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Afghanistan's Relations With Its Neighbors (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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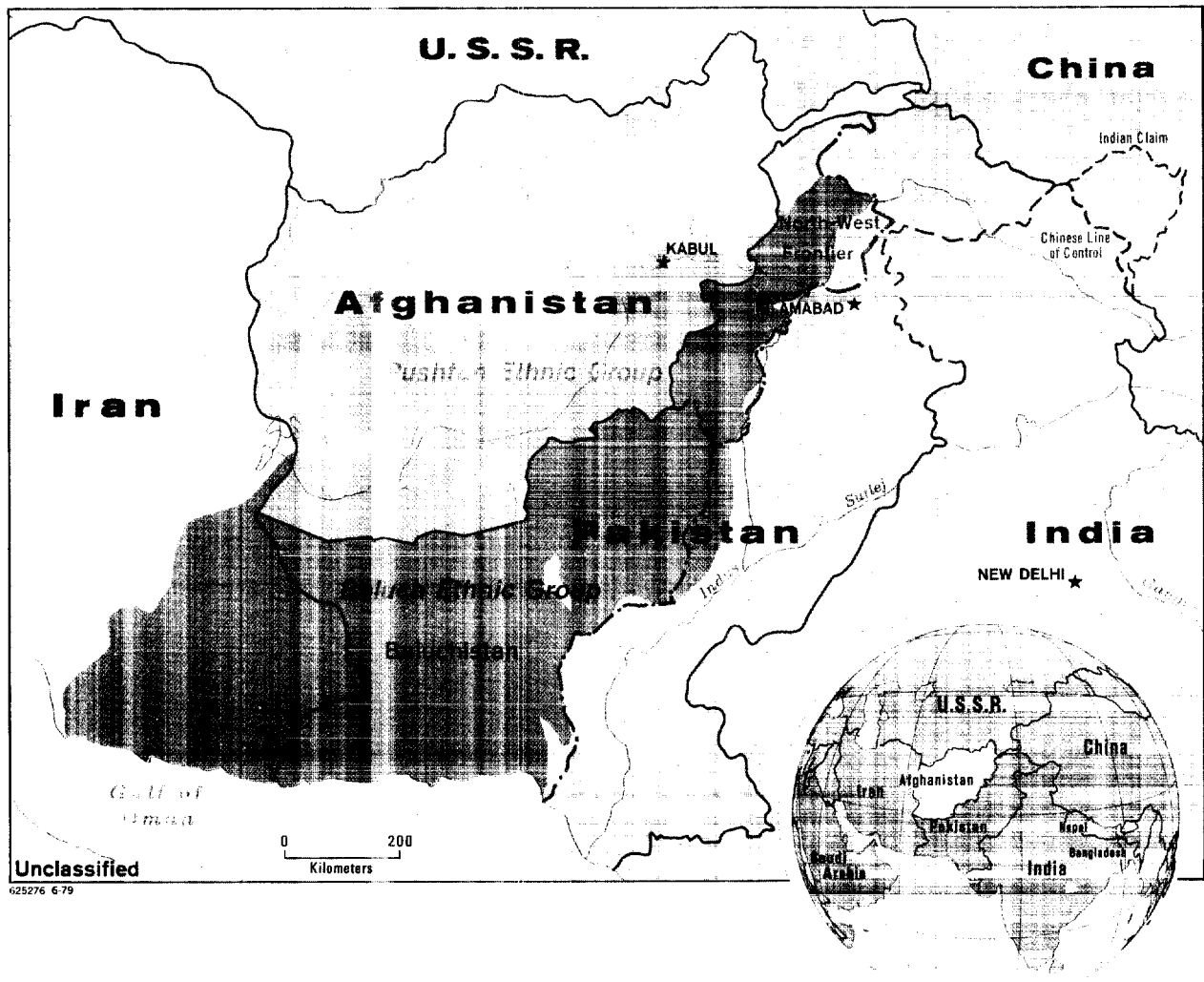
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Afghanistan's Relations With Its Neighbors (U)

Key Judgments

Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors were fairly smooth at the time of the Marxist coup last year. Since then, Soviet influence in Afghanistan has increased markedly and Kabul's relations with Iran and Pakistan have deteriorated. The Khomeini regime is distressed by the atheism of Afghanistan's rulers and nervous about the Soviet potential for using Afghanistan as a base for interference in Iran.

Pakistan feels threatened by the Taraki government, and fears revival of the long-simmering feud over the Pushtun-inhabited border provinces. The Pakistanis' worst nightmare is the prospect of conflict with India coupled with Afghan- or Soviet-sponsored tribal rebellion in Pushtun and Baluchi provinces.

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If the present Afghan Government were to regain control over much of the country, its relations with its neighbors would not change significantly. Nor would a replacement of Taraki's faction by a rival but equally pro-Soviet faction bring any significant improvement in relations.

But if Taraki were replaced by a military government, by the former ruling elite, or by a rightwing Islamic regime, some of the tension in foreign relations would ease. Even so, any Afghan Government is obliged to come to terms with the USSR, and both Iran and Pakistan would have abiding fears of Soviet and Afghan capability for upsetting stability in their countries.

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Afghanistan's Relations With Its Neighbors (U)

The Marxist coup in Afghanistan on 27 April 1978 brought a major shift in Afghan foreign relations, increasing fear and hostility in most of neighboring states, and greatly increasing Soviet influence in Kabul. The coup came at a time when Afghanistan's relations with most countries in the region were unusually good, and whether or not the Soviet-backed regime—which faces serious insurgency—survives, a return to the relatively stable situation that existed before the coup is unlikely. (S)

USSR

Following World War I, the USSR gradually replaced Great Britain as the most important foreign influence in Afghanistan, and in the mid-1950s began assistance programs that made Kabul heavily dependent on Moscow. By 1978, more than 95 percent of Afghanistan's military equipment was of Soviet origin, the USSR had supplied about \$700 million in economic aid, about 1,000 Soviet advisers were in the country, and the USSR was Afghanistan's major trading partner. (S NF)

Despite Afghan dependence on Moscow, the USSR made little effort to influence domestic programs, and in foreign affairs—although Kabul took pains to avoid actions likely to offend Moscow—there was no great pressure for active support of Soviet policies. Soviet influence was actually declining slightly at the time of the coup, as President Daoud vigorously sought support from a variety of foreign sources in an effort to lessen Afghan dependence on the USSR. Domestically, Daoud was moving against the Marxists—the arrest of the leaders of the present government touched off the coup. (S NF)

Nevertheless, there was no immediate threat to Moscow's preeminent position in Afghanistan, and the apparent basic Soviet interest there—preventing Afghanistan from falling under the influence of a third country—seemed in no danger. (S NF)

The installation of a Marxist government quickly led to an increase in Soviet influence. Advisers doubled in number and took a more active role in the government. In December, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship, Goodneighborliness, and Cooperation. Article 4 of the treaty called for “appropriate measures” to ensure the security of the signatories and also called for military cooperation, but left Moscow's commitment to Kabul vague. The Soviets responded to growing insurgency by taking a more active role in military operations and by applying pressure on Pakistan and Iran, the most likely sources of foreign support for the rebels. (S NF)

If the insurgency continues—as appears likely—even more Soviet support may be required to keep a Marxist government in power. Even if the Soviets do not make a conscious effort to increase their influence in Kabul, the Afghan need for military and administrative advice, military equipment, diplomatic support, and economic aid will tend to increase the Soviet role throughout the government. As the Soviet presence has become more pervasive, Soviet citizens in Afghanistan have become more closely identified in the minds of the Afghans with the increasingly unpopular government in Kabul. Attacks on Soviet advisers have become more frequent as the insurgency has intensified. Reported Soviet frustration at the performance of President Taraki could lead to Soviet efforts to replace the present Afghan leaders, although it is unclear whether Moscow has the capability at this point to do more than encourage Taraki's rivals. The installation of a government headed by Babrak Karmal, head of the Parcham faction, or by a military figure equally or more amenable to Soviet advice is not out of the question. The Parchamists were purged by the Taraki government in the summer of 1978, and their leaders are now in Czechoslovakia. The faction is supposedly more pro-Soviet than Taraki's, but differences between the two groups are primarily over personalities. Moscow would be unlikely to believe that such a change would lessen popular hostility to the government, but it might hope another leader would make fewer mistakes in dealing with insurgency. (S)

The close relationship with Moscow does not guarantee the survival of a Marxist government. At some point Moscow could decide that the survival of its friends was not worth the cost. For example, the USSR would have serious reservations about committing its ground forces even if it were clear that the only alternative was a rebel victory. Moreover, a move against the government by military units in Kabul could be over in a few hours, which would not allow Moscow enough time to take action to save the present rulers. (s)

Pakistan

Of Afghanistan's neighbors, Pakistan has felt itself the most directly threatened by the Marxists. At the time of the coup, relations were at a high point, and President Daoud's visit to Pakistan in March had raised hopes that even the Pushtunistan dispute over the status of Pakistan's frontier provinces could be settled. Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the border imposed by the British in the 19th century, and its periodic demands for independence or at least greater autonomy for the Pushtun and Baluchi speakers in the two border provinces of Pakistan have been the major problems in Pakistani-Afghan relations. It can be argued, however, that even if Daoud had remained in power, demands by these provinces for greater autonomy and domestic political pressure on the Afghan Government would eventually have led to a return to normal in bilateral relations—periods of coolness interrupted occasionally by heightened tensions and the threat of open war. (c)

The coup revived longstanding Pakistani fears of Russian designs on the frontier provinces. A persistent concern that the Afghans, backed by the Soviets, would detach the two provinces while India occupied the remainder of the country was again expressed. As insurgency mounted in Afghanistan, Islamabad became less concerned about an immediate threat, but did not believe the long-term dangers had diminished. Meanwhile, an exodus of anti-Marxist Afghans began, and by early June 1979 estimates of refugees living in Pakistan passed 100,000. (c)

Pakistan explored several options for dealing with Afghanistan. It has done what it could to preserve relations with Kabul, but Afghan statements on

Pushtunistan, increasingly strident accusations of Pakistani support for the rebels, and border incidents have raised the level of tension between the two nations.



Islamabad has meanwhile continued efforts to work out some accommodation with Moscow. There was, however, never much chance that either side would make the concessions necessary for a rapprochement, and relations appear to be worsening rather than improving as Soviet criticism of Pakistan intensified. (s)

Iran

The Shah was nearly as concerned as the Pakistanis with the implications of a Marxist government in Kabul. He not only feared that Iran's ally, Pakistan, might break up or turn to the USSR, but that Moscow could use Afghanistan as a base for supporting leftists in Iran. Relations between Afghanistan and Iran before the coup had declined from a high point reached in the early 1970s when a longstanding water dispute was resolved and Iranian plans for an economic aid program even larger than the Soviets' were announced. By the time of the coup, the two governments were again quarreling about water, and the Iranians had not yet taken steps to implement their massive aid proposals. (c)

Despite his concern following the Afghan coup, the Shah decided to adopt a hands-off policy. Mounting domestic problems in Iran precluded Iranian interference in Afghanistan, and even though Iran's new religious leaders have strongly denounced Afghanistan's atheistic rulers, Tehran is not now in a position to give more than negligible support to Afghan insurgents. (c)

India

Although India did not view the installation of the Afghan Marxists as a direct threat, it was concerned about the implications for regional stability. By extending early recognition and offers of aid, and by encouraging moderation, India has tried to offset

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Moscow's heavy influence. India has continued on this course despite disappointment with Kabul's domestic policies, growing Soviet influence in Kabul, its siding with radicals in the nonaligned movement, and fear that Kabul will eventually precipitate a confrontation between Pakistan and the USSR. (s)

China

China's past role in Afghanistan was limited to minor aid programs designed to keep alive some influence. Aside from confirming Chinese views on Soviet expansionism, the coup did not directly affect Chinese interests, but China is concerned about the effect of the coup on its ally, Pakistan. (s)

Islamic Nations

Although two trips to the Near East by President Daoud in early 1978 increased Arab interest in aiding Afghanistan, for most of the Islamic world Afghanistan has been a remote country of little immediate importance. The Marxist takeover has caused considerable concern about the threat to Islam there, and



The United States and the West

Prior to the coup, Afghan governments saw the West, and the United States in particular, as a valuable counterweight to the USSR and tried to maintain good relations. The current leaders seem uninterested in balancing Soviet influence. Despite the Taraki government's protestations that it wants good relations with all countries, there has been a steady erosion in relations with the West. Dealings with the Afghans have grown increasingly difficult—the Afghans have not cooperated on matters such as the investigation of the murder of the US Ambassador, and accusations by Kabul of US and other Western support for the insurgents have become more frequent. (c)

If the Marxists Survive

Most countries in the region would view a Marxist victory over the insurgents in Afghanistan as a Soviet victory. Fear of the USSR and respect for its power would both be enhanced. For the Arab oil producers, however, the end of fighting would probably lessen immediate concern about the country, although the development of good relations would be unlikely. (s)

Pakistan and Iran would continue to fear that Moscow would use Afghanistan to stir up trouble along the border, to support leftist movements in the two countries, and perhaps to increase Afghan military strength into a credible threat against its neighbors. In both countries, religious feeling would increase hostility toward Afghanistan's atheistic rulers. (s)

Even if the USSR desired to use Afghanistan in such a role, there would be serious limitations on Afghan ability to threaten its neighbors. Afghanistan would still be poor and weak. It would be unlikely to gain complete control of some tribal areas for years. Trained manpower is unavailable for a rapid expansion of the military. Control of Afghanistan would not necessarily enhance Moscow's ability to encourage leftist movements in Iran and Pakistan. Moscow would have much greater access to border areas, and some separatists—especially in Pakistani Baluchistan—would welcome Afghan and Soviet help. The bulk of the tribesmen—especially the Pakistani Pushtuns along the northern part of the border—are likely to view Kabul with considerably more suspicion than in the past.



Despite Afghan limitations, both Iran and Pakistan are likely to view the threat of Afghan meddling with separatists and support for leftists as serious and to consider a number of options for meeting it. Among them would be an improvement in relations with both Kabul and Moscow in an effort to deflect the threat, an increase in military strength to counter both domestic subversion and any overt Afghan military threat, and an effort to find allies and security guarantees. These

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policies would not necessarily be mutually exclusive, and Tehran and Islamabad may pursue several simultaneously. (s)

For the United States and the West, cooperation with Afghanistan would be at least as difficult as it is now. Ironically, however, a Marxist government in control of Afghanistan might be both willing and able to do something about what before the coup was regarded by the United States as its major problem with Afghanistan—opium production. (s)

If the Marxists Fall

The fall of the Marxists would lead to a decline in Soviet influence and some improvement in relations with other countries, but the changes would not necessarily be great. No government could last long in Kabul that did not recognize the fundamental necessity of maintaining at least reasonably good relations with its huge neighbor, the USSR. (c)

Perhaps the most likely successors to the present government are the leftist military officers—such as Defense Minister Watanjar—now in important posts in the government. Less doctrinaire and more nationalist than the civilian rulers, they could seize power so quickly that Moscow would be faced with a *fait accompli*. (s NF)

They would most likely move against the government in the belief that the civilian leadership could not defeat the insurgents, and because of unhappiness over the treatment of Islam and the extent of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. If they decided to continue to fight against the rebels, with as little popular backing as their predecessor and less sure support from Moscow, their days would probably be numbered. On the other hand, a show of support for Islam, the withdrawal of troops from the tribal areas, and movement away from the USSR could win them enough toleration to survive, although as a fairly weak government. They would also have the option of turning power over to civilians quickly, as leftist officers have done after the last two military coups. (c)

Moscow could live with such a government; there has even been speculation that the Soviets might at some point encourage a military coup as a way out. Afghanistan's other neighbors, however, would be highly suspicious of rulers so closely associated with the Marxists, and any early change in the state of relations would be slight. (c)

Although somewhat less likely, there are a number of other possible successors to the Marxists. Each of the potential successors retains some support in the military, and it is conceivable that their supporters could stage a successful coup at some point. Even without a coup, the collapse of the present government—or a leftist military government—in the face of mounting insurgency could also lead to several alternatives ranging from the reestablishment of the monarchy to a state of anarchy in the country. (c)

Among the possibilities would be the return of Afghanistan's previous elite—men such as Prince Abdul Wali, a cousin of both the former King and President Daoud; General Mostagni, once Daoud's army commander; or a number of politicians associated either with Daoud or the monarchy. To all of Afghanistan's neighbors, these men would be known quantities. Although it might appear that their arrival would mean a return to business as usual, their position would probably be far weaker than Daoud's, with less control of the countryside and greater opposition from both the left and the right. Ultimately they might prevail, but instability could be a problem not only for them, but for Tehran and Islamabad. Relations with Moscow, while not as close as those between the Taraki regime and the Soviets, would probably be reasonably good as the new government, aware of the nation's exposed position on the Soviet flank, sought to reassure Soviet leaders and ensure continued Soviet economic and military aid. (c)

A rightwing Islamic government could also come to power led perhaps by several of the religious figures now in exile in Pakistan. Iran might initially be pleased, but traditional differences between Shia Iran and Sunni Afghanistan could become an irritant in relations. Pakistan probably would not regard such a

government as a threat and would probably seek to prop it up. With little experience in government, with considerable dissension among its leaders, without any well-organized support, and probably with a minimum of foreign assistance (an Islamic government conceivably might refuse to deal with Moscow), its ability to remain in office would be questionable, and its chances of governing effectively very slight. (c)

New Delhi would probably regard either a leftwing military government or a return of the former elite as less of a threat to regional stability than a continuation of Marxist rule. India would almost certainly move quickly to establish good relations, continuing its policy of offering limited Indian aid as an alternative to total reliance on Moscow. Although India probably would also seek good relations with an Islamic government, New Delhi would be concerned by the emergence of an arc of conservative Islamic nations—Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—on its western flank. (c)

It would probably be some time before any successor government could regain even the degree of control Daoud had before the coup. Even if the various insurgent groups form a temporary alliance before the end of Marxist rule, given their widely differing aims unity is unlikely to survive victory. The tribesmen are likely to ignore directions from Kabul. Other groups that believed they received less than their share of the spoils might continue the rebellion. Central government authority would depend ultimately on undisciplined former insurgents and a demoralized regular army. Civil war could leave an already poor economy in shambles, and foreign aid might depend on Moscow's willingness to back the new rulers. (c)

Although Pakistan would regard an unstable Afghanistan as less threatening than one under Soviet guidance, Islamabad would still face problems. Virtual independence for Afghan tribes would encourage a similar goal among Pakistani tribesmen, and Pakistani armed forces could again be forced into action against

tribal insurgents in the two border provinces. An unstable Afghanistan could also tempt Moscow to recoup its losses by attempting to install a government more to its liking. (c)

In an effort to win popular support, any new but unstable Afghan Government would have the option of pursuing an adventurist foreign policy toward Pakistan and Iran, attempting to win tribal support by stronger advocacy of Pushtun independence, and by exploiting deep-seated cultural and religious differences with its neighbors. The long-sought goal of regional stability may be unattainable in the foreseeable future regardless of the outcome in Afghanistan. (c)

