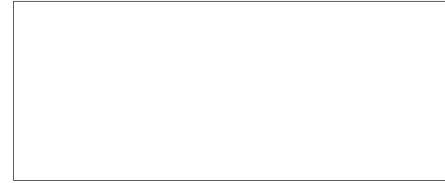




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# Near East and South Asia Review



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Supplement  
24 October 1986

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President Taya's hold on power appears increasingly precarious as Mauritania's underprivileged blacks and ruling Arabic Maurs jockey for power. Black agitation along with Libyan meddling have led Taya to crack down on black dissidents, but it is unclear how effective this repression will be.

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**Nazian: Valley of Disappointment for the Afghan Regime**

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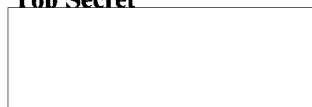
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**Articles**

**Mauritania: Taya Strikes Back Against Opponents**



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President Maaouiya Ould Sid Ahmed Taya's hold on power appears increasingly precarious. Since coming to power in December 1984, he has taken a number of steps to appease Mauritania's black population. These measures, however, have only whetted black appetites for more change because the blacks have always been underprivileged despite their growing numerical strength. At the same time, many of the country's ruling Arabic Maurs perceive such concessions as eroding their position at the apex of Mauritanian society. Black agitation, along with Libyan efforts to fish in troubled political waters, have led Taya during the past two months to crack down on black dissidents, but it is unclear whether his repression will quash or add to the mounting unrest.

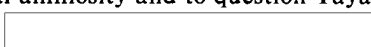
part, worry that the blacks will try to supplant them and change the character of the country from Arab to African. The anxiety of the Maurs is increased by their awareness that the black and Haratin populations are increasing faster than their own.



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**Taya's Reform Program Unravels**

As president and head of the ruling Military Council for National Salvation (CMSN), Taya broke sharply with the hardline policies of the previous regime and tried hard to reach an accommodation with the blacks. He probably believed such a policy was the only way to maintain the status quo. Toward that end, he ended political detention and internal travel controls and recently began preparations for local elections. Leaders of the principal black tribes, however, used their increased freedom to press for a larger share of political power. Their growing protests alarmed many of Taya's Maur supporters and led some to call for tougher measures to quell the growing racial animosity and to question Taya's authority as well.



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**A Divided Society**

According to the US Embassy, the Maurs—the traditional elite in Mauritania—account for 30 to 45 percent of the population of this almost entirely Islamic country and have a tight grip on both the government and the economy. Fundamentally different from the Maurs in psychology, culture, and background are Mauritania's three principal black tribes, which include up to 30 percent of the population and make up the majority of the military's enlisted personnel, the lower grades of the civil service, and the unskilled labor force. Caught between these two groups are the Haratin, a largely Arabized black sector of society that includes an estimated 25 to 40 percent of the population and occupies servile positions.

By late summer Taya apparently believed he had to crack down on dissident blacks. In September he arrested 40 prominent members of the politically active Toucouleur tribe on charges of subversive activity—primarily for membership in FLAME (Front for the Liberation of Africans in Mauritania), a secret black antigovernment organization, and for the dissemination of antigovernment tracts in Nouakchott and other Mauritanian towns in the south and at the recent Organization of African Unity and Nonaligned summit meetings.



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these tracts criticized the Maurs for



Since Mauritania received its independence from France in 1960, the black tribes have grown increasingly dissatisfied with their subordinate position, and, in recent years, their discontent has begun to spread to the Haratin. The Maurs, for their



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dominating virtually every sector of national life and compared the Taya government, controlled by the *be dane* (Arabized white people), with the apartheid regime of South Africa. These blacks were subsequently tried, and 20 received stiff fines and sentences ranging from six months to five years, to be followed by 10 years of internal exile.



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Along with these moves, Taya also sacked Minister of Commerce Babaly, the most prominent of the blacks on the CMSN, who lost both his ministerial and CMSN positions. Babaly had lost his job in August as Minister of the Interior because he refused to authorize the arrest of black dissidents. He was replaced at Interior by hardliner Djibril Abdellahi, who proceeded with the arrests.

**Outlook and Implications for the United States**

We believe that rising expectations on the part of the blacks combined with foreign meddling will make it increasingly difficult for the Taya regime to govern.

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We believe that the President will continue with the crackdown. Even if he succeeds in stifling black protests for a time, they are likely to break out again, with increasing strength. On the foreign policy front, Taya's insecurity will encourage him to maintain strict neutrality on the Western Sahara issue. If Qadhafi increases his pressure, Taya may be compelled to look to Morocco for support.

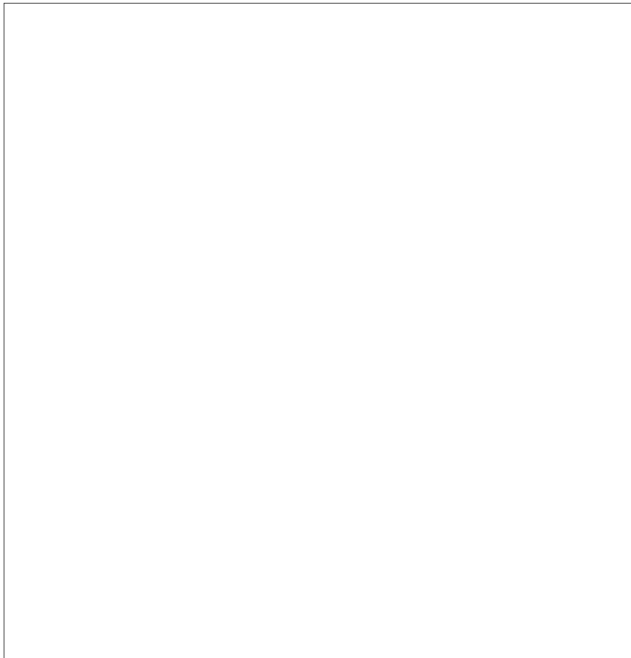
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Taya also removed from the CMSN Colonel Boukhreiss, a prominent leftist Maur, Arab nationalist, and pro-Libyan. Boukhreiss has a wide following in the military, the police, and civil government and is reported to espouse cooperation among Arab and black nationalists. In addition, four Boukhreiss supporters were arrested for allegedly selling Mauritanian passports to the Polisario.

In our view, Taya's successor probably would be less friendly to the United States. He is likely to be replaced by either a far left and pro-Libyan Arab hardliner such as Boukhreiss or, more likely, a far rightist such as Abdellahi. Changes likely to be instituted by a successor regime could include harsher enforcement of Islamic law, more emphasis on Arabic rather than French as the official language, and an abandonment or slowdown of the movement toward democracy, with perhaps even the cancellation of the municipal elections planned for December.

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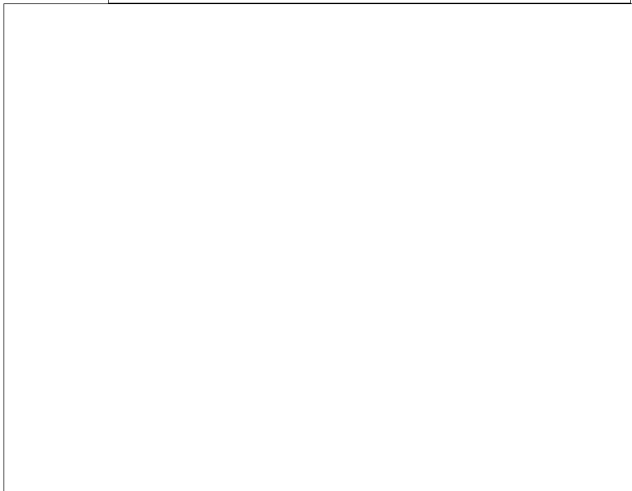
**Nazian: Valley of Disappointment for the Afghan Regime**

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As part of a general drive to increase its control of the strategic eastern border provinces, the Afghan regime tried without much success during the first half of early 1986 to block resistance forces from using the Nazian Valley. Besides hindering resistance infiltration and resupply operations, the government wanted to have a secure base to facilitate its support for Afridi tribesmen linked to the Pakistani dissident Wali Khan Kukikhel.

On 30 January, Afghan and Soviet forces began a new offensive in the valley to capture guerrilla weaponry, secure a route for pro-Kabul Pakistani tribesmen, and continue interdiction of resistance convoys.

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**A Strategic Valley**

The Nazian Valley in eastern Nangarhar Province is important for insurgent forces in the area, most of which belong to the Hizbi Islami (Khalis) party. Several major supply routes from Pakistan intersect at the town of Nazian. The trails cross the Safed Koh mountain range south of Nazian through five passes that are open only during the summer and fall.

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This part of Nangarhar Province is also close to an area of Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province occupied by the Afridi tribe. The leader of a fractious clan of the tribe, Wali Khan Kukikhel, has longstanding ties to the Kabul government.

During the week of 24 February, Afghan and Soviet forces launched another operation against insurgents in the Nazian-Towr Kham region.

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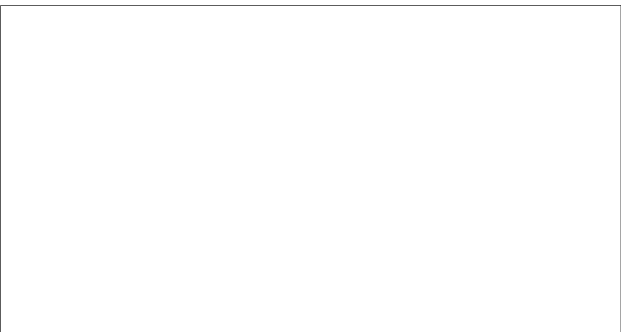
The sweep, probably intended to keep the insurgents from challenging the regime's newly established outposts, was apparently poorly planned, and the regime sustained more casualties than the insurgents.

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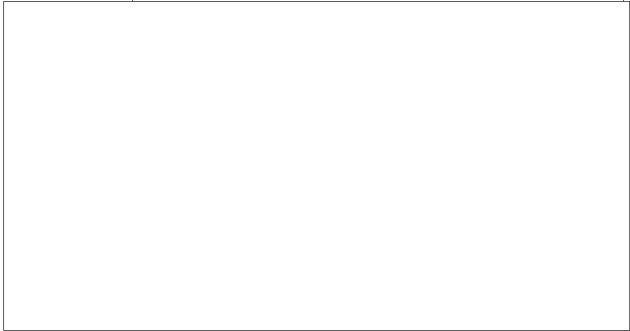
**Objective: To Secure the Valley**

In early 1986 Soviet and Afghan regime forces intensified military pressure on guerrilla forces in Nangarhar Province as part of an overall effort to stem insurgent resupply and infiltration from Pakistan.



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**Prospects**

The Afghan regime probably will not resume major operations in the Nazian Valley in the near future. The surge of guerrilla activity throughout Afghanistan during the summer strained the army's capabilities to respond to a widespread threat, and resistance pressure in other sections of Nangarhar and Paktia Provinces has put regime forces there on the defensive. To undertake another major offensive in the Nazian Valley, the poorly trained and understrength Afghan military will need substantial assistance from Soviet forces. Even then, a large-scale offensive would probably provide only fleeting control of the valley. [Redacted]

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As long as the regime had a preponderance of force in the valley, insurgent forces drew back. Starting in late March, however, when the regime was forced to use some of the forces deployed in Nazian to respond to insurgent activity in Paktia and Vardak Provinces, the insurgents took advantage of the pullout to escalate attacks. Over the next two months, the guerrillas increased their strength in the valley sufficiently to seize five border posts, according to the US Embassy in Islamabad. Resistance forces also interdicted several regime convoys and captured some ammunition stocks. [Redacted]

Events in the Nazian Valley underscore the Soviet and Afghan Governments' inability to pacify permanently important border areas. Insurgent activity can be stifled only in the few instances where the regime can afford to station large units. [Redacted]

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The level of guerrilla activity increased enough by late May that Afghan regime and Soviet military commanders once more prepared to resume combat operations in Nazian. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Before this new offensive began, the insurgents overran more Afghan army posts in the Nazian Valley. In response, Kabul ordered airstrikes and some reinforcements from the army's 11th Infantry Division at Jalalabad. Although those actions momentarily permitted the regime to fend off insurgent attacks, the guerrillas shortly thereafter assaulted four regime security posts in the valley, causing heavy casualties. [Redacted]

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