

FOOTNOTES

1. *Izvestiya* (Moscow, February 25, 1976).
2. See *CIA Study: Soviet Covert Action and Propaganda*. Presented to the Oversight Committee, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, 6 February 1980, by the Deputy Director of Operations, CIA.
3. 464 Cruise missiles and 180 US Pershing II ballistic missiles to be based in Western Europe by late 1983.
4. Referred to by analysts as the Soviet "window of opportunity" or as the West's "present danger".
5. Estimates of the number of Muslims in the USSR vary from 40 to 50 million — a fifth of its total population — and, due to differential birth rates, the population of the predominantly Muslim Central Asian Republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Turkmenia and Kirgizia) is growing at five times the rate of that in the Slav USSR. By the 1990s Muslims may account for a third of the total population, and by the year 2000 the Russian Slav population will be a minority. See Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf", *Adelphi Paper* no 157, (London, 1980).
6. In 1934, the Soviet Army was ordered into Afghanistan to support the pro-Russian Amir. However, before the troops reached the frontier the Amir's regime collapsed and the orders to advance were revoked by Moscow. See Ken Booth, *The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy*, (London, 1973).
7. Gaddafi warned Libyan dissidents abroad that they were "doomed" unless they returned home by June 11 to face his justice. By mid-May, five had been murdered, in Rome and London.
8. See Samuel T. Francis "Latin American Terrorism: The Cuban Connection" *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, No 104 (Washington, 1979).
9. See Paul Wilkinson *Terrorism and the Liberal State* (London, 1977), pp. 231-234.

RESISTANCE TO THE SOVIET OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

by David Charters

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, many journalists and analysts expressed well-founded doubts about the prospects for effective opposition to the Soviet occupation forces. Six months later the resistance continues but the doubts persist. This article will attempt to analyse the anti-Soviet resistance to date, to examine the problems and prospects confronting it in the months to come, and attempt to answer the question: is effective resistance to Soviet domination possible?

What is Resistance?

M.R.D. Foot, authority on the European resistance, starts his recent study of the subject with the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* definition: "an organized underground movement in a country occupied by enemy forces carried on with the assistance of armed fighters for the purpose of frustrating and damaging the occupying power."¹ The principal political task is subversion, which

includes, by Foot's classification, four subordinate activities: sabotage; attacks on troops and individuals; politics; and insurrection.² The emphasis on subversion is significant because it establishes limits on the role and the realistically attainable objectives of resistance; it does not include liberation. Only rarely, and arguably at that (Yugoslavia being a case in point), did the European resistance gain strength sufficient to "liberate" a country, to move from the military into the political sphere, without the massive infusion of allied forces. This is an important consideration in the context of Afghanistan; a "counter-invasion" by external allies is highly unlikely and those who might assume that the Afghans can liberate themselves without such assistance would do well to recall the historical record. Having said that, it should be stressed that resistance is by no means futile. In the military dimension resistance operations can raise the human and material costs of occupation to severe levels, causing a corresponding decline in morale and fighting efficiency among the enemy forces. Enemy lines of communication may be harassed, forcing the occupation forces to deploy on internal security duties troops which might be used for offensive operations elsewhere. The resistance groups can gather and pass to their external allies valuable intelligence on the occupation forces.³ Equally, if not more important, politically a resistance movement can provide a focus for the national will to oppose the occupation. Assistance from allies and successful resistance actions may restore national self-respect and confidence and revive the desire and ability to assume responsibility for government after liberation.⁴

Conditions Favouring Resistance

Recent history affords numerous examples of opposition to totalitarian regimes, foreign occupation and colonial rule. In some cases opposition flared into open, violent resistance; in others it remained muted, if it was not silenced altogether. Clearly, resistance will flourish only under certain conditions, which may include any or all of the following:⁵

1. A cause — something to resist, such as political repression, foreign occupation, ethnic, religious or other discrimination, corrupt and/or ineffective government, modernization.
2. A population willing to be persuaded that armed rebellion is the best (or only) means of removing the occupation forces.
3. Alternative non-violent channels for resolving grievances are either non-existent, blocked or insufficiently developed to accommodate them.
4. Development or existence of a cultural tradition which accepts or encourages the use of violence to resolve grievances.
5. Failure of a government system — corruption, division, loss of initiative among governing elites and administrative institutions, break-down of essential services — including in the population a lack of confidence and a general decline in respect for authority.
6. Techniques of repression employed by the government which are sufficient to increase agitation induced by other factors but insufficient to deter further violence.
7. Emergence or existence of a political leadership and organization willing and able to exploit the situation.

8. An adequate and renewable supply of weapons appropriate to the terrain and to the technical abilities of the resistance.
9. "Geo-political factors" — terrain which favours the resistance while hampering the operations of the enemy; the existence of areas of minimal government control; technical, political or moral limitations on the government's use of force; regional superpower competition for influence.

This comprehensive, if imperfect, model offers a broad framework within which to consider the prospects for the Afghan Resistance.

The Afghan Resistance

BACKGROUND

The Afghan resistance movement grew out of widespread opposition to "reforms" initiated by the Marxist government of Nur Mohammed Taraki, who seized power in a coup d'état in April 1978. The government's efforts to reduce the power of the "Mullahs" (religious leaders) and to emancipate women deeply offended the conservative, devout Islamic tribes. Moreover, fiercely independent and traditionally rebellious they resented the government's close association with the atheistic Russians and the growing Soviet presence in the country. Opposition flared into violence almost immediately and by June 1979 some 2,000 Soviet "advisers", provided under the terms of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of December 1978, were assisting the Soviet-trained and -armed Afghan army in the suppression of resistance. Reports received since indicate that the repression was brutal: thousands of Afghans died in the crushing of an uprising in Herat in March 1979, and the following month Soviet advisers directed Afghan troops and police in a massacre of an estimated 1,000 men at the village of Kerala, northeast of Kabul. In September 1979 Amnesty International reported that the Taraki regime had imprisoned some 30,000 people and had executed at least 2,000 "political prisoners". Far from crushing the resistance the repression appeared to give it greater strength and momentum; by the autumn of 1979 the resistance appeared to control much of the countryside outside the main cities.⁶ This was the military situation which, combined with political factors in Kabul and on the international scene, induced the Soviet Union to intervene in December 1979. Troops were flown into the capital and armoured columns crossed Afghanistan's northern borders. Today there are an estimated 80,000 Soviet troops in the country, and the resistance has had to challenge this powerful force as well as the Marxist-led Afghan Army.

RESISTANCE OPERATIONS

Afghan resistance operations since the Soviet invasion have followed the pattern suggested by Foot. First, the movement sabotaged power lines, coal and copper mines and intimidated farmers to convince them to reduce the spring grain planting.⁷ Secondly, the resistance carried out constant attacks on Soviet and Afghan troops and on individuals thought to be collaborating with the regime. Owing to government censorship and the consequent difficulty in acquiring accurate information, the effect of these attacks can only be estimated: in April the U.S. Department of State placed Soviet casualties at about 500 per week, totalling an estimated 7,000 since the invasion.⁸ The

political dimension of resistance activities fell into three distinct but related areas: attempts to organize a united front for coordinating resistance activities; propaganda; and subversion of the Afghan army. The resistance had considerable success in the latter area: by February, as many as 40,000 men of the Afghan army may have defected to the insurgents, taking their weapons and equipment with them. In some cases, complete units fought the Soviets outright, while others refused to carry out offensive operations against the resistance movement.⁹ Finally, after considerable organization the resistance movement launched a major urban insurrection on February 21st. The uprising began in Kabul with a general strike which spread to ten other cities and towns the next day. Demonstrators in Kabul marched in the streets, rioted, and stole weapons from police stations. Soviet and Afghan troops using armoured vehicles and helicopter gunships crushed the uprising after six days, leaving 350-500 Afghans dead and many more wounded. Similar incidents occurred on a smaller scale at the end of April, and in May and June.¹⁰

STATE OF THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE

Generally speaking, conditions in Afghanistan favour the resistance movement. What began as a violent reaction to Marxist modernization plans stifened by political repression has, with the Soviet invasion, broadened to become a war of national liberation. The fact that six months after the Soviet invasion the resistance shows no signs of stopping demonstrates the depth and widespread appeal of the liberation cause. This should not be surprising. First, the Afghan tribes have a long history of opposition to foreign invaders and to any form of central government. Even in recent times central government institutions have not replaced fully local, tribal and religious authority in the rural areas. In fact, tribal religious fervour provided the propaganda vehicle for mobilizing opposition to the Marxist regime.¹¹ Secondly, the tribes traditionally have used violence to resolve differences and to repel foreign forces and the rugged mountain ranges and deep valleys which dominate much of the country favour the guerrilla warfare tactics adopted naturally by the Afghan tribes. The terrain confines the highly-mechanized Soviet Army to a few roads or to movement by air and leaves many areas of minimal government control.¹²

The resistance movement is, however, not without its difficulties. At first glance the most serious of these appears to be the lack of a recognized leader and a cohesive organization. One estimate places 60 different factions in opposition to the government;¹³ even amongst the largest and most influential groups there are tribal and religious differences which preclude the easy formation of a united resistance movement. One observer has suggested that this may be a product of the predominant influence of the Sunni Islam sect in Afghanistan. The Sunni sect lacks the Shiite's hierarchial authority structure of powerful Mullahs and Ayatullahs. Consequently, Islam has never been as strong a unifying force in Afghanistan as it is in predominantly Shiite Iran.¹⁴ It may be fair to suggest as well that, by its very nature, a spontaneous resistance movement is bound to be poorly organized, at least in the early stages. The consequences of disunity are several: first, the Islamic nations of the Middle East, obvious allies in the struggle against the Soviet Union, have demonstrated reluctance to support the Afghan resistance in anything stronger than moral terms. They provide financ-

ing for the refugees who have fled to Pakistan, recognizing that some of the funds and benefits will go indirectly to the resistance. Only Egypt has gone so far as to train resistance fighters and to provide them with arms.¹⁵ It may be that these likely supporters will withhold total support until a recognized leader and a coherent organization appear. Secondly, what little political strength that the Karmal government has rests on the power of the Soviet army and on the disunity of the opposition. The longer the disunity continues, the greater will be the ability of the Soviet Union to "divide and conquer", destroying the individual organizations piecemeal. Finally, there is no generally recognized "rival state" along the lines of Sinn Féin during the Irish rebellion of 1919-21, nor is there a government-in-exile, such as the Free French in the Second World War. Thus, while the rebels clearly are able to remove temporarily government control in certain areas, and are capable of organizing popular uprisings of limited duration, it appears that they have not been able to build a parallel hierarchy which would be able to make that important move from the military into the political sphere, to fill the power vacuum if the Karmal government collapses.

This limitation is related directly, if only partially, to the second problem: weapons. The supply of arms, either purchased in Pakistan or captured from government forces, was probably adequate until the Soviet invasion. But weapons acquired in Pakistan must be smuggled slowly across a frontier now made hazardous by airmobile Soviet forces. Furthermore, many of the resistance weapons are outdated, but more modern arms are expensive and, in any case, few members of the resistance have demonstrated the technical capacity necessary to use them. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is reported to have opened a conduit of Soviet-made weapons to the resistance fighters in January, but the scale of supply is not known; the fact that the rebels complain still about a shortage of weapons indicates that it is probably limited.¹⁶ The slow rate of attrition of Soviet helicopters indicates that at least one crucial weapon — the man-portable surface-to-air missile — is not yet getting through. In quantity, such weapons could make the narrow mountain passes "hell on earth" for Soviet pilots, thereby reducing the Soviet army's air mobility. Anti-tank rocket launchers of simple design and, above all, land mines, could do the same for vehicle-borne forces, tied as they are to vulnerable roads, forced by snipers to drive "buttoned up" with limited visibility.

Echoing, perhaps unwittingly, Churchill's famous comment to Roosevelt, one Afghan spokesman said in January, "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job."¹⁷ Weapons alone will not bring liberation, but appropriate weapons in quantity could raise the human costs of the Soviet occupation to levels which would preclude consolidation of the Soviet position in Afghanistan or its exploitation for further adventures.

Finally, geo-political factors still favour the Soviet Union. It shares a common border with Afghanistan, making reinforcement and re-supply of forces relatively easy. Although the strategic political fallout from the Soviet invasion remains "hot news" the Soviets have managed through strict censorship, harassment and expulsion of western news media, to reduce the profile of the occupation itself and the resistance to it to the status of secondary news. Few western newsmen are either willing or able to make the dangerous trek overland

to see the situation for themselves. Consequently, reports of fighting are sketchy: resistance claims of victory may be dismissed easily as exaggerations and it remains difficult to confirm reports of Soviet atrocities or the use of chemical weapons.¹⁸ This serves Soviet interests in two ways: first, it prevents the west from gaining the kind of moral ascendancy which, in the hands of the Soviet Union and its allies, imposed moral and political limits on American behavior in Vietnam. It is hard to condemn what you cannot see; brutal repression can continue out of the camera's eye. Secondly, the lack of credible spokesmen for the opposition may, in time, confer legitimacy upon the Soviet accounts of the conflict, and thus, indirectly, upon the Soviet position as a whole. Both of these factors will be important if the Soviet Union is to attempt to disarm western anger and to forestall effective sanctions; they are crucial elements in the current Soviet "peace offensive" aimed at "normalizing" east-west relations and legitimizing the status quo in Afghanistan.¹⁹

Conclusions

The prospects for the Afghan resistance are grim indeed. The passage of time is the greatest legitimizer of all and the pressure on President Carter to reopen the lines of communication to Moscow, to restore "détente", may be a good indication of how far the process has gone already.²⁰ In a world almost desperate for peace at any price, is there any hope for liberation of Afghanistan, or at the very least, effective resistance to Soviet domination? The answer must remain at present a qualified "yes", because it rests on the willingness of the west to give unqualified moral, political and material support to the Afghan resistance. Such support is not yet forthcoming, either because we have already accepted the eventual triumph of a "new order" in Afghanistan, or because we are afraid to stand by our consciences and admit that we are involved. Neither position is defensible in moral or strategic terms. The west need not feel guilty for supporting a genuine anti-imperialist struggle and for opposing strongly on moral grounds Soviet intervention in a foreign country. Furthermore, sustained support for the resistance could ensure that the occupation is so costly for the Soviets in political, human and material terms that they would be unable to exploit their position there and would be reluctant to attempt such an operation again.

The Price

A decision to support the Afghan resistance should not be made lightly, for it would involve serious commitments for the west. First, the commitment would have to be long-term, not subject to changes at the whim of one party or minister or another. It is important for moral credibility that policy remain consistent: if the Soviet occupation is regarded as immoral, illegal and unacceptable now, it must remain so. This in turn would require political will to maintain the commitment for years if necessary, to live with the political, economic and human costs, and to convince the western public that there are no easy solutions, no instant results. It may be too much to expect that President Carter's State of the Union address in January was intended to prepare the nation — and the western alliance — for just such a long-haul struggle.

Secondly, the west must be prepared to accept a supporting role, not a directing one. Command and control would have to remain with the resistance move-

ment itself; it cannot be run from Washington. Furthermore, the west must avoid the temptation to do "all or nothing". A long-haul commitment precludes "quick fixes" and the problems of the resistance cannot be solved simply by throwing money at them. The commitment in dollar terms need not be high, therefore, just constant. If the Middle Eastern members of OPEC could contribute directly to the purchasing of arms for the resistance, the west and other nations could play a valuable supportive role as the arsenal of the freedom struggle.

Third, in order to stimulate effective resistance the west might have to support the leader of the party which promises the most effective campaign. The aim of their struggle is to remove foreign domination. The character of the regime which might follow a Soviet pullout is a matter to be resolved by the Afghans themselves.

Finally, support should be justified on moral terms. If the west could be seen to be backing a resistance movement because the struggle is morally correct, it would obviate the need to mask our support under a cloak of secrecy.

President Carter's description of the Afghanistan situation as "the most serious crisis since the Second World War"²¹ was unnecessarily melodramatic. But the implications are serious enough. To do nothing in the face of naked aggression might ease the short-term crisis but the long-term consequences would be very dangerous: in a future crisis over, for example, the Persian Gulf oil fields, the west could be reduced to a choice between appeasement or nuclear war, neither of which would protect western interests. By choosing the middle course now, the west could make the Soviets pay a discouraging price for their aggression without committing either the west or the nations of the region to an all-out war. For such security, economic sanctions, an Olympic boycott and a long-term commitment to the Afghan freedom struggle seem a very small price to pay. In closing, it is worth recalling the advice of Edmund Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."²²

Footnotes

1. 3rd Edition, 1969, Vol. 2, cited in M.R.D. Foot, *Resistance* (London, 1978), p. 5.
2. Foot, p. 10.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 310, 315; G3 Division, Allied Forces Headquarters, "Estimate of SOE Operations: Report by Chiefs of Staff to Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean", 31 Oct. 1945, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) Memoranda no. 665, Papers of the British Cabinet Office (CAB) 80/98, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew, Middlesex, England. SOE (Special Operations Executive) was the British secret service which played a major role in organizing, supporting, training and arming the anti-Nazi resistance.
4. Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, "The Value of SOE Operations in the Supreme Commander's Sphere", 13 July 1945, COSC Memoranda no. 146, CAB 80/48, PRO.
5. Michael Elliott-Bateman, "The Conditions for People's War", in Elliott-Bateman et al., *The Fourth Dimension of Warfare, Volume II: Revolt to Revolution* (Manchester, 1974), pp. 286-312; see also, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn., 1968), pp. 274-78 and "Civil Violence and the Process of Development" in "Civil Violence and the International System Part II: Violence and International Security", *Adelphi*

- Papers*, no. 83 (1971), pp. 1-4; Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 93-122, 334-47.
6. David Rees, "Afghanistan's Role in Soviet Strategy," *Conflict Studies*, no. 118 (May, 1980), pp. 2-3; Theodore L. Eliot, "Afghanistan After the 1978 Revolution", *Strategic Review*, vol. 7 no. 2 (Spring, 1979), pp. 57-58, 60; "Documentation — Soviet Relations With Afghanistan (text of treaty): *Survival*, vol. 21, no. 2 (March/April 1979), pp. 92-93; *Time*, 14 May, 1 October 1979, 7 Jan. 1980; *Newsweek*, 11 Feb. 1980; Gwynne Dyer, "Afghanistan Could be a Soviet Vietnam". *Gazette* (Montreal), 23 Aug. 1979; *Washington Post*, 6 Feb. 1980, *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 1980.
 7. *Time*, 4 Feb., 28 April 1980.
 8. U.S. Dept. of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Special Report no. 70 — Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*. (April, 1980), p. 2. More conservative estimates place the total number of Soviet casualties at about 4,000. Casualty figures for the Afghan Army, which bore the brunt of the fighting in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, are not available.
 9. U.S. Dept. of State, *ibid.*; R.D.M. Furlong, Theodor Winkler, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan", *International Defence Review*, no. 2 (1980), p. 169; *Time*, 28 Jan., 4 Feb. 1980; *The Economist*, 2 Feb. 1980; *U.S. News and World Report*, 4, 11 Feb. 1980; *Daily Telegraph* (London), 15 Jan. 1980; *Toronto Star*, 21 Jan., 16 March 1980.
 10. *Pravda*, 24 Feb. 1980; *Newsweek*, *Time*, 10 March 1980; *The Times*, (London), 2 May 1980; *Economist*, 17 May 1980; *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 June 1980.
 11. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 249-50, 755; Robert Fisk, reporting from Kabul, CBC Radio "Sunday Morning", 17 Feb. 1980; *The Economist*, 2 Feb. 1980; *Time*, 28 Jan. 1980; *Toronto Star*, 21 Jan. 1980.
 12. Dupree, pp. 1, 5, 12, 118-119; Fisk, CBC, 17 Feb. 1980; Liz Thurgood, "All Quiet on the Kabul Front", *Guardian Weekly*, 3 Feb. 1980; *Newsweek*, 26 May 1980.
 13. *Time*, 28 Jan. 1980.
 14. Fisk, CBC, 17 Feb. 1980.
 15. *Newsweek*, 25 Feb. 1980.
 16. *Guardian Weekly*, 24 Feb. 1980; *Gazette* (Montreal), 12 April 1980.
 17. *Newsweek*, 14 Jan. 1980.
 18. *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 28 Jan. 1980; *Time*, 4 Feb. 1980; *Boston Globe*, 28 April 1980; *Newsweek*, 26 May 1980.
 19. *Time*, 5, 26 May 1980; *Newsweek*, 26 May 1980.
 20. See for example, Robert Lasch, "Lessons of Korea and Vietnam", *Newsweek*, 18 Feb. 1980; Cliff Kincaid, "Anti-Draft Rally Report", *Human Events*, 12 April 1980; "Special Report — A Foreign Policy in Disarray", *Newsweek*, 12 May 1980.
 21. *Newsweek*, 14 Jan. 1980.
 22. Letter to William Smith, 9 Jan. 1795.

POST-REFERENDUM QUEBEC — THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT

by

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For more than 20 years now English Canada has been anxiously following the progress of political change in the province of Quebec. By nearly every