

December 27, 1982

AFGHANISTAN THREE YEARS LATER: MORE U.S. HELP NEEDED

INTRODUCTION

Three years ago today, Soviet troops rolled into Afghanistan. Within hours, Moscow installed Babrak Karmal as a puppet ruler in Kabul and have kept him in power only through the force of over 100,000 troops. Karmal's sole claim to legitimacy is that the Kremlin prefers him to the maverick Hafizollah Amin, the Afghan communist it ousted and executed in the early days of the 1979 invasion.¹ Karmal's authority extends only up to the effective range of Soviet guns--and even then only in daylight. Beyond the small Soviet-controlled enclave, some tens of thousands of Freedom Fighters have been battling and repelling the invaders. Nonetheless, on balance, Moscow is reaping dividends from its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

To be sure, the Soviet invasion shocked Americans. It was the most blatant, and dramatic, of a series of Soviet actions which signalled the primacy that Moscow gives geopolitical ambitions over maintaining stable relations with the West in general and the United States in particular. Even President Carter, who repeatedly gave Moscow the benefit of the doubt, conceded that detente was dead. But the prize of Afghanistan must seem worth the price to the Kremlin. By seizing Afghanistan, Moscow has begun eroding the buffer zone which had separated rival empires for centuries. For over three thousand years, whenever any major power dominated the mountains of Afghanistan, it posed real threats to the Indian subcontinent. Afghanistan is a stepping

¹ For an analysis of Soviet activities in Afghanistan before the invasion, see Anthony Arnold, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective (Hoover Institution, 1981).

stone not only to South Asia but to the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf. By invading Afghanistan, Moscow maximized its leverage over Iran and Pakistan, minimized the potential threat of resurgent Islamic fundamentalism to its fast growing "internal colonies" of 45 million Moslems in Central Asia, and significantly reduced the distance between Soviet airbases and the West's vital oil supply route through the Strait of Hormuz.²

What is most alarming, perhaps, is that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marked the first time that the "Brezhnev Doctrine" was applied beyond the Soviet bloc. This doctrine, proclaimed to justify the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, declares the irreversibility of Communist "revolutions" and, in effect, seeks to justify Soviet colonialism. If it succeeds in Afghanistan, a dangerous precedent would be set for Iran and Pakistan.

Although much of the world seems willing to accept such a Soviet fait accompli, the Afghan "revolution" is far from irreversible. In three years of warfare, the unity, strength and staying power of the Afghan resistance has grown significantly. What once was a disjointed Islamic backlash against the Communist regime in Kabul has been transformed into a broad-based popular struggle of national liberation against foreign occupation. Afghan Freedom Fighters now control 90 percent of the countryside and increasingly have wrested the initiative from the Soviet forces.

Having initially underestimated the breadth and depth of opposition to its illegal military occupation, Moscow now plans to crush the resistance in a prolonged war of attrition similar to the campaign it waged against the Basmachi guerrillas of Central Asia sixty years ago. The Kremlin is betting that Western and Islamic powers eventually will accede to its occupation of Afghanistan, leaving it a free hand to deal with the Afghan people through a combination of intimidation and cooptation. Up to 1 million Afghans have perished since 1979 in a systematic campaign of calculated terror, with 35,000 executions in one prison alone. The Soviets have used illegal chemical and toxin weapons in remote areas and indiscriminate bombing of defenseless civilians in heavily populated areas. Torture is widespread. As a result of Soviet brutality, more than 2.7 million Afghans have fled to Pakistan.

For the United States to permit Afghanistan to be absorbed into the Soviet empire would be a betrayal of American moral, ideological and geopolitical interests. Washington has a strong ideological reason to support the independence of a free people. Most important, Washington has a substantial geopolitical interest

² For an analysis of Afghanistan's geopolitical importance written before the invasion, see James Phillips, "Afghanistan: The Soviet Quagmire," Heritage Foundation Background No. 101, October 25, 1979.

in containing the southern thrust of Soviet imperialism, preventing it from reaching the oilfields of the Persian Gulf.

Washington should work to convince the Soviets that their long-run interests would be better served through a face-saving withdrawal that would safeguard the security of the USSR's southern border without compromising the legitimate political rights of the Afghan people or the rule of international law. A consistent and persistent program of multilateral diplomatic, economic and political pressures would go far to eventually persuading Moscow of the advantages of such a course.

Such an effort, however, would be wasted unless the military and economic costs of the occupation are first brought home to Moscow. The United States should dispatch to the Afghan Freedom Fighters the supplies needed to sustain their fight for independence. The Soviet Union must be convinced that the costs of holding Afghanistan exceed the strategic benefits. Only then will it reconsider its policy of military adventurism in Afghanistan.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

Since coming to power on the backs of Russian tanks in December 1979, the Parcham (Banner) faction of the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) backed away from the draconian policies pushed by the doctrinaire Khalq (Masses) faction of the PDPA that terrorized Afghanistan after the April 1978 coup d'etat. Babrak Karmal's Parchamis all but abandoned the land reforms that had thrown the countryside into an uproar, started paying lip service to Islamic custom in a vain effort to allay the distrust of the fervently religious population, and sought to detach ethnic minorities such as the Tajiks, Turkmens, Hazaras and Nuristanis from the Pushtun-dominated resistance by appealing to their sense of ethnic chauvinism.

The Parchamis have little to show for their efforts. Not only have they failed to expand their extremely narrow base of support, but their ranks have actually been thinned by the attacks of the Freedom Fighters as well as by internecine squabbles with the numerically superior Khalq that periodically degenerate into gunfights. Although the Soviets have tried to unify the two groups, their rivalry has been exacerbated by Parchami resentment over the ill-treatment they received at the hands of the Khalq in 1978-79 and by Khalqi resentment over Parcham's past participation in the Daoud government and its current slavish devotion to the Kremlin. Relations between the two factions are further strained by their ethnic makeup: the Khalq is predominantly a Pushtun organization while the Parcham has a large Tajik membership.

The Freedom Fighters, however, also do not enjoy unity. They are plagued by bickering due to ideological, ethnic and personal rivalries. Six major political organizations, now based

across the border in Peshawar, Pakistan, have coalesced into two loose umbrella groups. The Islamic fundamentalist camp is composed of three factions: the Hezb-i-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; a Hezb-i-Islami splinter group led by Yunus Khalis; and the Jamiat-i-Islami, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani. These groups seek to transform Afghanistan into a theocratic state similar to Khomeini's Iran. They draw support from Iran, Libya, conservative Persian Gulf states and Pakistan's Jamiat-i-Islami.

The second umbrella group is comprised of three groups with a more secular, modern outlook: the National Front for the Liberation of Afghanistan, led by Sayed Gailani; the National Liberation Front, led by Sebqatullah Mojadedi; and the Islamic Revolutionary Movement, led by Mohammad Nabi Mohammad. These moderate groups are open to the development of a pluralist democracy in Afghanistan and might favor the return as a figurehead of the former king, Zahir Shah--a move bitterly opposed by the fundamentalists. The moderates look to the West in addition to the Islamic world for support.

Like the Afghan communists, the Freedom Fighters--generally known as Mujahideen (Holy Warriors)--have battled each other as well as their enemies. Although the Soviet invasion has unified Afghans to a degree unprecedented in modern history, a strong sense of rivalry pervades the resistance. Personal, ideological and ethnic frictions hamper collective action as does the keen competition for international support. The uncompromising Hekmatyar, head of the ultra-conservative Hezb-i-Islami, perhaps the largest and most far-flung group, is a particularly prickly and uncooperative leader. Hekmatyar's strongarm tactics in dealing with other resistance groups have alienated a growing segment of the Afghan population. Hekmatyar's obstinacy has provided Kabul with an opportunity to drive a wedge into the resistance movement.³

While the Peshawar-based political factions compete for international attention and support, the tribal confederations in the interior of Afghanistan carry on the war. These bands operate almost wholly independently of the Peshawar groups. Local commanders such as Sayed Ali Beheshti in the Hazara tribal belt along the mountainous spine of Afghanistan and Massoud, the "Lion of the Panjshir Valley," oversee the war effort in virtually autonomous regions. Such charismatic military leaders may eventually supersede the factious Islamic political elites that currently control the logistical support network that sustains the Mujahideen.

Another trend is the growing unity of Afghan exile groups in the West. In August 1981, the Organization for Strengthening the Unity and Struggle for the Liberation of Afghanistan (OSULA) was established in West Germany to coordinate the activities of

³ Far Eastern Economic Review, October 29, 1982.

Afghan freedom organizations and present the broadest possible United Afghan front in the international political arena. A prominent guiding force of OSULA is Dr. Mohammad Yussof, a widely respected former prime minister of Afghanistan. He may play a key role in unifying the various Afghan factions in the future.

Such unity is indispensable if the Afghans hope to liberate their country. While a centralized command structure is not needed to wage a diffuse guerrilla war, military pressures alone will not secure a Soviet withdrawal. This can only be attained through negotiation--and that requires Afghan unity.

Moscow has not yet displayed a willingness to seriously negotiate. It summarily rejected British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington's July 1981 proposal for a two-stage international conference to resolve the Afghan issue. The Soviets have refused to recognize the indigenous nature of the resistance and instead have accused the United States, Communist China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt of fomenting turmoil inside Afghanistan. The USSR has proclaimed that until "foreign interference" in Afghanistan's internal affairs ended, the Soviet Army would fulfill its "fraternal" obligation to defend the Afghan communist regime that had "invited" Soviet intervention. Moscow will discuss the Afghan issue only if the Kabul regime is recognized as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. This is unacceptable to the West and Pakistan because it would legitimize Soviet activities in Afghanistan and imply that activities of the Afghan nationalists were illegitimate.

Moscow, however, has permitted Kabul to enter proximity talks with Pakistan and Iran under the aegis of a U.N. intermediary. In June 1982, nine days of discussions in Geneva produced little but an agreement to resume the indirect talks at a later date. Meanwhile, Moscow has used the talks to defuse international outrage and head off diplomatic opposition to its continuing occupation. At a non-aligned meeting in Havana last summer, Russia's friends sought to block an anti-Soviet resolution on Afghanistan, arguing that such a resolution would upset the "delicate" Geneva negotiations.

Soviet insistence that any diplomatic solution should guarantee the continued rule of the existing regime is a strong indication that it does not consider the negotiations to be a viable enterprise, but it only using them to neutralize international opposition to its invasion. The main combatants--the Soviets and the Mujahideen--are not even represented at the talks. The only exchanges that the Soviet have with the Mujahideen will continue to be on the battlefield.

THE MILITARY SITUATION

Soviet propaganda innocently talks of the "limited" nature of Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. While 110,000 troops

hardly constitute a "limited" force in absolute terms, in a relative sense it arguably is "limited," for Moscow would have to commit three to five times as many troops to control militarily the countryside--and even then the Mujahideen could hold out indefinitely in the rugged mountains. The Soviets, however, seem to be taking the long view and appear in no hurry to win the war. They are not trying to deliver a knockout punch to the Freedom Fighters because they realize that it cannot be done. The resistance is a hydra-headed organism in which no single head is crucial for its continued survival.

Moscow instead is seeking to strangle the resistance by degrees--by destroying Afghan food supplies, razing sympathetic villages and terrorizing the civilian population.⁴ The Soviets have made a systematic effort to reduce the size of the "sea" in which the guerrillas swim by triggering a mass exodus of Afghan civilians. Afghans today comprise the largest single refugee group in the world. Over 2.7 million Afghans have fled to Pakistan and as many as 1 million have taken refuge in Iran. One of every five Afghans already has fled his homeland; more are sure to follow. In the words of one expert: "The Soviets do not want Afghans. They want Afghanistan."⁵

The Soviet strategy for subduing Afghanistan derives from the Soviet suppression of the protracted Basmachi revolt in Central Asia.⁶ This drawn-out war sputtered on and off from 1920 to 1936 and taught the Russians important lessons in how to deal with Moslem uprisings. Moscow divided the opposition and won over native tribal, religious and intellectual elites through well-timed tactical concessions mixed with heavy propaganda. Moscow also created a strong indigenous communist party apparatus and fielded a Moslem national army. Moscow has tried to duplicate these efforts to Afghanistan with little success--so far.⁷

The Soviets have launched an ambitious economic development program designed to integrate the Afghan economy into Central Asia. An estimated 15,000 young Afghans have been shuttled off into the Soviet Union for training and indoctrination.⁸ In January 1981, the National Fatherland Front, ostensibly a non-communist

⁴ See John Hutchison, "Scorched Earth Policy in Afghanistan," Military Review, April 1982.

⁵ Thomas Gouttierre, "Afghanistan: Is the U.S. Doing Enough?" Human Events, December 26, 1981.

⁶ Basmachi is an Uzbek term for bandits. Most of the Basmachi could more properly be labeled Islamic nationalists.

⁷ For a detailed comparison of the Soviet strategies in Afghanistan and Central Asia, see Alexandre Bennigsen, "The Soviet Union and Muslim Guerilla Wars, 1920-1981: Lessons for Afghanistan," Rand Corporation, August 1981.

⁸ A Nearby Observer, "The Afghan-Soviet War: Stalemate or Evolution?" Middle East Journal, Spring 1982, p. 160.

national front organization, was set up to broaden the Kabul regime's base of support. These are seeds that the Soviets expect to flower over time. The Soviets hope that those who remain inside the country eventually will become dependent on the regime for food and shelter and will be hard pressed to reject communist offers of immunity from attack in return for noncooperation with the Mujahideen.

To accelerate the process of demoralization the Soviets are waging a brutal undeclared war against the civilian population. Up to one million Afghans have been killed since 1979⁹ in a systematic terror campaign. An estimated 35,000 executions have occurred in one prison alone--Pul-i-Charkhi prison in Kabul.¹⁰ Civilians increasingly are being punished for aiding the resistance and atrocities are commonplace. In March 1979, hundreds of civilians were buried alive after Russian airborne troops stormed Herat.¹¹ More than 1,000 unarmed men and boys were machine gunned by Soviet advisers and Afghan troops at the village of Kerela in April 1979.¹² Hundreds were believed killed in the indiscriminate Soviet shelling of Kandahar in January 1982 before the Mujahideen withdrew from the center of the city, apparently at the request of the local population. French doctors who have volunteered to run hospitals inside Afghanistan have accused the Soviets of deliberately bombing them beginning in November 1981.¹³ In late July 1982, Soviet and Afghan troops massacred at least 1,000-2,000 civilians and razed entire villages in Logar province, south of Kabul.¹⁴

In addition to the unprovoked bombing and shelling of defenseless villages, the Soviets have seeded the countryside with illegal boobytraps disguised as toys, cigarette packs and pens.¹⁵ They have repeatedly used chemical weapons in remote areas, violating the 1925 Geneva protocol, the 1972 Toxin and Biological Warfare convention and the rule of customary international law.¹⁶ The U.S. State Department estimates that at least 3,000 Afghans have been killed by chemical weapons.¹⁷ In November the U.S.

-
- ⁹ Nake Kamrany, "Afghanistan Under Soviet Occupation," Current History, May 1982.
 - ¹⁰ Statement of Rosanne Klass, "Situation in Afghanistan," Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, March 8, 1982, p. 74.
 - ¹¹ See Appendix II of Thomas Gouttierre's Statement in "Situation in Afghanistan," Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, March 8, 1982, p. 58.
 - ¹² Washington Star, February 5, 1980.
 - ¹³ Daily Telegraph (London) January 21, 1982.
 - ¹⁴ Washington Post, August 4, 1982; Christian Science Monitor, August 11, 1982.
 - ¹⁵ Christian Science Monitor, January 26, 1982.
 - ¹⁶ See James Phillips, "Moscow's Poison War: Mounting Evidence of Soviet Battlefield Atrocities", Heritage Foundation Background No. 165, February 5, 1982.
 - ¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan," Special Report No. 98, March 22, 1982.

government released convincing evidence, in the form of two contaminated Soviet gas masks, that the Soviets continue their poison war in Afghanistan.¹⁸

In spite of the Soviet barrage, the area controlled by the Mujahidden has steadily increased. The effectiveness of the Soviet-controlled Afghan army has been eroded severely by extensive defections and casualties that have reduced its troop strength from 80,000 in 1978 to less than 30,000 today. Of those remaining, many Afghan Army troops tacitly observe local non-aggression pacts with the Mujahideen, creating a thriving black market that has become one of the Freedom Fighters' main sources of ammunition and supplies. The Soviets are bearing the brunt of the war effort. Estimates of Soviet deaths run as high as 30,000, although it seems more probable that approximately 10,000 have been killed during the invasion and occupation. Deaths now mount at the rate of 3,000-5,000 per year.

Aside from periodic assaults on Mujahideen strongholds such as the Panjshir and Logar valleys, the Soviets have been content to dominate the major cities and transport routes, conceding the initiative to the resistance. Evidently concerned with holding casualties to a minimum, the Soviets have been a reluctant to commit troops in actions initiated by the guerrillas, particularly at night when Soviet air support is unavailable. The result is a standoff: the Russians are incapable of finding and destroying the Freedom Fighters in Afghanistan's rough terrain while the Freedom Fighters are unable to mount significant attacks on Russian bases or sever Russian supply lines.

Moscow's strategic interests are well served by keeping fighting at the present level. Although its troops control only 10 percent of the country, they retain command over well-placed airbases capable of projecting Soviet tactical air power into Iran, Pakistan and the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Afghan base camps provide training and logistical support for subversive activities in Iran and Pakistan. Moreover, the Afghanistan battlefield allows Moscow to field test new models of armored vehicles, artillery, aircraft, assault rifles, chemical weapons and nylon body armor. Though the Russian bear might have stumbled into a hornets nest, the stings it has suffered from the Mujahideen are insignificant compared to the benefits of continuing to occupy Afghanistan.

MUJAHIDEEN REQUIREMENTS

The Afghan Freedom Fighters have mounted a primitive but suprisingly effective resistance to the Red Army. The morale of

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan: An Update," Special Report No. 104, November 1982.

the fierce Moslem tribesmen is currently high, nourished by virulent xenophobia and by the code of badal (blood vengeance).. The Afghans' courage is fortified by traditional Islamic beliefs: if he kills an enemy in the jihad (holy war) he is revered as a ghazi (Islamic warrior) and if he falls in battle he becomes a shaheed (martyr) who reaps great rewards in paradise.

The Freedom Fighters' will to fight is not matched by their military capabilities. On the whole, the Mujahideen remain a poorly equipped force bereft of heavy weapons and hampered by a lack of communications equipment and medical facilities. Although the Mujahideen possess a wider variety of weapons than they did at the outset of the invasion, ammunition remains in short supply. The most important sources of arms supplies are those captured on the battlefield or delivered by defectors. Another source is the black market--weapons bought from "neutral" Afghan army posts or manufactured in the tribal no man's land in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, particularly at Darra. Because of the tremendous demand for locally produced weapons, prices for such weapons have soared, allegedly prompting Afghans to step up the cultivation of opium poppies to finance arms purchases.

The third source of arms, those supplied by foreign powers, remains shrouded in mystery. A trickle of weapons, including recoilless rifles, light anti-aircraft guns, and antitank rockets evidently has reached Afghanistan from China and Egypt and through non-government channels in Iran, Pakistan and the conservative Gulf states. The United States is presumed to be contributing aid to the resistance but there is no hard evidence of such assistance outside of American-made sleeping bags and a small number of Winchester deer rifles, items that could have been purchased on the open market by non-American groups.¹⁹

Smallscale aid in the form of money, food and small arms has also come from non-governmental groups such as the Moslem Brotherhood, the Jamiat-i-Islami of Pakistan and Baluchi religious leaders in Iran.²⁰ Moscow has warned Iran and Pakistan against aiding the Mujahideen²¹ and both governments have taken the warning to heart. Ayatollah Khomeini has denounced the Soviet invasion and pays lip service to the Afghan cause, but the Iranians are preoccupied with their own internal problems and anxious not to jeopardize Soviet military assistance in their war with Iraq. The Pakistanis, for their part, are reluctant to provoke a Soviet military response or stepped-up Soviet support for Pakistani subversive organizations such as the Zulfiqar terrorists, a group led by former Pakistani President Bhutto's sons that seeks vengeance for his 1979 execution.

¹⁹ New York Times, January 12, 1982.

²⁰ New York Times, January 16, 1980.

²¹ New York Times, January 8, 1980.

At present the Mujahideen do not have enough weapons to equip all of their potential fighters. With an adequate supply of small arms and ammunition they could be expected to field up to 150,000 men, compared with the 40,000 to 80,000 guerrillas believed to be active today. The Mujahideen need modern anti-aircraft weapons to protect themselves from Soviets' Mi-24 helicopter gunship. The Sam-7, a lightweight Soviet-made heat-seeking missile-launcher would be an ideal helicopter killer. It is widely available in the arsenals of a number of former Soviet client states whose relations with Moscow have soured. The Soviet-made RPG-7 would be a good choice for an anti-tank weapon for the same reasons.

Medical supplies and expertise are other high-priority needs. At present, wounded Mujahideen face the grim prospect of a lengthy trek of several days, if not weeks, to get to Pakistan or to field hospitals manned by French volunteers inside Afghanistan. Washington could help the Afghans set up their own medical facilities and train their own medical teams. Improving the medical care available to the Afghans would raise their morale and cut their losses, both of which are important considerations in a prolonged war of attrition.

Access to food supplies is an increasingly serious problem for the Mujahideen and their sympathizers throughout the country. The Soviets systematically have been trying to destroy the agricultural economic base in the areas of fiercest resistance. The Soviets have set fields afire, sprayed defoliants on them from the air and destroyed the underground irrigation system supplying many farms with water.²³ Military offensives into Afghanistan's most fertile valleys are timed to cause maximum disruption to the planting and harvesting operations of local farmers. By depleting food supplies in hostile areas the Soviets force the civilian population to flee to Pakistan or to areas that can be more easily controlled. Meanwhile, the Mujahideen's logistical network is strained by the need to provide food to guerrilla bands in the interior and the amount of weapons and ammunition that can be distributed is correspondingly diminished. By Fall 1982 even resistance strongholds that long had been self-sufficient in food were experiencing shortages.²⁴ Shipments of U.S. surplus P.L. 480 food to the Freedom Fighters thus are desperately needed.

The Mujahideen need an improved communications network to coordinate their military operations. The United States could remedy this deficiency by supplying them with surplus portable radio equipment along with hand or foot-powered electrical generators.

²³ Wall Street Journal, July 21, 1980.

²⁴ FBIS Daily Report, South Asia, October 21, 1982, p. C1.

WHAT THE U.S. HAS AT STAKE

The United States cannot afford to ignore the Afghan cries for assistance. Declared U.S. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick before the United Nations in 1981: "The Soviet Union can conquer Afghanistan only by eliminating the Afghan nation. This the world must not permit to happen, for if Afghanistan is vanquished, no independent nation will be safe."

American inaction on Afghanistan sends a dangerous signal to Moscow for it could encourage future Soviet adventurism. Iran, Pakistan and other neighboring countries would be demoralized by continued American indifference to Soviet expansionism. These countries could be tempted to take out insurance policies by cutting their own deals with Moscow.

To ignore the Afghan struggle, moreover, would allow the Soviets to consolidate the gains from their southern expansion and turn Afghanistan into a forward base for further expansion. The Soviets are reportedly building a network of new airbases at Farah and Herat near the Iranian border, at Serdeh Band near the Pakistani border and at Askargh, near Kandahar.²⁵ These bases allow Soviet warplanes to roam well beyond Afghanistan's frontiers. Long range MiG-27 fighter bombers and long range MiG-25 reconnaissance aircraft already are stationed in Southern Afghanistan, within range of the Strait of Hormuz, the strategic chokepoint at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Existing airbases at Bagram, Shindand, Kandahar and Jalabad have been enlarged and Sam-8 anti-aircraft missiles have been installed to defend them. Since MiG-27s and Sam-8s are ill-suited for counterinsurgency warfare, their deployment raises disturbing questions about long-term Soviet intentions.

Opponents of significant American aid to the Afghans argue that it may lead to a deterioration of Soviet-American relations. This ignores the fact that if the Soviets were truly interested in "good" Soviet-American relations then they would not have invaded Afghanistan in the first place. Moscow, moreover, did not hesitate supplying the weapons that killed 34,000 Americans in the Korean War and 58,000 in Vietnam.

A stronger argument against supplying substantial arms to the Afghans is that this might lead the Soviets to escalate military pressures against Pakistan or increase covert aid to Pakistani subversive and separatist groups. But what is to prevent the Soviets from doing this even if aid is withheld from the Afghans anyway? In fact, the Pakistanis will face even stronger Soviet pressures if the Soviets consolidate their hold over Afghanistan. Lieutenant General Abdul Qadir, the acting Minister of Defense of Afghanistan, hinted in January 1982 that

²⁵ The Sunday Telegraph, August 8, 1982.

the Afghan Army would have a "significant role" in the future "like that played by the Cuban and Vietnamese armies."²⁶ This can hardly be comforting to the Pakistanis, given Kabul's support for a "Greater Pushtunistan" to be carved out of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.

Equally ominous was Babrak Karmal's veiled threat of May 1981: "Not far away is the day when our army will become a strong and energetic army capable of defending peace and security not only in Afghanistan but in the region as well."²⁷ In the long run, the Pakistanis have a strong interest in strengthening the Mujahideen, since they are Pakistan's first line of defense.

American aid should be provided as discretely as possible to deny Moscow the propaganda argument that the resistance is inspired by external powers. The Pakistanis will balk at becoming a conduit for sophisticated weapons and should not be pressured into doing so. Only non-combat supplies such as food, medicine and communications equipment should be funneled directly through Pakistan. Iran should not be ruled out as an arms conduit, particularly if civil war erupts.

The United States should help the Afghans obtain sorely needed shoulder-fired anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. Soviet-made weapons would be best because they would be compatible with the large quantity of Russian equipment and ammunition bought on the black market or captured on the battlefield. The huge arsenal that the Israelis captured in Lebanon could be tapped.

The United States should not identify itself with any one Afghan group but should spread its aid over as many as possible. The moderate groups generally require more aid than fundamentalist groups because the latter enjoy preferred treatment in the Islamic world. Establishing a direct pipeline to guerrilla groups inside Afghanistan would be more cost-effective than going through middlemen outside of Afghanistan, but may not be politically feasible.

CONCLUSION

As the leader of the Free World, the United States has a moral obligation to aid the Afghan struggle for freedom and self-determination. The United States and the Mujahideen share common goals. Both desire a Soviet withdrawal, Afghan independence, a government acceptable to the Afghan people and an honorable return of the refugees. As a superpower charged with main-

²⁶ FBIS, Daily Report, South Asia, January 28, 1982, p. C1.

²⁷ Ibid.

taining the global balance of power, the United States has a prudent self-interest in blocking the further southern expansion of the Soviet bloc.

Furnishing aid to the Afghans would send a reassuring signal to nearby states that Washington is able to recognize and protect its own interests as well as those of its friends. Aiding the Afghans would be a sobering signal to the Soviets that they must downgrade their expansionist ambitions or suffer the consequences. Finally, aiding the Afghans would alter the Soviets' cost/benefit calculus vis-a-vis prospective interventions in Iran and Pakistan by raising the perceived risks of Soviet adventurism in those countries. For these reasons the United States should help the Afghans stay their courageous course.

James A. Phillips
Policy Analyst