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CONSOLIDATING VICTORY IN AFGHANISTAN

INTRODUCTION

The Afghan *mujahideen* freedom fighters scored a great victory when their fierce resistance forced the Soviet Union to end its ten-year occupation of Afghanistan on February 15 last year. Yet that victory remains painfully incomplete. Although Soviet troops have withdrawn, the puppet regime that Moscow installed in Kabul at the cost of 1,200,000 Afghan lives survives despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people. The regime survives largely because of the \$250 million to \$300 million of military aid that it has been receiving every month from Moscow.

It is the survival of the Kabul regime and the flood of Soviet aid to it that thrust Afghanistan onto the agenda of Secretary of State James Baker's February 8 and 9 meetings in Moscow with his counterpart, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. While in Moscow, Baker dropped the longstanding American demand that the Soviet-installed dictator, Najibullah, be removed before a negotiated settlement is possible. This is troubling because it suggests that the United States commitment to Afghan self-determination is weakening. This American concession, moreover, was not reciprocated by Moscow.

"Gorbachev's War." From Washington's perspective, Soviet policy toward Afghanistan is puzzling. While Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has acquiesced to, even encouraged, the collapse of Eastern Europe's communist dictatorships, he has spent over \$4 billion of scarce Soviet resources on Afghanistan in the past year. Thus the war there remains in a very real sense "Gorbachev's War." More than 300 Soviet military advisers and an unknown number of KGB personnel continue to plan military operations, launch SCUD-B surface-to-surface missiles, train communist army officers, repair military equipment, and direct the dreaded *Khad* secret police. Soviet

warplanes based inside the Soviet Union steal across the border to launch covert air strikes against resistance strongholds in northern Afghanistan.

Gorbachev's hand-picked surrogate, Najibullah (who like many Afghans has only one name), tenaciously has entrenched his unpopular regime in Kabul and other major Afghan cities. The *mujahideen* have made minor military gains since the Soviet pullout but mainly have been hampered by internal rivalries, logistical problems, and a flawed military strategy. A key difficulty: the *mujahideen* are superb guerrillas who have not yet learned to fight conventional battles. Although they have improved, they lack the weapons, training, organization, and unified leadership necessary to launch coordinated offensives against heavily fortified communist garrisons.

More important, the *mujahideen* have not yet evolved from a national resistance movement against Soviet occupation to a popular government. The Afghan Interim Government (AIG) set up in Pakistan in February 1989 by Afghan political parties based in Pakistan failed to include Iran-based parties, key field commanders, and important tribal and ethnic groups. Until it is broadened to form a truly representative provisional government, the *mujahideen* will be unable to generate sufficient military pressure or induce enough defections from the disgruntled Afghan army to overthrow Najibullah.

Diplomatic Leverage. This will take time. The *mujahideen* require at least one more fighting season (late spring to early fall) to convince Najibullah and his Soviet backers that the Kabul regime is doomed and must make way for a new government. Military pressure is necessary to produce the diplomatic leverage required to oust the Afghan communists. To exert such pressure the *mujahideen* desperately need effective and consistent U.S. military aid. Washington should not acquiesce to Soviet diplomatic efforts to end aid to

AFGHANISTAN

Area - 260,000 square miles, approximately the size of Texas.

Population - estimated in 1985 at 11 million, with 3.7 million refugees in Pakistan, 2 million in Iran and several hundred thousand in the West.

Capital - Kabul (estimated population of 2 million).

Religion - Sunni (80%-85%) and Shia (15%-20%) Muslim. Small minorities of Ismaili Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Agriculture products - Wheat, corn, rice, fruits, nuts, wool, mutton and vegetables. Mostly subsistence agriculture.

Natural resources - Natural gas, coal, copper, iron, chrome, precious and semiprecious stones, some minerals.

Main Exports - Natural gas, fruit, carpets.

Main Imports - machinery, manufactured goods, refined petroleum products, food.

Source: *Afghanistan: Background Notes*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, July 1986, p. 1; *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, Foreign Area Studies, The American University, January 1986, pp. xiv - xv.

Heritage DataChart

both sides of the Afghan conflict, because this would leave the resistance at a permanent disadvantage relative to the Kabul regime, which has stockpiled huge quantities of Soviet military supplies in the last year. Nor should Washington permit Moscow to engineer a cosmetic political settlement that would create an unstable coalition government to mask continued communist control over the Afghan army and secret police. Instead the U.S. firmly and patiently should support the Afghan struggle for liberation and self-determination.

To help the *mujahideen* consolidate their victory, the U.S. should:

- 1) Continue to supply the *mujahideen* with military supplies, including larger (current number is classified) numbers of Stinger and other anti-aircraft missiles, mortars, mine-clearing equipment, and radios.
- 2) Give the *mujahideen* adequate training in how to use these arms and how to coordinate their military offensives.
- 3) Protest Soviet violations of April 1988 Geneva Accords, which prohibit Soviet participation in combat and cross-border Soviet bombing attacks.
- 4) Press the anti-communist Afghan Interim Government (AIG), established in Pakistan in February 1989, to broaden its base of support by including more Afghan Shiites, field commanders, educated expatriates, Durrani Pushtuns, and non-Pushtun ethnic groups.
- 5) Press Pakistan to cease its attempts to dominate the AIG and end its disruptive practice of channeling a disproportionate share of military supplies to fundamentalist groups resented by most Afghans.
- 6) Push for a political settlement based on power transfer to the resistance, not an unworkable, cosmetic agreement on power sharing.

THE MILITARY SITUATION

The *mujahideen* have improved their military position marginally since the February 15, 1989, Soviet troop withdrawal. They now directly control roughly 90 percent of Afghanistan's territory. They have improved the security of their supply routes, particularly along the Pakistani border; overwhelmed isolated regime outposts, nibbled at the outer ring of defenses surrounding the major cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Herat (listed in order of importance), and wrested the initiative from communist forces, which by and large remain hunkered down in heavily fortified garrisons.

The Najibullah regime is defended by approximately 100,000 fighting men, including a largely unreliable army of 40,000, lightly-armed but more reliable tribal militias of about 25,000, and up to 35,000 crack troops of the Ministry

of Interior.¹ By contrast, according to Pentagon estimates, the Afghan resistance can mobilize up to 300,000 men, although no more than 150,000 are usually in the field at the same time.

Lacking Coordination. The *mujahideen* are superb guerrilla fighters, adept at mountain warfare, but have not yet learned to fight major offensives in flat terrain against well-defended cities and bases. The *mujahideen* hydra-headed leadership, small unit tactics, and decentralized organization, which enabled them to withstand the Soviet onslaught, hamper their ability to mount coordinated assaults on government strongholds. When they descend from the mountains to concentrate their forces to besiege garrisons, they become vulnerable to government artillery attacks and high-altitude saturation bombing.²

The *mujahideen* lack the firepower to destroy fortified positions. Their light artillery and inaccurate Chinese- and Egyptian-made rockets have little effect on entrenched troops, but threaten nearby civilians, most of whom support the resistance. The *mujahideen* also lack the capability to penetrate the enormous mine fields that surround major cities and bases.³ These offensive deficiencies have enabled the Najibullah regime to withstand intermittent *mujahideen* attacks.

Government Reprisals. But the regime has failed to defeat the *mujahideen*. As a result, the Kabul regime targets the civilian supporters of the resistance. Najibullah has adopted a hostage strategy, launching indiscriminate artillery, missile, and air strikes against civilians in retaliation for nearby resistance attacks. These intimidation tactics prompt civilians to request local resistance leaders to refrain from overtly liberating densely populated areas. In Kandahar, Afghanistan's second largest city, for example, local *mujahideen* acceded to their civilian supporters' requests to avoid triggering massive government reprisals. These commanders negotiated a *de facto* cease fire with local government forces led by trusted members of their own tribal group.

In exchange for their forbearance, various Kandahar *mujahideen* groups are believed to receive military supplies from local army units, cash tribute from Kabul, and perhaps even promises that the army garrison will defect to the resistance at an opportune moment. Mullah Lala Malang, a widely respected commander, has said that he will not start the final battle to

1 . U.S. Department of State, "Afghanistan: Soviet Occupation and Withdrawal," Special Report No. 179, December 1988, p. 7.

2 . Soviet technicians have converted scores of huge Antonov-12 transport planes into deadly bombers capable of dropping their 44,000 pound payloads from above the three-mile range of the *mujahideen* Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. These planes can loiter for hours above the battlefield, making repeated and increasingly accurate attacks on the defenseless guerrillas below. See *Washington Post*, May 10, 1989.

3 . American analysts estimate that there may be up to 30 million mines strewn throughout Afghanistan, including airdropped mines randomly dispersed along *mujahideen* supply routes and farmers fields. Some 30,000 Afghans, mostly civilians, have been disabled by mines and untold thousands killed. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Soviet/East European Report*, December 10, 1988.

liberate Kandahar until the *mujahideen* achieve effective military coordination, a development that would prevent the Kabul regime from focusing its military counterattacks and reprisals on Kandahar alone.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

There was never only one war in Afghanistan; there were many. Afghanistan's rugged mountains imposed geographic barriers that forced each isolated valley to fight its own war against the Soviets and Kabul communists. Afghanistan's pre-war population of 15 million to 17 million organized itself along ethnic, tribal, and ideological lines to resist the Soviet-imposed communist regime. The Pushtuns, the largest ethnic group with 40 percent to 50 percent of the population, historically dominated Afghan politics and formed the bulk of the anti-communist resistance. The Tajiks of northern

Major Resistance Groups

	Leader	Ideology	Geographic Base
Sunni Parties (Based in Pakistan)			
Jamiat Islami	Burhanuddin Rabbani	Moderate Fundamentalist	North-Northeast
Hezbi Islami(G)	Gulbuddin Hekmatyar	Radical Fundamentalist	North and Southeast
Hezbi Islami(K)	Yunis Khalis	Fundamentalist	Kabul and Southeast
Islamic Union	A.R. Sayyaf	Ultra-Orthodox Fundamentalist	Southeast
Harakat	M. Nabi Mohammadi	Traditionalist	Southern tribal
Nat'l Islamic Front for Afghanistan	S.A. Gailani	Traditionalist-Royalist	Southern tribal
Afghan Nat'l Liberation Front	S. Mojadiddi	Traditionalist	Southern tribal
Shia Parties (Based in Iran)			
"Shura"	S. Beheshti	Traditionalist	Central Hazarajat
Nasr	Unknown	Radical Pro-Iranian	Central Hazarajat
Harakat	S.A. Muhseni	Moderate Fundamentalist	Urban areas
Pasdaran	Unknown	Radical Pro-Iranian	West & Central

Source : Richard Cronin, "Afghanistan After the Soviet Withdrawal: Contenders for Power," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, March 2, 1989, p. 6.

Afghanistan, the second largest group with roughly 30 percent of the population, also have made a major contribution to the resistance. The smaller Uzbek, Hazara, Turkoman, and other communities have done less fighting but remain important pieces in Afghanistan's complex ethnic mosaic.

Islam has been the most important force binding the *ad hoc* anti-communist coalition. Even the name *mujahideen* reflects the Islamic influence; it means "those who fight the Holy War." Now that the foreign invader has been repulsed, the united and dedicated spirit of the Holy War has waned. Islam now is a source of tension between Afghans of different Islamic sects. There is growing friction between Afghan Shiites (who comprise 15 percent to 20 percent of the population) and Afghanistan's Sunni majority. Moreover, fundamentalists groups such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's radical *Hezbi Islami* are trying to assert themselves against the traditional political and religious leaders.

Reemerging Rivalries. The Soviet withdrawal has encouraged a reversion to the kaleidoscopic traditional patterns of Afghan politics. Longstanding personal, political, tribal, ethnic, and ideological rivalries submerged in the common struggle against the Soviet invader gradually have reemerged as the contending factions jockey for political power. The seven major Sunni parties based in Peshawar, Pakistan, have a strong power base among the 3.7 million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan but have less influence over the independent Afghans still living inside Afghanistan.

The Peshawar parties convened a *shura* (council) in Pakistan on February 10, 1989, to establish a provisional government that could stake a credible claim to be Afghanistan's legitimate government. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI), which controls the disbursement of aid to the Pakistani-based *mujahideen*, brokered the formation of the Afghan Interim Government (AIG) on February 23. Sibgatullah Mojadiddi, a professor of Islamic Law who leads the smallest traditionalist party, was voted in as President and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the leader of the smallest fundamentalist party, was voted in as Prime Minister. The fact that two of the least powerful Peshawar leaders were chosen to lead the AIG is an indication that the Peshawar-based party leaders were more interested in preserving their personal political fiefdoms than in building a broad-based government of national unity.

Narrowly Based. The AIG mistakenly failed to include important pieces of the Afghan political jigsaw puzzle. The Iran-based Shiite parties boycotted the 480-seat *shura* when they were offered only 60 of the 120 seats they demanded. Tajiks, Uzbeks, important *mujahideen* field commanders, supporters of former King Zahir Shah (overthrown in 1973), and expatriates living outside Pakistan were underrepresented at the *shura*. The strong Pakistan and Saudi Arabia influences on the proceedings tainted the results of the *shura*, because of the Afghans' visceral distrust of foreigners.

Many Afghans perceived the resulting AIG to be too narrowly based, too pro-Pakistani, and too fundamentalist. Most non-Pushtuns, particularly the Tajiks, perceived it to be too Pushtun-dominated. Pushtuns from the Durrani

tribal group in southern Afghanistan, which was the powerbase for the royal dynasty that ruled Afghanistan from 1747 until 1973, resented the AIG's disproportionate inclusion of members of the Ghilzai tribal group of eastern Afghanistan.

Divide and Rule Strategy. Najibullah cleverly has tried to exploit cleavages in the resistance by offering cash bribes, fuel and weapons to war-weary local commanders in exchange for promises of neutrality. Although few commanders formally have accepted such deals, Najibullah declared many areas to be "zones of peace" and spread disinformation to fan suspicions of separate deals, particularly with major commanders like Ahmed Shah Masoud. Najibullah's propaganda regularly denounces the "lavish" lifestyle of the "warmongers" in Peshawar in an attempt to drive a wedge between the military leaders inside Afghanistan and the political leaders outside. Kabul's propaganda also exploits the traditional unease of urban Afghans with the unruly mountain tribes and exploits the anti-Pakistani sentiments of the population by stressing the AIG's subservience to Pakistan.

Najibullah's regime also is plagued with internal rivalries. The Afghan communist party is estimated to have 150,000 members, of which only 5,000 are believed loyal to Najibullah.⁴ The communists are divided into warring factions: the ruling *Parcham* (banner) group, a pragmatic urban-based clique put in power by the 1979 Soviet invasion, and the larger, more doctrinaire *Khalq* (masses) faction, dominated by rural Pushtuns. There is considerable friction between the *Parcham*-dominated secret police and the *Khalq*-dominated army. Najibullah alertly crushed three coup attempts last year (in April, July, and December). If the *mujahideen* can maintain military pressure, Najibullah may fall victim to his own disgruntled followers, who then may sue for peace.

THE FAILURE OF THE JALALABAD OFFENSIVE

Once established, the Afghan Interim Government appeared more anxious to gain foreign recognition and divide up postwar spoils than to broaden its domestic base of support. It hastily moved to capture the eastern city of Jalalabad, which it hoped to make the provisional capital of liberated Afghanistan. Ignoring the harshest winter in fifteen years, the AIG pressed for an attack in early March. Political considerations were paramount: the attack began shortly before the March 13 to 16 summit meeting in Riyadh of the foreign ministers of Muslim countries belonging to the Islamic Conference Organization. The AIG and Pakistan hoped that a timely military victory at Jalalabad would win recognition of the AIG by the Islamic Conference Organization, the Muslim world's most prestigious international body.

⁴ . Estimate of General Farouq Zarif, a high-ranking defector from the secret police cited in Lally Weymouth, "Inside Najibullah's Regime," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1989.

Instead, the Jalalabad campaign exposed the *mujahideen*'s military and political weaknesses. This crucial operation, the first offensive after the Soviet withdrawal, was improvised with little military or political planning. The AIG failed to consult with such key commanders as Ahmed Shah Massoud or Abdul Haq, who had the expertise and seasoned fighters that might have assured victory. Instead the AIG rushed thousands of *mujahideen* across the border from Pakistan to the outskirts of Jalalabad. This alienated local *mujahideen* who resented the sudden intrusion of outside forces, particularly several hundred fundamentalist Arab volunteers of the zealous "Islamic Brigades." The AIG's attempts to take Jalalabad without involving the major field commanders was in effect a coup, probably inspired by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI), to signal increasingly independent commanders inside Afghanistan that the AIG could win without them.

Overruling Local Commanders. The original plan was to encircle the city and persuade the government forces to surrender, but the local *mujahideen* were unable to convince tribal kinsmen defending Jalalabad that defectors would be safe from the retribution of the undisciplined newcomers. Although defectors had been well-treated throughout most of the war, fundamentalist *mujahideen* had massacred 79 army defectors east of Jalalabad in November 1988. ISI then pushed for a direct assault on the city over the objections of several local commanders who argued that it would result in too many civilian casualties.

The *mujahideen*, 15,000 strong, began a disjointed attack against Jalalabad on March 6. Although they initially succeeded in overrunning the strategic Samarkhel garrison on the outskirts of the city, they could not penetrate the mine fields that protected the estimated 17,000 troops inside. Lacking a unified chain of command, the various *mujahideen* groups were poorly coordinated. The Kabul-Jalalabad road, Jalalabad's vital supply link, was not cut until March 20. The *mujahideen* neglected to attack the Kabul and Bagram air bases, fifty miles away, which became a staging area for the government's devastating air attacks. Roughly half of the up to 8,000 casualties that the *mujahideen* sustained at Jalalabad were due to air attacks.⁵

Desultory Siege. Najibullah's armed forces had the luxury of focusing entirely on Jalalabad because there were few diversionary attacks elsewhere. Although the fighting season traditionally did not begin until late spring, it was clear that many field commanders declined to assist the Peshawar-based politicians to gain a new capital because they resented being taken for granted by the AIG, which they felt did not adequately represent the fighting men. Tajiks abstained from the fighting around Jalalabad due to resentment over the minor role assigned to the Tajik-dominated *Jamiat Islami* at the *shura*. Durrani Pushtuns, also disappointed by their treatment by the *shura*,

5 . *Washington Post*, April 24, 1989 and June 27, 1989.

were unwilling to make sacrifices to install the Ghilzai-dominated AIG in the Ghilzai region of Jalalabad.⁶

Once the initial assault bogged down, the battle became a desultory siege. When the siege was broken on May 12, 1989, the Kabul regime crowed that it had won another "Stalingrad" — the Soviet victory considered to be a turning point in the U.S.S.R.'s fight against Germany in World War II. By squandering men and supplies in a premature high-stakes offensive against one of Najibullah's strongest bastions, the AIG and ISI gave the Kabul regime a victory that boosted communist morale.

PROBLEMS WITH AMERICAN AID

Some of the *mujahideen's* problems can be attributed to Washington's miscalculations. Most American analysts expected the Kabul regime to collapse quickly, like the puppet regimes that the Soviet Army had left behind in May 1946 in the Iranian provinces of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan when Moscow was forced by United States diplomatic pressure to end its occupation of northern Iran. Other observers invoked the Vietnam analogy, but forgot that the South Vietnamese government survived for two years after the U.S. withdrawal and ultimately succumbed to a North Vietnamese invasion, not to the Viet Cong guerrillas.⁷ The South Vietnamese government, moreover, was hamstrung by the U.S. Congress, which cut U.S. aid by 80 percent from 1973 to 1975.

Halving Aid. The U.S. intelligence community estimated that the Najibullah regime would collapse six to twelve months after the Soviet troop pull-out.⁸ This estimate led Washington to underestimate the quantity and quality of arms that the resistance needed to seal its victory. The U.S. had provided the Afghan resistance with \$2.3 billion in military aid from 1980 to

6 . One Durrani Pushtun shrugged off the battle for Kandahar, saying: "This is not a matter for Durrani. It is Ghilzai against Ghilzai." *New York Times*, June 6, 1989.

7 . Anthony Arnold, a leading expert on Afghanistan, presciently predicted that following a Soviet withdrawal: "There is likely to be in Afghanistan, just as in Vietnam, a temporary and misleading increase in regime security effectiveness." The Kabul regime's forces, "no longer able to rely on Soviet troops for support and protection, will probably fight harder, both as a matter of increased pride and in the interests of individual survival." Anthony Arnold, "Parallels and Divergences Between the U.S. Experience in Vietnam and the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 7, No. 2/3, 1988, p. 127.

8 . *Washington Post*, June 27, 1989.

1988, including roughly \$600 million in 1988 alone.⁹ Although figures remain classified, military aid reportedly declined to less than half of 1988 levels in the first six months of last year.¹⁰ The *mujahideen* surrounding Jalalabad were short of ammunition and were forced to siphon off aid that normally would have gone to other commanders to sustain the Jalalabad attack.¹¹

Washington also altered the mix of its weapons for the *mujahideen*, phasing out advanced weapons that it feared could end up in Iranian or terrorist hands. Accurate Spanish-made 120mm mortars long promised to the *mujahideen* were withheld after the delivery of only 30 to 50 units. More important, Washington reduced deliveries of *Stinger* shoulder-fired heat-seeking anti-aircraft missiles shortly after the signing of the April 1988 United Nations-sponsored Geneva Accords, which set the terms of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. These missiles, first used in Afghanistan in September 1986, altered the military balance by reducing the effectiveness of Soviet and Afghan air attacks.¹²

Some 900 to 1,000 *Stingers* were sent to the resistance between 1986 and February 1989.¹³ After *Stinger* deliveries were cut, the *mujahideen* began hoarding their remaining missiles; government bombing then increased.¹⁴ U.S. intelligence officials estimated that the *mujahideen* had 200 to 500 *Stingers* left by last spring.¹⁵ The Bush Administration, fearing that *Stingers* could turn up in the hands of terrorists after the fall of Najibullah, even drew up plans to recover unused *Stingers* by offering the *mujahideen* trucks, tractors, and irrigation equipment in return.

MOSCOW'S AID CONTINUES TO FLOW TO KABUL

When Secretary of State George Shultz signed the Geneva Accords on April 14, 1988, he made it clear that the U.S. reserved the right to continue military aid to the resistance, and then added: "But we are prepared to meet restraint with restraint." This policy of determining U.S. military aid by gauging levels of Soviet military aid was called "positive symmetry." Both the Reagan and the Bush Administrations, however, gave Moscow the benefit of

9. *New York Times*, October 10, 1989, p. A17.

10. *Washington Post*, September 2, 1989.

11. Jalaluddin Haqqani, a major commander in the eastern province of Paktia, complained that aid was cut by almost 80 per cent after the February 15, 1989 Soviet withdrawal. FBIS, *Daily Report*, Near East and South Asia, April 12, 1989, p. 43.

12. A 1989 U.S. Army study estimated that *Stingers* destroyed 269 aircraft in Afghanistan and hit 79 percent of the targets fired upon. *Washington Post*, June 27, 1989.

13. *Washington Post*, July 5, 1989.

14. Cord Meyer, "Unfinished Business in Afghanistan," *Washington Times*, August 5, 1988.

15. *New York Times*, March 12, 1989, p. 18.

the doubt and discounted the prospect of massive Soviet aid. The conventional wisdom was that the U.S. should calibrate its aid to avoid humiliating Gorbachev, who was only looking for a "decent interval" between the Soviet withdrawal and the fall of Najibullah. It was assumed that Gorbachev's highly publicized "new thinking" in foreign affairs meant the Soviets would stop meddling in regional matters.

Gorbachev's "new thinking," however, apparently does not include the abandonment of the Afghan communists. A senior U.S. intelligence official told the *New York Times* that the U.S. had been caught by surprise by the scale of Soviet military aid.¹⁶ Between early March and mid-July 1989, Moscow transferred to Kabul 550 SCUD-B surface-to-surface missiles, 160 T-55 and T-62 tanks, 615 armored personnel carriers, and 1,600 five-ton trucks.¹⁷ Moscow launched the largest air supply effort since the 1948 Berlin airlift, sending 25 to 40 Il-76 transport planes to Kabul each day.¹⁸ U.S. officials estimate that these planes delivered \$250 million to \$300 million worth of military supplies each month.¹⁹ A Soviet official estimated that the airlift alone would cost about \$490 million per year.²⁰ Soviet military support to Kabul last year was estimated to total up to \$4.5 billion.²¹

Moscow Violation. More than 300 Soviet military advisers remain in Afghanistan where they plan Afghan military operations, repair military equipment, train communist army officers, and launch the 180-mile range SCUD-B missiles. Although Soviet advisers were not explicitly banned by the April 1988 Geneva Accords, Soviet participation in combat operations was prohibited. Moscow is violating this commitment; according to a confidential U.S. government report leaked to the *New York Times* on October 10, 1989. Soviet advisers wearing Afghan army uniforms control the huge missiles, which are launched from a base near Kabul that Afghan personnel are not allowed to enter. More than 900 SCUD-B missiles were fired between last February and October.²²

Moscow also is violating the Geneva Accords by making cross-border bombing attacks against targets in northern Afghanistan. The *mujahideen* have monitored and taped radio conversations between Russian-speaking pilots engaged in combat operations, including some over Jalalabad.²³ Soviet

16. *New York Times*, March 24, 1989.

17. *Washington Post*, September 2, 1989, p. A20.

18. *New York Times*, May 24, 1989, p. A12.

19. *New York Times*, October 10, 1989, p. A17.

20. *New York Times*, May 24, 1989, p. A12.

21. David Isby, "Why the Mujahideen Did Not Win the War in 1989 and What They Must Do in 1990," unpublished paper, January 1990, p. 6.

22. *New York Times*, October 10, 1989, p. A17.

23. *Washington Times*, October 30, 1989.

air combat operations have been confirmed by an Afghan pilot who defected September 29, 1989, and a high-level defector from the Afghan secret police, General Farouq Zarif.²⁴

The Soviet KGB also remains active in Afghanistan. Some 1,500 KGB personnel supervise the activities of the Afghan Interior Ministry and secret police.²⁵ Some observers have charged that 6,000 to 7,000 Soviet Central Asian troops disguised as Afghans were dispatched to Afghanistan in mid-1988. Others maintain that this Jowzjani militia actually is manned by Uzbek and Turkmen mercenaries from northern Afghanistan.²⁶

AN AMERICAN POLICY FOR A FREE AFGHANISTAN

America has achieved its primary and extremely important strategic goal in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of Soviet troops. But the U.S. did not give the *mujahideen* arms merely to kill Soviets. The ultimate U.S. objective has been the creation of a stable, independent, and free Afghanistan strong enough to block any possible future expansion of Soviet power. No peace is possible as long as the communists occupy Kabul. Until the communists have relinquished power, Afghanistan will be buffeted by instability that could invite future Soviet intervention. And as long as the war continues, the 3.7 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan will stay put. A U.S. or Pakistani attempt to strike a deal with Moscow over the heads of the Afghans could transform this large, well-armed Afghan population into a destabilizing force that would turn on its Pakistani hosts much as the Palestinian guerrillas turned against the Jordanian government during the 1970 Black September uprising.

Washington should adopt a three-track policy to assist Afghans to regain self-determination: 1) help the *mujahideen* maintain military pressure on Kabul; 2) help the AIG broaden its base of support to become the core of a truly representative government that would include "good Muslims" from Kabul who do not support the communists; 3) seek a diplomatic settlement that includes power transfer from Najibullah to the broadened AIG, not a cosmetic and unworkable power-sharing scheme.

Military Policy

Washington's failure to maintain the promised "positive symmetry" in arms supplies contributed to the *mujahideen*'s military difficulties last year. Increased U.S. military support thus is necessary to redress the imbalance of power created by the massive Soviet arms aid to Kabul. Effective U.S. military aid will improve *mujahideen* military prospects and give Najibullah incentive to admit defeat and head for exile in the Soviet Union. Those that cynically complain that the U.S. is "fighting to the last Afghan" do not know

24. See *Washington Times*, October 6, 1989 and Weymouth, *op. cit.*

25. Rosanne Klass, "U.S. Must Assess Afghan Policy," *Wall Street Journal*, October 18, 1989, p. A25.

26. See Rosanne Klass and Barnett Rubin letters to the editor, *Orbis*, Spring 1989.

the Afghans. The *mujahideen* will continue to fight for their freedom regardless of whether U.S. support continues. Effective U.S. aid is required by the 1982 Tsongas-Ritter Resolution, which passed the U.S. Senate unanimously. It declared: "It would be indefensible to provide the freedom fighters with only enough aid to fight and die but not enough to advance their cause of freedom."

To restore the arms symmetry in Afghanistan, the Bush Administration should:

1) **Upgrade the arms provided to the mujahideen.** To blunt the regimes's deadly high altitude bombing tactics, the *mujahideen* desperately need high-altitude anti-aircraft missiles, such as the British-built 7,000-meter range *Rapier*, which could be mounted on trucks. In addition to greater numbers of the basic *Stinger*, Washington should provide third generation *Stinger*-RMPs, capable of countering the types of flares used by the Soviets to deflect the basic *Stingers*.²⁷ Improved air defenses would enhance the ability of the *mujahideen* to protect civilians in liberated areas, which could lead cities such as Kandahar and Herat to defect to the resistance.

The *mujahideen* also need more accurate and longer range artillery to allow them to attack government garrisons while minimizing civilian casualties. The U.S. should rush several hundred Spanish-made 120mm mortars to the resistance, along with fire control equipment and ammunition for captured artillery. More anti-tank weapons, such as the *Milan* anti-tank guided missile, are needed. Large numbers of special artillery shells capable of cratering runways are necessary to put air bases out of action. Hundreds of *Lightfoot* mine-clearing devices are needed to facilitate attacks and give possible defectors a path out of encircled garrisons.

2) **Train the mujahideen on modern weapons and tactics.** The *mujahideen* should be trained to use their new weapons effectively, to coordinate artillery fire with guerrilla attacks, and to use radio equipment to improve cooperation between dispersed groups.

3) **Urge the mujahideen to adopt a strategy of strangulation.** The resistance should avoid costly frontal attacks on fortified positions and instead try to interdict the regimes road and air supply lines. Guerrillas have won wars in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, and Rhodesia without taking any major towns, but by stressing the political, military, and diplomatic strengths of guerrilla warfare.²⁸

4) **Assert U.S. control over distribution of aid.** Pakistan currently disburses aid so as to maximize its influence over the *mujahideen*. It thus penalizes independent commanders by cutting their aid and seeks to bypass the major com-

27. *New York Times*, March 27, 1989.

28. See Isby, *op. cit.*

manders through the piecemeal subcontracting of military operations to more pliable minor commanders.²⁹ This disrupts the *mujahideen* command structure, sows discord, and undermines morale. Washington should insist that American, not Pakistani, personnel control the flow of U.S. aid to insure that it is channeled directly to such major field commanders as Ahmed Shah Massoud, Abdul Haq, and Ismail Khan. If the massive Soviet arms airlift continues in 1990, the U.S. should begin its own airlift to these commanders, using C-130E *Blackbird* transports designed for low-level penetration and resupply operations.

5) Reduce the aid going to radical fundamentalists. Pakistan currently allocates the lion's share of arms to the *Hezbi Islami* of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a fanatically anti-Western leader who has been described as a cross between Pol Pot and Abu Nidal. Pakistan's ISI favors Hekmatyar because he is a pan-Islamic leader who wants cooperation with Islamic Pakistan and is unlikely to promote irredentist Pushtun claims on Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, a longstanding source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hekmatyar seeks dominance over the other parties and recently broke with the AIG after his party was condemned for killing 30 members of the rival *Jamiat Islami* last July. Washington should penalize Hekmatyar for his attacks on his rivals by cutting off his aid and diverting it to groups, such as *Jamiat Islami*, that have demonstrated a willingness to cooperate against the communists.

Building Support for the AIG

Afghans historically have been superb warriors against foreign invaders, but erratic builders of domestic consensus. Ultimately, the *mujahideen* must rely on political willpower, not merely military firepower, to win their protracted struggle against Najibullah's communists. The resistance must transform itself into a coherent alternative government that can attract broad support from the wavering segment of the urban population that tolerates the repressive Najibullah regime because it fears that the rural-based *mujahideen* will plunge Afghanistan into anarchy. The U.S. therefore should:

1) Press the AIG to broaden its support base. The AIG should consult, cultivate, and include more field commanders, Shiites, urban elites, Durrani Pushtuns, non-Pushtuns, and educated expatriates. No outside power can force unity on the Afghans, but the U.S., cooperating with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, can discourage disunity. Washington should urge Islamabad and Riyadh to reduce their disproportionate support for fundamentalist groups and withdraw the "Islamic Brigades," which many *mujahideen* resent and which frighten regime supporters who otherwise would defect.

2) Urge the resistance to develop a unified military leadership. Washington should help the *mujahideen* establish a Military Council that

29. See Zalmay Khalilzad, "Ending the Afghan War," *Washington Post*, January 7, 1990, p. B4.

would give major field commanders (such as Ahmed Shah Massoud in the north, Abdul Haq around Kabul, Ismail Khan in Herat, and Amin Wardak in Wardak province, among others) control over military strategy and operations. American military aid should be channeled directly to this council to strengthen cooperation and minimize competition among rival groups. This would also help limit Pakistan's manipulation of military aid.

3) Insist that Pakistan reduce its involvement in AIG decisionmaking. Meddling by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence could trigger an anti-Pakistani backlash and tarnish the legitimacy of the resistance in the eyes of many Afghans. Washington should work with Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her Foreign Ministry, which are known to be critical of the agency's overreaching in Afghanistan, to reduce its control over the arms flow.

4) Encourage defections. The Kabul regime was weakened by a hemorrhage of approximately 1,500 defections per month between summer 1988 and February 1989.³⁰ Defections then decreased because of the resistance's loss of momentum, its disorganization, and poor treatment of some earlier defectors. Najibullah's regime is riddled with disloyal officials.³¹ To encourage defections the AIG should proclaim publicly a general amnesty for all Najibullah supporters not guilty of war crimes. The U.S. should help the AIG establish mobile radio stations inside Afghanistan to publicize the safe treatment granted to future defectors. Negotiations on the surrender of garrisons should be conducted by local *mujahideen* commanders who enjoy the trust of the government troops.

Diplomacy

The U.S. consistently has rejected any proposed peace settlement that would allow the Soviet-installed Najibullah regime to retain power. Secretary of State Baker, however, seems to have undercut this policy at his February 8 meeting in Moscow with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze by dropping the long-held American demand that Najibullah be removed before negotiations begin. Although the U.S. still insists that Najibullah must go, it now maintains that the removal could be part of a gradual, phased transition. This is risky because it puts Washington on a collision course with its *mujahideen* allies in exchange for Moscow's promise to remove Najibullah at some vaguely defined later date. Given Soviet violations of the Geneva Accords, George Bush and Jim Baker should not rely on Soviet good faith.

Baker's concession gives Najibullah the opportunity to pose as a conciliatory peace-seeker while shifting the onus for continuing the war onto the *mujahideen*, who probably will reject this approach because they consider Najibullah a war criminal. During the transition period the U.S. would be re-

30. Donatella Lorch, "Target: Kabul," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, February 12, 1989, p. 34.

31. Even Kabul is full of *mujahideen* sympathizers. A BBC correspondent travelling with the *mujahideen* was escorted around Kabul by secret police officials working with the resistance. *New York Times*, March 24, 1989.

quired to press its Afghan friends to accept a cease fire and negotiate with a regime they consider anathema. This pressure not only will drive a wedge between the U.S. and the *mujahideen*, but will shatter the fragile unity of the resistance. Even if Washington could drag the AIG to the negotiating table, it would provoke fundamentalists to defect from the group amid charges of a U.S. sellout. This would weaken the resistance's bargaining leverage in negotiations and give the Kabul regime a new lease on life.

Soviet Complaint. Baker's major concession apparently does not go far enough for Moscow. Soviet spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov complained that Baker's proposal "does not take into consideration the situation that obtains in Kabul," a reference to the fact that the military balance of power remains in Najibullah's favor. Washington should not rush into a negotiating process that tilts the balance further in Najibullah's favor. Instead, it patiently should help the *mujahideen* enhance their bargaining leverage by building their military and political strength.

The U.S. should abide by its longstanding commitment to Afghan self-determination and avoid negotiating with Moscow over the heads of the Afghans. Washington will lose credibility with the *mujahideen* if they suspect a U.S. "sellout." Washington should make it clear that the Najibullah regime is Moscow's headache. Gorbachev hand picked Najibullah to assume power in May 1986 and now annually spends up to \$4.5 billion in military aid to keep him in power. Gorbachev will have an increasingly hard time justifying this investment to the Soviet people during a time of economic crisis. He will have an even harder time explaining this support to the Soviet Union's increasingly restive Muslim population of 50 million. The U.S. therefore should:

1) **Reject "negative symmetry."** Although Moscow rejected a U.S. suggestion for a cutoff of superpower aid ("negative symmetry") in conjunction with the Geneva Accords in 1988, it now wants to adopt this arrangement. This would guarantee that the Najibullah regime would maintain its military superiority over the *mujahideen* and reduce its incentives for a diplomatic settlement. "Negative symmetry" also would weaken the unity of the *mujahideen* and strengthen Hekmatyar's influence because he has the largest stores of stockpiled supplies.

2) **Rebuff Soviet attempts to force the resistance into a coalition with communists.** It is not realistic to expect Afghans, known for their keen desire for vengeance (*badal*), to join in a coalition with communists responsible for the deaths of some 1,200,000 Afghans. The *mujahideen*, who regard Najibullah as "our Hitler," never would accept such an arrangement. Washington's support for such a coalition would undermine U.S. influence in Afghanistan.

3) **Send the U.S. special envoy to Peshawar.** Currently, Peter Tomsen, the U.S. special envoy that oversees Afghan affairs, is based in Washington, far from the action. He should be relocated to Peshawar and assume supervision of all U.S. personnel dealing with military and humanitarian aid programs for Afghanistan. The U.S. should withdraw its diplomatic recognition from Kabul, where it has not had diplomatic representation since January 1989 due to security considerations. Until the AIG has earned U.S. diplomatic recogni-

tion by broadening its political support and establishing itself inside Afghanistan, Washington should recognize no government.

4) Push for power transfer, not power sharing. Washington should insist that a political settlement be based on the complete and irrevocable transfer of power from Najibullah's regime to a broadened AIG. The former king, Zahir Shah, could play an indispensable role as the symbolic figurehead for a neutral interim regime that could prepare for elections or another *shura* to determine Afghanistan's future government. Moscow should spirit Najibullah off for "medical treatment" in the Soviet Union, the same arrangement that removed his predecessor, Babrak Karmal, in 1986. A settlement also must end communist control over the army and disband the secret police.

CONCLUSION

The war in Afghanistan remains Gorbachev's war. The fighting will continue until Gorbachev's hand-picked surrogate Najibullah and his bloody regime are removed. Massive Soviet military aid only prolongs the struggle and postpones its resolution. To offset this Soviet support the U.S. should increase its military support for the *mujahideen* and equally important, should help the AIG transform itself into a representative government.

Challenging Gorbachev. Washington should not rush into a short-sighted agreement on a transitional government that would weaken the unity and bargaining leverage of the *mujahideen*. This would facilitate Soviet efforts to engineer a cosmetic settlement that would safeguard communist control of the real levers of power, the army and secret police. The U.S. should rule out any settlement that does not include the removal of Najibullah, the purge of communist army officers and the disbanding of the secret police.

If Mikhail Gorbachev wants to preserve a working relationship with post-Najibullah Afghanistan then he must lance the Afghan boil and remove Najibullah. The U.S. should challenge Gorbachev to live up to his "new thinking" by giving the Afghans in 1990 what he wisely permitted Eastern Europeans in 1989 — self-determination. If Gorbachev balks at this, then the U.S. should patiently back the *mujahideen* to prompt "newer thinking."

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AFGHANISTAN CHRONOLOGY

- July 17, 1973** King Zahir Shah ousted by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud, with communist support. Zahir now lives in Rome.
- April 27, 1978** Daoud overthrown and killed in a bloody communist coup. Communist reign of terror begins.
- Summer 1978** Organized resistance begins against communist rule.
- December 5, 1978** Moscow and Kabul sign Treaty of Friendship
- December 27, 1979** Soviets invade with 85,000 troops to oust maverick communist dictator Hafizollah Amin and preserve communist rule. Soviets install Babrak Karmal as new communist leader.
- January 1980** Carter Administration begins American aid to resistance.
- February 1981** Reagan Administration expands aid, often prompted by U.S. Congress.
- March 1985** Mikhail Gorbachev assumes Kremlin power, escalates air war against *mujahideen* and intimidation campaign against Pakistan.
- 1985-1986** Soviet troop strength grows to 120,000. Lowpoint of war for resistance.
- February 1986** Reagan Administration authorizes *Stinger* missiles for *mujahideen*.
- May 1986** Moscow replaces Afghan communist leader Babrak Karmal with Najibullah, chief of Secret Police.
- April 14, 1988** Geneva Accords signed setting terms of Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- August 17, 1988** Pakistani President Zia al-Haq and U.S. Ambassador Arnold Raphel are killed when Zia's plane is sabotaged and crashes.
- February 15, 1989** Deadline for Soviet withdrawal set by Geneva accords.
- February 15, 1989** Last Soviet regular forces withdraw; more than 300 Soviet military advisers and an unknown number of KGB personnel remain.
- February 23, 1989** Afghan Interim Government (AIG) formed in Pakistan.
- March-July 1989** Unsuccessful *mujahideen* siege of Jalalabad.