

IN THIS ISSUE

The Soviet war in Afghanistan is now well into its sixth year, and shows no signs of waning. To the contrary, the levels of violence have increased. The Soviet armed forces have resorted to 'scorched earth' tactics to depopulate guerrilla strongholds in the countryside. The resistance movement has responded with better weapons, greater coordination, and a higher degree of professional skill in its attacks. Each has denied victory to the other, and this seems unlikely to change for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, as other crises — in the Middle East and Central America — have demanded and received immediate attention, the Afghan war has been relegated to the back pages of the daily newspaper and to the back burner of East-West diplomacy. This need not have been the case had at least one prominent international non-governmental organization decided to plead the cause of the Afghan people. As J.A. Emerson Vermaat's article points out, such leadership was and remains unlikely to come from the World Council of Churches. So outspoken on matters of peace, social justice, and human rights in other conflict situations, the WCC, Vermaat maintains, has on the Afghanistan crisis succumbed to Soviet pressure and dodged the real issues for the sake of ecumenical harmony.

As Alan Garcia Perez, the newly elected president of Peru, was sworn in on July 28th, guerrillas of the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) movement blacked out Lima, the national capital. Attacks such as this have increased at an alarming rate in recent months, drastically destabilizing the struggling South American democracy. Robert Ash examines the relatively unknown Sendero insurgency and concludes that while it has yet to prove that its strategy works, it nonetheless poses a significant challenge to the new government. Taking a longer and broader view of political violence in the region, Francis Coghlan explores the American role in historical perspective. His assessment suggests that American capabilities to influence either events or perceptions in the region are limited, and that the current administration may just have to live with the unpopularity of its Central American policies at home and abroad.

Finally, Gholam Razi uses a study of the Iran-Iraq war, now five years long and stalemated, to challenge scholarly assumptions about prevailing methods of assessing capabilities of states to wage war. He draws attention to the relationship of capabilities to objectives and to the changing nature of the international system. More important, he questions the assumptions of rationality in elite decision-making about going to war. That, in itself, is a sobering judgement of which all should take heed.

The opinions expressed in the articles, reviews and other contributions are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily represent those of the Centre for Conflict Studies or of the University of New Brunswick.
