

NSC BRIEFING

BACKGROUND - AFGHANISTAN

I. In National Estimate on Afghanistan

(published 19 Oct), we concluded:

A. That strategically important buffer state is vulnerable to Soviet pressure because of its exposed position, military weakness and its growing economic ties with the USSR.

B. Soviet attentions to Afghanistan--particularly in form economic, technical assistance--increased markedly in 1978 year and will probably continue grow.

C. However, USSR unlikely gain control of Afghanistan within next years, because:

- 1. Soviet technicians would be used for subversion but Afghanistan has almost no pro-Communist elements with which to work.

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2. USSR is unlikely to use force, since such action would offer few advantages and would bring a strong anti-Soviet reaction, particularly in Arab-Asian bloc.

D. Finally, we said that, despite some discussion of possible Afghan-Pakistan confederation, both internal complications and Soviet and Indian opposition make such a merger extremely unlikely.

II. Events since October have effected this National Estimate only slightly.

A. As to Soviet economic activities, these are continuing, but reason to believe that reports of accelerated penetrations exaggerated.

1. Claim of Soviet supply 90 %
Afghan oil discounted by continued
Western shipments 2-3 million
gallons (annual consumption in
was some 3 million).

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2. Soviet-Afghan trade agreements, which show fourfold expansion on paper, may well not be fulfilled.

B. Prospects for better Afghan-Pakistan relations have improved, although merger remains improbable.

1. Afghan Foreign Minister has agreed to confer on outstanding issues with Pakistan, at time and place not yet specified.
2. Although Afghan prime minister recently restated his government's support of thorny Pushtoonistan cause, his action is considered a pre-conference maneuver and prospects for Afghan-Pak collaboration are brighter.