

Zia channelled the lion's share of American weapons aid to the fundamentalists, consciously downgrading Pushtun resistance groups. Since becoming Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto has attempted to reverse his anti-Pushtun policy, calling for a broad-based Afghan government dominated neither by the Communists nor the fundamentalists. Pakistan's interests require such a government, she told me in June 1988, since "continued civil war means the continued presence of three million refugees." In a subsequent interview with *The Nation* of Lahore, she warned more explicitly that efforts to establish a Pakistani satellite state in Kabul might stir up a Pushtun backlash.

When Bhutto visited Washington in June, she urged the US to pursue a political solution of the Afghan war through negotiations with the Soviet Union. The Bush administration stalled for time, arguing that the resistance should be given another chance to overthrow Kabul militarily this summer and fall. But administration officials express increasing impatience with the poor military performance of the resistance and the inability of the government-in-exile to broaden its base. If the Kabul regime is still intact by the end of the fighting season in October, these officials foresee an intensified search for a political solution.

WHAT EXPLAINS THE STAYING POWER OF THE Communist forces demonstrated in the Jalalabad fighting? To be sure, the Kabul regime has airpower, while the resistance forces do not. Another military factor responsible for the poor showing of the resistance forces in the Jalalabad assault so far has been their lack of experience in conventional warfare. But an important and often overlooked part of the answer lies in the fact that the Communist Party has a hard core of forty thousand highly-motivated activists who see themselves as nationalists and modernizers carrying forward the abortive reform effort launched by King Amanullah from 1919 to 1929. On a visit to Kabul in 1984 and in continuing contacts with Communist leaders, I have been reminded that dedication and a patriotic self-image are not a monopoly of the resistance fighters.

The taint of Pakistani sponsorship now attaching to the Peshawar exile regime has reinforced this patriotic self-image and enabled the Communists to rationalize their own record of a decade of collaboration with Soviet occupation forces. Many party activists are drawn from previously-submerged social groups, including women. They will not easily give up their new status and are likely to continue to fight rather than abandon the field to the resistance.

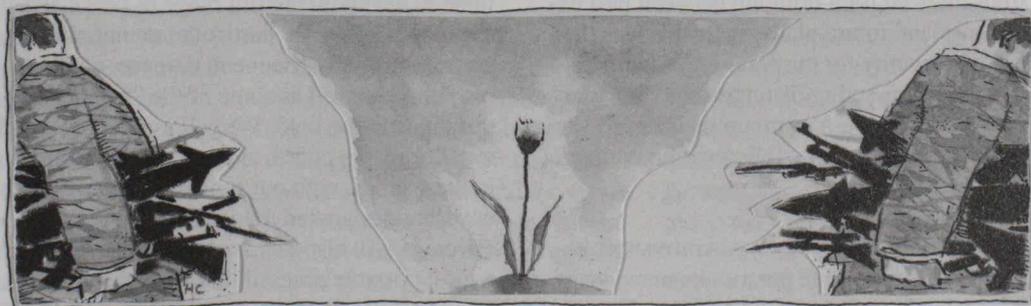
Conceivably, with a large-scale expansion of Pakistani technical and logistical support now being provided, the resistance forces would be able to use armored vehicles and improve their showing. However, the deep-seated divisions

in the resistance would make a definitive victory unlikely in the absence of years of training in conventional warfare and a massive escalation of American military aid extending not only to armored vehicles but also to aircraft. More important, even in the event that the Communists are dislodged from Kabul, they would not necessarily stop fighting. Afghanistan would in all probability remain locked in a continuing civil war involving the Communists; Islamic fundamentalist factions backed by Pakistan, the United States and Saudi Arabia; Shia groups backed by Iran; and many of the resistance field commanders, especially those linked to the Pushtun groups who look to Zahir Shah as their spokesman.

Among the possible topics of Soviet-American discussions on Afghanistan is an agreement to terminate military aid to the Afghan combatants. Originally proposed by the United States in March, 1988, "negative symmetry" was rejected at that time by Moscow. Since Gorbachev's reversal of the Soviet position in November 1988, however, it is Washington that has rejected the concept.

If an aid cutoff could be agreed upon, the Afghan combatants would be compelled, for the first time, to focus seriously on possible political compromises. Secretary General Pérez De Cuellar would then have an opportunity to pursue the 3 November 1988, General Assembly resolution calling on him to promote a broad-based government embracing "all segments" of the Afghan people.

One of Zahir Shah's close advisers, Sultan M. Ghazi, has urged the Secretary General to convene a series of national unity conferences, or mini-*shuras* as a prelude to a larger *shura*.



Neither Kabul nor the Peshawar government-in-exile would be represented as such. However, the invitation list would be designed to provide for representation of all significant political and social forces. The mini-*shuras* could choose an interim government directly, composed of independent, non-partisan figures, as proposed by former UN mediator Diego Cordovez in July 1988, or they could call a larger gathering for this purpose.

CONTRARY TO THE WIDESPREAD IMAGE OF A hopelessly polarized society, there is no shortage of respected, centrist Afghans who could form a government capable of commanding popular support. Former Deputy Prime Minis-

ter Abdul Samad Hamed, former Justice Minister Abdul Sitar Sirat, former Agriculture Minister Abdul Wakil and former Deputy Prime Minister Ali Ahmad Popal are examples of the many experienced Afghan leaders who are not tainted by fundamentalist extremism, past links with the Communists, or the corruption charges that have discredited most of the alliance leaders.

While the Communist Party cannot be wished away in a postwar Afghanistan, it clearly cannot have a significant role in an interim regime and is not likely to win major representation in any future elections. Just as the US should not seek to exclude all Communist participation in the process leading to an interim regime, so the Soviet Union should be prepared to support representative processes that would, by their nature, consign the Communists to clear minority status.

Many Bush administration officials are skeptical of all formulas for replacing the Communist regime peacefully. Such scenarios, it is argued, implicitly assume that the existing Kabul governmental infrastructure would be left in place, at least initially. In this view, the armed forces, police and intelligence services of the Communist regime must be militarily destroyed and uprooted or they will subvert any new government. It is necessary to "start from scratch," as President Reagan put it in a press conference in November 1988.

The task of reshaping the armed forces, police and intelligence services inherited from the Najibullah regime would clearly not be an easy one. But the leadership of a successor regime would be fortified by its control of Western, UN and Soviet aid resources. Communist

discipline is not likely to survive for long within the security services in the midst of the political realignments that would accompany a broad-based regime. As the memory of the Soviet occupation fades, Afghan nationalism is likely to reassert itself, gradually diluting and domesticating Afghan Communism.

In my view, a policy designed to start from scratch in Afghanistan carries unacceptable moral as well as political costs. Such a policy is, in effect, a policy of fighting to the last Afghan, in the misguided pursuit of perceived American geopolitical objectives that can be achieved more effectively through political and diplomatic means. □