

Near right: The majority of the Mujahidden guerrilla forces are Islamic fundamentalists. Middle right: The guerrilla forces are largely outnumbered and face superior firepower from the Soviet Red Army. Here, guerrillas pose by downed Soviet equipment. Far right: A Soviet victim of the Afghanistan carnage.



# Afganistan: Seven years after the invasion

## FEATURES

1986 marks seven years since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. On the 27th of December, 1979, some 150,000 Soviet soldiers supported by 500 fighter planes, 700 helicopters and 4,000 tanks crossed the Afghan border. But the Afghan people have proved to be a tenacious adversary. Today the stalemate continues against the Afghan Mujahidden, or "freedom fighters" as they are commonly known.

The Soviet invasion has disrupted the lives of 15 million Afghans. About 2.5 million have sought refuge in Pakistan, mostly in the Peshawar province and another 1.5 million have fled to Iran and Turkey. In 1984 it was estimated that over one million Afghani men, women and children had been killed.

The Red Army has also sustained substantial losses, in both physical and political terms. According to US sources, about 20,000 soldiers have either died, deserted or disappeared. This has created a difficult Soviet domestic problem. Most Soviet citizens have been unaware of the nature of their country's involvement in Afghanistan. It was only in the early part of 1985 that Soviet television began covering sections of the war, labeling the Mujahidden as rebels, bandits and counter-revolutionaries.

Unfortunately for the Mujahidden, the war has not yet seriously affected Afghanistan's neighbors. Turkey is going through a period of economic reconstruction while Pakistan will not become involved for both economic and strategic reasons. Pakistan and India are still engaged in the Kashmiri conflict and any full-scale Pakistani involvement would disrupt its guerrilla activities. As well, Iran is occupied in its six year war with Iraq. Finally, the Gulf countries refuse to get directly involved despite the fact that the Mujahidden have announced their intentions to form an Islamic state known as 'Shar'iah.' The creation of a Muslim state would pose a threat to the Soviets since it might cause an uprising of the 50-60 million Muslims in the USSR.

The international community has not been altogether silent on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Many nations boycotted the 1980 Olympics held in Moscow. Last November 22, 122 nations in the United Nations voted in favor of an immediate Soviet withdrawal.

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, igniting a protracted struggle with native Muslim rebels who have constructed

### Events Leading to the Invasion

During the reign of Nadir Shah, and his son Zahir Shah Khan (the latter which lasted until 1973), Afghanistan had been relying on the Soviet Union for support. This became more evident after 1953 when Daoud Khan was appointed Prime Minister. In 1956, as a result of a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, Afghanistan began receiving arms and military training.

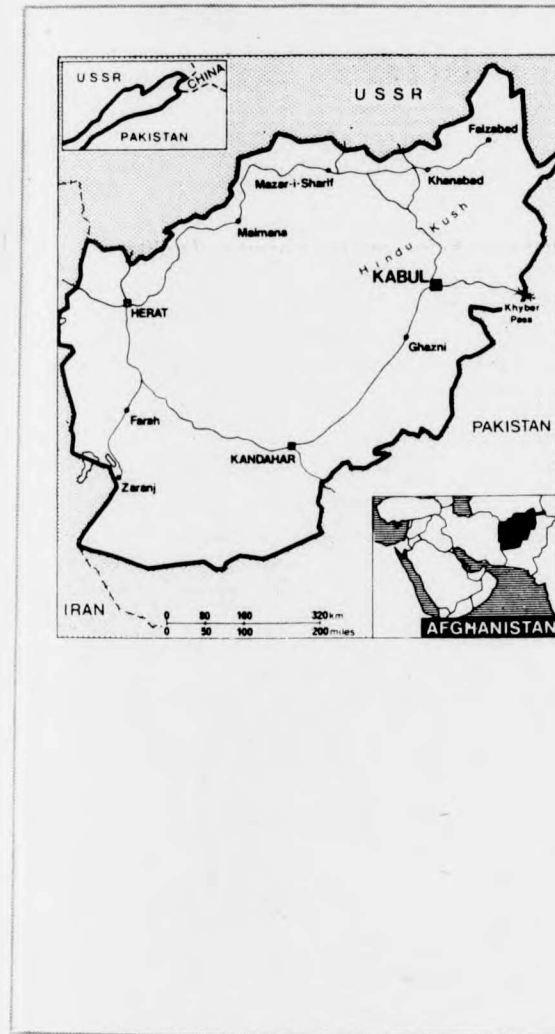
In 1963 Afghanistan broke all ties with US backed Pakistan and became more reliant on the Soviets for exports and imports. The next 10 years saw a tacit alignment with Moscow. At the same time trade and aid programs were initiated with Washington.

In 1973 Zahir Shah was forced into exile and the previously deposed Daoud returned to power as President. During the period between 1976-78 Daoud began realigning his priorities.

Afghanistan began establishing ties with Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. As well, Afghan military personnel were sent to India for training instead of the USSR. A Soviet backed coup transpired, removing Daoud and establishing Nur Muhammad Taraki in power. However, when Taraki was secretly invited to Moscow to organize a coalition between various factions within Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin seized power. At this point the Muslims began to rise up against the tottering government of Amin and Moscow began planning for invasion.

Amin was killed immediately before the invasion, and along with the Red Army, Babrak Karmal entered Kabul and took control. Karmal then merged the two main Marxist parties, Khalk (People's) and Parcham (Banner). Faced with the problem of a deserting army and a major split in the Khad (Afghan Secret Service) Karmal will probably never be able to retain power if left to himself.

It would seem that the Soviets view Afghanistan as a buffer between nations friendly to the US and themselves. In addition Afghanistan is indispensable in terms of Soviet geopolitical strategy as it offers access to a warm water port.



### The Ongoing War in Afghanistan

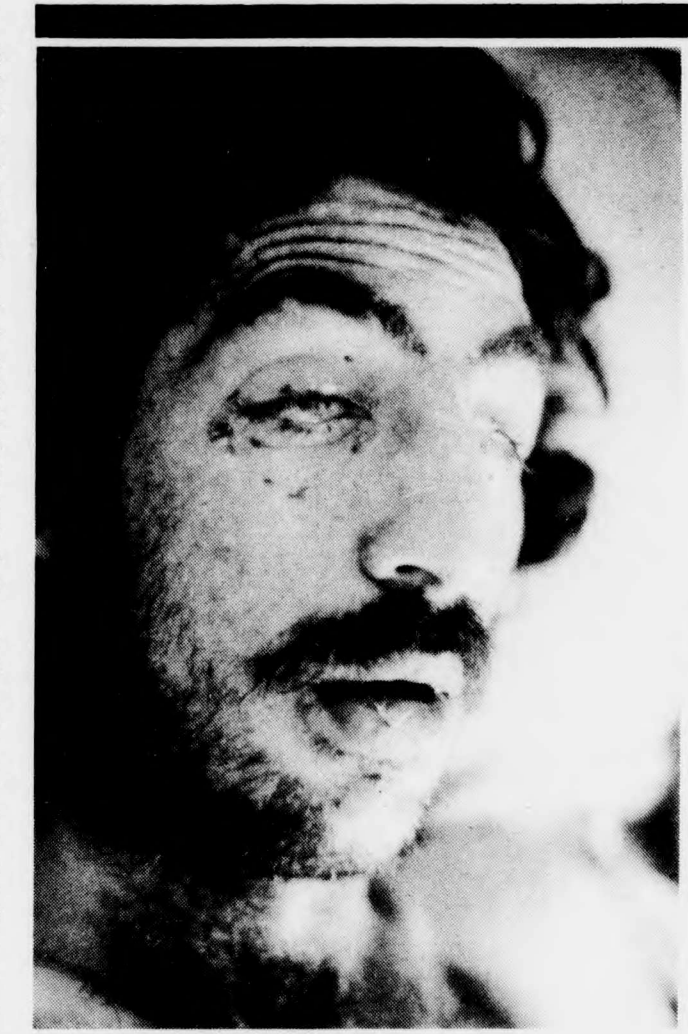
Afghanistan has also served as useful testing ground for the newest weapons and techniques of warfare. There have been reports of the use of chemical and biological weapons for fighting the guerrilla warfare tactics of the Mujahidden. With 200,000 armed Mujahidden, and another 300,000 unarmed, the Soviets have had to fight a war against an enemy which cannot confront them in classical head-on battles.

The Mujahidden have a long history of resisting invasion. Henry S. Bradsher, in "Afghanistan and the Soviet Union," says, "At the crossroads of ethnic migrations, marauding armies, and modern empires, this area has a more continuous history of fighting invasions than any other part of the world. In wars and guerrilla classes, fighting each other when not resisting outsiders, Afghanistan's varied peoples have sharpened their collective instincts over the centuries for resistance to Soviet control."

The Afghans are known to be extremely loyal to their tribes and this has led to the leaders, called Khans or Maliks. This tribal problem caused serious setbacks for the Mujahidden at the outset of the Soviet invasion. Before 1983 the forces fought in their own provinces of origin. In addition to the fact that Afghanistan is comprised of many tribes, the country is divided into 26 provinces extending over 648,000 square kilometres. In late 1983 the Seven Party Alliance was formed consisting of the main groups and tribes. They rotate leadership every year and presently Jalaluddin Haqqani from the province of Patkia is the leader.

The immediate objective of the Afghan Mujahidden is to drive the Red Army out of Afghanistan. They then hope to establish the 'rule of Allah.' Since no Muslim country is willing to rally on the side of the Mujahidden they are left alone in their Tehad (Holy War struggle) against a formidable enemy. A state needs people and the rate at which the Afghans are being killed shows that the population may soon be half its original size.

Since no direct help is coming from the Gulf States, the US is forced to assist the cause of the Mujahidden. However, the Mujahidden has refused to negotiate directly with Washington. They want to keep the Jihad pure and they see America as corrupt. In addition they do not want it to appear that they are fighting a proxy war. Nevertheless the US spends \$325 million on military and medical aid for the Mujahidden. The aid goes to Pakistan and it has been reported that not all of the funds are reaching the Mujahidden.



There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding purported Soviet use of chemical and biological weapons. Here, a victim bears testimony to these charges.

The guerillas continue to use Russian Kalishnikov machine guns and sub-machine guns, old rifles, and some American and Egyptian machine guns. They get the Kalishnikovs from military bases and dead soldiers while some weapons are brought from the peasants who get them from the Soviets in exchange for food.

In an October 1985 interview in *Inquiry*, Mujahidden guerrilla leader Haqqani said, "It is true that we face a well-prepared and ruthless imperialist enemy and enjoy comparatively little material support from the Muslim world. But the Soviet Union is an aging imperialist power, plagued by a highly inefficient economy, ridden with internal political contradictions and unable to create popular enthusiasm for its archaic and obsolete state ideology. The decline and fall of the Soviet empire—its inevitable retreat from Asia will begin with its defeat at the hands of the Afghan Mujahidden." This, in short, is the position of the "freedom fighters." It remains to be seen whether Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev will prolong the war or continue in the fashion established by Leonid Brezhnev in 1979.