

a fratricidal struggle to the detriment of their primary objective.

Footnotes

1. W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare* (London, 1977).
2. Karl Marx, in W. Laqueur, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-145.
3. Engels in W. Laqueur, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-145.
4. In the case of Eastern Europe the democratization of access to the basic elements of the good life.
5. Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, published as an appendix to Robert Moss "Urban Guerrilla Warfare" in *Adelphi Papers*, no. 79 (1971).
6. Mao Tse Tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking, 1963).
7. Kenneth Kaunda's recent book, *Kaunda on Violence* attests to this disenchantment with Gandhi's method.
8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, 1976).
9. K. Grundy, *Guerrilla Struggle in Africa* (New York, 1971).
10. By 1955 only about 6 out of a total of 800 senior government posts went to Southerners during the Sudanisation of posts vacated by the British.
11. Interview with Albert Ndele reported in *Sunday Times* (London) 28 May 1978, p. 12.
12. John Baylis, "Revolutionary War" in John Baylis et al *Contemporary Strategy* (London, 1975). South Africa presents a major problem for our typology (i.e. the two main categories) of guerrilla warfare in Africa. A guerrilla war against the white minority regime in Pretoria can be seen simultaneously as an instance of *Wars to overthrow Indigenously-Controlled Socio-economic/political structures*, if one accepts the thesis that Afrikaaners are Africans, and as an instance of *Wars against Colonial Powers* if one shares the popular African perception of the Afrikaaners as colonizers. (I owe this point to Professor Seth Singleton of Rippon College, Wisconsin.)

COUP AND CONSOLIDATION: THE SOVIET SEIZURE OF POWER IN AFGHANISTAN

by

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Question: "What is the Soviet Army doing in Afghanistan?"

Answer: "Looking for the government that invited it in."

Overheard in a Moscow taxi

In his foreword to Edward Luttwak's classic study of the art and science of the coup d'état,¹ S.E. Finer noted that more governments are changed by coup

than by election. The coup is, of course, characteristic of governmental change in the third world, for a variety of social and political reasons associated with the process of modernization.² Afghanistan is no exception — it has experienced three coups since the spring of 1978 and suffered many more earlier in this century.³ But the Soviet-engineered takeover in December 1979 was a coup with a difference. First, it was carried out entirely by foreign (i.e. Soviet) troops against a native (i.e. Afghan) government. Secondly, it set in train a process designed to make the coup irreversible. Consequently, although like most governments installed by coup d'état the Afghan government remains inherently unstable, the consolidation process, call it "Sovietization", is designed to make any counter-coup impossible. With Soviet forces poised on the Polish border, it may be instructive to examine the intervention/consolidation process, in order to shed some light on the methods which might be employed should the Soviet government decide that there is no alternative to "fraternal assistance."

Coup

It is by no means clear, even at a distance of seventeen months, at what point the Soviet government decided to take control of the Afghan government, let alone for what reasons. The "Grand Design" school of thought, seeing in the Afghan invasion the carefully planned closing of pincers on the west's oil supplies, are inclined to see the Soviet hand behind the original Marxist coup in April 1978. The "self-defence" school suggests that the Soviet move was reactive, an *ad hoc* opportunistic response to a deteriorating situation on the Soviet frontier which, if unchecked, could have exerted a destabilizing influence in the Moslem republics of the USSR.⁴ This debate, increasingly the province of historians, rages on but it is worth bearing in mind that the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Many a carefully-laid plan has been hastened or modified, if not derailed, by unexpected events. Soviet intentions, if not their methods, may have been influenced by several unexpected developments during 1979.

The first of these was the uprising in Herat in March. Rebellious army units, Moslem guerrillas and large numbers of civilians attacked government officials, pro-regime soldiers and killed at least twenty Soviet advisers and their families.⁵ It is possible that planning for a coup began after this incident, but if so the first visible move was not made until July, when a Soviet airborne battalion was deployed at Bagram air force base about 40 km from Kabul. This battalion, the first Soviet combat unit deployed to Afghanistan, ostensibly undertook "airfield security" duties. It is worth noting, however, that Soviet airborne forces, the élite of the Soviet Army, are trained for and assigned to *spetsnaz* ("special designation") operations, missions considered too sensitive for regular army units. During such operations, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 being a case in point, airborne troops may work in close cooperation with the Soviet secret service, the KGB⁶. As will be shown later, airborne units played an important role in the Afghan coup itself. Therefore, although this battalion undoubtedly played a conventional role in protecting the airfield from guerrilla attacks, it may also have been "the thin end of the wedge" — securing an important entry point for those forces that would carry out the coup.

In any case, it is likely that the fifty-man Soviet delegation that visited

Afghanistan from August to October made some specific recommendations. The delegation was headed by Marshal Ivan Pavlovsky, Deputy Defence Minister and Commander of the Soviet Ground Forces, and included Marshal Alexei Yepishev, Chief Political Commissar of the Soviet Armed Forces. American intelligence analysts believe that Pavlovsky delivered a grim report to the Soviet Politburo and that he played a central role in decision-making on intervention.⁷ In the midst of the Pavlovsky visit another unexpected, and apparently unwelcome, event occurred. On 16 September Hafizullah Amin, the Afghan Prime Minister, overthrew President Taraki in a bloody coup. It has been suggested that the Soviets were suspicious of Amin and had urged Taraki to get rid of him, but that Amin acted first. The Soviets responded coolly to Amin's seizure of power.⁸ Amin, a strong-willed nationalist, then embarked on a course which in Soviet eyes must have appeared unwise at the very least and on the whole a reckless and dangerous threat to Marxist and Soviet interests in Afghanistan. He rejected Soviet suggestions that he broaden the base of his party and government. Instead, he intensified the repressive and collectivist measures that had alienated the rural tribal population in the first place. It is possible that he also refused Soviet suggestions that they be allowed to introduce military forces into Afghanistan gradually to take over from the Afghan army the task of countering the resistance movement.⁹

According to one unconfirmed report, Amin was plotting to expel the Soviets from Afghanistan, as President Sadat had cleared them out of Egypt. Apparently, Amin denied the Soviets the use of Shindand air force base in western Afghanistan, either to limit access to his country or to assert his authority, or both. The Soviets pressed their case by raising the spectre of possible American intervention in Iran in response to the seizure of the Tehran embassy — which occurred in November. It is not clear what use the Soviets intended to make of the base with respect to such American action. Perhaps they simply hoped that under cover of indignant world reaction to American military action against Iran they would be able to slip their own forces into Afghanistan, almost unnoticed.¹⁰

Military preparations essential for a coup and/or invasion went ahead during the autumn. By October, the Soviets had completed the re-equipping of their "swing" forces in the western military districts. Consisting principally of airborne divisions, these are the units that can be deployed easily from their home districts to any trouble spot in the Soviet empire, from Eastern Europe to Central Asia. At about the same time the Soviets staged what appears, in retrospect, to have been a dress rehearsal for Afghanistan: the airlift of an *airborne division, with all of its vehicles and equipment, from the western USSR to South Yemen and back.*¹¹

On December 2, 1979, Lieutenant-General Viktor Paputin, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs (the second highest ranking police official in the Soviet Union) arrived in Kabul. A candidate member of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee and close personal associate of President Brezhnev, he had clearly been dispatched on a mission of great importance and sensitivity, the purpose of which remains unclear to this day. Although he was apparently acting under the guise of modernizing the Afghan security forces (the intelli-

gence services and/or the secret police) it appears that he had two missions: first to attempt to bring Amin back into line, and secondly, if that failed, to arrange a coup. Clearly the first objective failed. Amin apparently refused to invite the Soviets to intervene, leaving open only the course of replacing Amin with a more pliant leader.¹² At this point the Soviets may have begun to select a leader to replace him, but the transparent clumsiness of the succession (of which more will be said later) suggests that Babrak Karmal may have been recruited only at the last minute.

Military preparations were stepped up at this point. A Soviet *spetsnaz* airborne regiment of some 2,500 men arrived at Bagram on December 8. Some time between the 10th and the 24th a battalion or more moved to Kabul international airport. Two entry points were thus securely in Soviet hands. Between the 11th and the 15th, military transport aircraft concentrated at bases near Moscow. Three motorized rifle divisions from the Turkmen Military District were mobilized during this period and a build-up of aircraft and logistical "tail" was seen. On the 22nd, the divisions moved to the Soviet-Afghan border. On the 20th, elements of the airborne regiment had moved from Bagram to the Salang Pass, a key point on the highway from the border. The troops cleared the pass of resistance fighters who reportedly had held it since September. On the 24th the new Soviet ambassador apparently made one final effort to persuade Amin to accept "fraternal assistance", but Amin remained unmoved. Nonetheless, sensing the potential danger to himself, he moved to the Darulaman Palace; seven miles southwest of the city centre, where he surrounded himself with his elite guard, eight tanks and some armoured personnel carriers. Between 25 and 27 December, some 350-380 flights brought 5,000 men of the 105th Guards Airborne Division, with all of their vehicles and equipment, into Bagram and Kabul airports. Along with elements of the 103rd and 104th, these troops had flown from bases at Vitebsk, Potshinok and Smolensk in the western Soviet Union. Meanwhile, at least two Soviet motorized rifle divisions, the 5th and the 360th, crossed the border heading for Herat and Kabul respectively. As the intervention gathered momentum, the Soviet forces carried out a number of deception operations designed to prepare the ground for an unopposed coup. Some Afghan army units stationed in Kabul were sent into the countryside to fight the insurgents. Others were disarmed and their vehicles immobilized. At the critical moment at the opening of the coup Afghan officers were attending a Soviet reception.¹³

The coup began at 7:15 pm (local time) 27 December with the seizure of the Ministry of the Interior, the department responsible for internal security and the secret police. Past experience suggests that this was probably a joint army/KGB operation, the troops being assisted by a "fifth column" under KGB control. Fifteen minutes later an explosion at the telecommunications building knocked out most internal and external telephone and telex facilities, disrupting communications between Afghan government authorities, and between the Afghan High Command and its military units. At the same time, Soviet troops surrounded and assaulted Darulaman Palace, where Amin was residing. Along with forty members of his family and staff, Amin was killed during or shortly after the battle for the palace. But as the coup continued through the evening

Soviet timing began to unravel. At 8:45 pm Radio Moscow, broadcasting on Kabul Radio's wave length from Termez — on the Soviet side of the Afghan border, carried a statement by Babrak Karmal to the effect that he had taken over the government and was appealing for Soviet military assistance. But Karmal was believed to be still in Moscow at this time and Kabul Radio was broadcasting normally without any indication of a change in the country's leadership. Clearly, some element of the plan had slipped: Kabul Radio was not silenced by Soviet troops until 9:30 pm, forty-five minutes after Karmal's broadcast. The fighting which deposed Amin, moreover, did not end until 11:00 pm. In the meantime, *Tass* and Radio Moscow repeated Karmal's message for international audiences. Kabul Radio came back on the air at 2:40 am, December 28th, broadcasting a list of the new revolutionary council headed by Babrak Karmal.¹⁴

Somewhere in the midst of this, General Paputin died under circumstances still clouded in uncertainty. Soviet sources gave December 28th as the date of his "untimely death" but offered no explanation. Some western reports say that he died on the 26th in a shootout with Amin's bodyguards. Others suggest that he committed suicide after being recalled to Moscow in disgrace because he had botched a crucial part of the coup — *safe-guarding Amin until Karmal had been made leader*. If true, he had thus denied the Soviet coup the stamp of legitimacy that might have deflected some of the criticism of the international community. Karmal did not arrive in Kabul until at the earliest the 28th and possibly as late as the 31st, giving the lie to Soviet claims that they had been invited in by the leader of a legitimate government. Sovietologists noted that Paputin's official obituary lacked Brezhnev's signature, a gesture that would normally be accorded the obituary of a senior party member, suggesting that the Soviet government was displeased or, at the very least, embarrassed by the death of such a senior Soviet official in circumstances clearly associated with a sensitive political/military operation.¹⁵

In subsequent days, Soviet forces increased their hold on Kabul and fanned out to take control of other key towns and Afghan garrisons. It is reported that the entire operation was directed from Moscow by First Deputy Defence Minister Marshal Sergei Sokolov, whose orders were transmitted by satellite to the 40th Army Headquarters in the field on the Soviet-Afghan frontier.¹⁶

Consolidation

Up to this point, flaws aside, the coup had followed a standard format. The subsequent consolidation process differed from the pattern of most coups to the extent that the Soviet Union was able to bring greater resources to bear than would normally be available to a third world government, as well as experience and a formula thoroughly and successfully practised since 1917. The Soviets have taken steps intended to secure their long-term hold on the country.

Although for the purpose of domestic and international appearances the Afghan government is independent and entirely "native", the Soviets wield the real power in Kabul. Shortly after the coup thousands of Soviet officials were reported to have arrived in Kabul where, ostensibly attached to the civil service as advisers, they appear to have taken over all policy and decision-making functions. Except for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs — where a Russian is

Deputy Director — Soviet bureaucrats are said to occupy the senior positions in every department. Each cabinet minister has two Soviet officials assigned to him as “advisers.” Karmal himself is all but a prisoner of the Soviets — his six chief advisers, as well as his bodyguard, driver, doctor and chef, are all Russians.¹⁷ In addition, Soviet control extends to specific key sectors of the Afghan government. First, in January 1980, the Soviets disbanded the Afghan security service and then recreated it around a nucleus of 640 Soviet intelligence officers, mainly from the KGB but possibly including East Germans. Vassily Sufrachenko, the KGB chief in Afghanistan, is said to have a large staff of Soviet officers fluent in both of the official languages of Afghanistan, Pushtu and Dari.¹⁸

Secondly, Soviet officials dominate the Ministry of Information and Culture, the department responsible for news and propaganda. Soviet staff produce virtually all press releases and Soviet personnel have been assigned as editors of Afghan newspapers. At the end of January 1980 the ministry ordered the expulsion from Afghanistan of all non-communist members of the foreign press corps. This gives the Soviets almost total control of the flow of news about the situation in Afghanistan and resulted, by the end of 1980, in significant reduction in the coverage of the Afghan war in the western news media.¹⁹ Closely linked to information services is the field of education and here too the Soviets have been active. A five man Soviet advisory committee is said to have taken over administration of the University of Kabul and forty-three Russian professors were sent to Kabul to teach, to revise curriculum and to bring programs and texts “up to the high standards of the Soviet Union.” In the meantime, some 1500 university students were sent to Soviet universities in 1980. New texts are being prepared for schools as well and Russian language is being introduced on a widespread basis. The Soviets helped to organize and run “Pioneer” camps for young children during the summer of 1980 and have agreed to provide experts to help manage agricultural and industrial institutes. They are also to establish a “Faculty of Workers”, which appears to be a school for ideological training of a nucleus of people who will create a new Afghan Communist Party along Soviet lines. Similar schools were established in Angola and Ethiopia as Soviet influence increased in those countries. Less clear is the role of a proposed “Faculty of Preparedness.” It may be some kind of military academy or an institute for training an armed wing of the Communist Party. In the meantime military and police officers are being trained in the Soviet Union.²⁰

Following the pattern established in Eastern Europe, the Soviet government has encouraged the Afghan government to create new political institutions which will involve more people in government activities and thereby, hopefully, commit them to support of the government. These institutions include government-dominated trade unions, unions of writers, poets, artists and journalists and a youth movement associated with the ruling party. All of these groups have established, not necessarily by choice, close links with their Soviet counterparts. On the first anniversary of the coup that brought him to power Babrak Karmal announced plans for a “National Fatherland Front”. A meeting of government and party officials, non-party and tribal representatives appointed a 44-man commission to draft a charter for the Front’s first congress, which was to be held at the end of March 1981.²¹ Clearly, this represented an

attempt to broaden the base of the regime in such a way as to downplay its close association with Marxism and the Soviets. The "broad front" strategy is a classic revolutionary method, although it usually precedes rather than follows a seizure of power. As nothing further has been heard since the beginning of the year it is not possible to determine whether the Front, or any of the other organizations, is in fact gaining any support. Given their late arrival on the *Afghan political scene — and their forced births — these groups will face an uphill battle to convince an Afghan population inherently suspicious of central government and foreign invaders that they are anything more than Soviet puppet organizations.*

The intentions of the Soviet consolidation process are clear: Afghanistan is to be locked into the Soviet orbit permanently and irreversibly. The Soviets are prepared to carry the shaky Karmal regime and its economy²² until such time as a more stable and broadly-based party can take over the running of the country *with a degree of control and legitimacy. Soviet control of the security service and the press are intended to hold the line in the short term while their efforts in the educational field and political mobilization produce the new leadership and institutions that will govern Afghanistan in the long haul. In the meantime, the Soviets are saddled with an administrative nuisance, a political embarrassment and a constant drain on troops and the economy. For the foreseeable future Afghanistan will remain insufficiently pacified to be fully integrated into the Soviet bloc, while demanding the commitment of the full range of Soviet political, administrative and military resources.*

Footnotes

1. Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969).
2. See for example, S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (London, 1962); John J. Johnson, *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries* (Princeton, 1962); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn., 1968).
3. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, 1973), *passim*.
4. For a selection of contrasting opinions on Soviet motives with respect to Afghanistan, see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1979* (London, 1980); Edward Luttwak, "After Afghanistan, What?", *Commentary*, (April 1980), pp. 40-49; David Rees, "Afghanistan's Role in Soviet Strategy", *Conflict Studies*, no. 118 (1980); William E. Griffith, "Super-power Relations After Afghanistan", *Survival*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1980), pp. 146-51; and Jiri Valenta, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: the Difficulty of Knowing Where to Stop", *Orbis*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1980), pp. 201-17.
5. *Time*, 1 Oct. 1979; *Toronto Star*, 21 Jan. 1980.
6. Rees, p. 2; Maurice Tugwell, *Airborne to Battle* (London, 1971), pp. 329-32, and "Day of the Paratroops", *Military Review*, vol. 57, no. 3 (1977), pp. 40-53; Kenneth Allard, "Soviet Airborne Forces and Preemptive Power Projection", *Parameters*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1980), pp. 42-51; John J. Dziak, "Soviet Intelligence and Security Services in the Eighties: the Paramilitary Dimension", in Roy Godson, ed., *Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's: Counter-Intelligence* (Washington, DC, 1980), p. 105.
7. Valenta, pp. 206-7, 210-12; *New York Times*, 22 Dec. 1979, 2 Jan. 1980. If an article by

- Charles Fenyesi, *Guardian Weekly*, 19 Apr. 1981, is correct, Pavlovsky's report included an account of an ambush of his delegation, which cost the lives of many members.
8. Rees, p. 2 Following the coup the Soviets put an airborne division on alert.
 9. Valenta, p. 206; *The Observer*, 18 Nov. 1979; *New York Times*, 2 Jan. 1980.
 10. *Toronto Star*, 28 Dec. 1980; *Guardian Weekly*, 19 Apr. 1981. Amin succeeded in persuading the Soviets to replace their ambassador in November.
 11. Valenta draws particular attention to a speech by Marshal Yepishev, reported in *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 23 Nov. 1979, which called upon Soviet troops to be ready to support a "new foreign policy initiative." See also "International Defense Digest", *International Defense Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1980).
 12. Dziak, pp. 104, 106.
 13. Rees, p. 3; R.D.M. Furlong, Theodor Winkler, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan", *International Defense Review* vol. 13, no. 2 (1980), pp. 168-70; Colonel Franz Freistetter, "The Battle in Afghanistan: a View from Europe", *Strategic Review*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1981), pp. 37-39; see also *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 7 Jan. 1980; *Newsweek*, 7 Jan. 1980; *Time*, 14 Jan. 1980.
 14. William Branigan, "Timetable for Afghanistan Take-Over", *Washington Post*, reprinted in *Guardian Weekly*, 13 Jan. 1980; *Radio Moscow, Tass*, and *Kabul Radio* broadcasts 27-28 Dec. 1979, from BBC External Services, Monitoring Service, *Summary of World Broadcasts* (London, 1979). Note — reports differ as to Karmal's whereabouts at the time of the coup — some suggest he was still in Prague.
 15. Furlong and Winkler, p. 169; Dziak, pp. 104, 106; *New York Times*, 4 Jan. 1980; Kevin Klose, "Death of Soviet Official Spurs Rumours", *Guardian Weekly*, 30 Mar. 1980. Citing *The Economist, Foreign Report*, 9 Jan. 1980, Dziak suggests that Paputin was in the forefront of the coup operation, using 80-90 Soviet intelligence and military personnel to secure key posts in the Afghan government without consulting Amin.
 16. Furlong and Winkler, p. 169.
 17. *Toronto Star*, 21 Jan. 1980; *Globe and Mail*, 6 June 1980.
 18. Rees, pp. 4-5; *Toronto Star*, 21 Jan., 16 Mar. 1980.
 19. *Newsweek*, 28 Jan. 1980; *Macleans*, 21 April 1980; US Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, "Afghanistan Briefing", *Current Policy*, no. 194, (Washington, D.C. June, 1980).
 20. *New York Times*, 14 Aug. 1980.
 21. *Kabul New Times*, 4 Oct. 1980; *New York Times*, 6 Dec. 1980, 2 Jan. 1981.
 22. The extent of Soviet involvement in the Afghan economy is considerable, but the extent to which they control it — or would even wish to do so — is not clear.