan. Australia has thus far declined to participate, but in doing so, it is out of step with other Western governments: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Norway, Singapore, Sweden, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America.

\(^{60}\) On the work of these agencies, see John H. Lorentz, 'Afghan Aid: The Role of Private Voluntary Organizations', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.11, nos.1-2, Fall-Winter 1987, pp.102-111. The existence of tension between the Co-ordinator’s Office and voluntary organisations was clear to us from numerous conversations in Islamabad and Peshawar.

Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States have all taken part. One hopes that the Australian Government will soon reconsider its position.

Apart from projects such as this, there are a number of projects run by Afghan organisations which provide medical treatment and educational assistance to those who need it most. A degree of ethnocentrism has often led Western donors to shy away from supporting such groups; it can be much easier to make out a cheque to an established Western charity. It is therefore worth pointing out that the Afghan organisations frequently operate with very limited overheads, and concentrate on pouring as many resources as possible into direct assistance; furthermore, they have links with the recipient community which Western charities cannot so readily build. Experienced voluntary agencies such as the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan work very closely with Afghan organisations, and this is certainly the path for donors to follow. We should like to mention four kinds of work which merit backing.

The Eye Clinic for Afghan Refugees, headed by Dr A.H. Mujahid, a German-trained Ophthalmologist, is an established organisation which provides outpatient treatment for Afghan refugees, among whom the problem of trachoma is endemic. As we ourselves have witnessed, there is great demand for the Clinic's services, with a large queue forming outside the simple consulting room in the Shaheen Town district of Peshawar. The Clinic is under constant threat because of the shortage of funds, and its staff members all live a very basic life style. Because of variations in the cost of living, even a moderate subvention from a Western agency could add markedly to its capacity to meet the needs of its patients. Its address is P.O. Box 871, University, Peshawar, Pakistan; and its Bank Account number is C.D. 399, Habib Bank Ltd., Tehkal Bala, Peshawar, Pakistan.

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The Mujahid Health Training Centre is actively involved in providing health training courses for young Afghans who go into Afghanistan to work as primary health care workers or medics. It runs a hostel where students are accommodated during courses, and its plan for the future include the establishment of a dental care course, to help deal with the digestive disorders and malnutrition which rotting teeth can produce. Effective primary health care is vital for the rebuilding of Afghanistan. A medical system of the kind found in developed Western countries will not be quickly established given the chaos brought by a decade of war, and it is imperative that proper basic health care programmes be established with Afghan staff. Considerable progress had been made in this direction before the communist coup in 1978.63 The Mujahid Health Training Centre is headed by Dr Abdul Rahim Tarshi, and its address is P.O. Box 1016, University, Peshawar, Pakistan.

The education of women is a matter of particular importance. A secondary school for refugee girls has been established in Pakistan, and may well prove a model for the development of education for girls in Afghanistan in the future. Its Principal is Mrs Tajwar Kakar, a former schoolteacher from Kunduz who suffered severely at the hands of the communist regime before coming to Pakistan.64 The school is supported by a major Afghan resistance party, the Jamiat-i Islami, and assistance for it can be channelled through the Director of the Jamiat’s Education Committee, Dr Abdul Hai. His address is G.P.O. Box 183, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Finally, attention should be paid to helping the north of Afghanistan. On account of its remoteness, this area runs the risk of being neglected when the distribution of aid is concerned. Yet it is in the north that the resistance has been particularly effective in establishing the kind of local institutions which will be a vital

element in postwar reconstruction, and a Supervisory Council of the North has been established to coordinate activities throughout the region. Help for the north can be directed to Mr Ahmad Zia Massoud, whose address is P.O. Box 264, Peshawar, Pakistan.

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Given enough time Afghanistan will recover. Western Governments and private organisations can play a crucial role by cooperating with the Afghan people during the process of recovery. But the lessons of the Afghan War will have been wasted if we pretend that the war was something that somehow just ‘happened’. The war claimed an awesome number of victims, and the moral responsibility falls squarely upon Soviet shoulders. Should this ever be forgotten, the dead of Afghanistan will truly have been dishonoured, and their sacrifice valued at naught.