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The Afghan Refugees: An Irritant to Soviet- Pakistani Relations

An Intelligence Memorandum

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J. J. Langford

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**The Afghan Refugees:
An Irritant to Soviet-
Pakistani Relations**

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Summary

Afghan resistance efforts are receiving support from families encamped as refugees in Pakistan and from related tribes who live in the Pakistani borderlands. Soviet and Afghan military forces may attempt to curb cross-border activity when weather conditions improve in April and May.

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If retaliatory action is taken against refugee groups in Pakistan, likely danger zones are in the upper Konar Valley in Chitral District, in Mohmand tribal territory north of the Khyber Pass, and in the area of Parachinar in the Kurram Valley. The Pakistani Government may choose to reduce the strain in Soviet-Pakistani relations by removing refugees from the border area.

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More than 700,000 Afghan refugees are located in the border areas of Pakistan; most eventually register with government agencies in order to establish eligibility for relief supplies, and about 650,000 are already registered in camps ranging in size from 500 to 11,000. Almost all the refugees are Pushtun tribesmen.

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Cross-border tribal ties, combined with the tendency to travel in extended family units, have enabled the refugees to survive until now without much government support. The need, however, for food, shelter, and sanitation systems is growing.

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The author of this memorandum is Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research. This paper was coordinated with the Offices of Economic Research and Political Analysis, the Afghan Task Force, and the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia. Information available as of 1 April 1980 was used in the preparation of the text. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, East Asia Branch, OGCR

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**The Afghan Refugees:
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Pakistani Relations**

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Support for rebels in Afghanistan by Afghan refugees in the border zones of Pakistan could provoke retaliatory action by Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Afghan male refugees reenter Afghanistan from Pakistan to defend their tribal homelands from what they perceive as the godless government in Kabul. They return periodically to Pakistani territory to visit their families, to acquire arms and ammunition, and to seek medical treatment, in effect using the frontier areas of Pakistan as safe havens. Afghan Government and Soviet spokesmen accuse them of being among the "foreign elements" responsible for the widespread dissidence in Afghanistan.

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Pakistani Government authorities have tried to discourage activities by the refugees that would precipitate a border incident and have restricted their official support to relief aid in the form of food, medicine, and other humanitarian supplies. But they cannot prevent the movement of small groups of people back and forth across the border, which cuts through mountainous terrain in tribal territory over which government forces have never exercised more than limited control.

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Apart from rhetoric, the Afghan Government and the Soviet authorities have been restrained in their reactions to refugee cross-border activities. Last fall the Afghan Government—probably at the urging of Soviet advisers—attempted to defuse the situation by establishing a grace period for the return of the refugees without reprisals. Although the period was extended, few refugees accepted the offer. More recently, Soviet sources have privately indicated that unless the refugees returned in the near future, they would forfeit forever their rights in their homeland.

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There is some indication that Soviet officials are now willing to consider retaliatory airstrikes against rebel sanctuaries in Pakistan. In addition, the rugged terrain in the border zone would not preclude small cross-border land-based raids by the Soviets, although land operations using mechanized equipment would be restricted to three or four major crossing points.

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**Retaliation
Danger Zones**

The spring offensive by Afghan and Soviet military forces in the Konar Valley in eastern Afghanistan, which began in early March, increased the flow of refugees into Pakistan along the section of the border north of the Khyber Pass. Present danger zones for refugee-caused incidents are in the upper Konar Valley in Chitral District and in Mohmand tribal territory. During the past 18 months, the Mohmands in Pakistan have actively

supported their tribal relatives in Afghanistan. Several large-scale—though abortive—raids into eastern Afghanistan originated in Mohmand territory.

[]

The Soviet forces have recently expanded their guerrilla-clearing operations into the provinces south of the Kabul River Valley, and a primary danger zone now is the Parachinar area of the Kurram Valley. In this region are concentrations of refugees from the tribes which have been most active in the guerrilla activity in the environs of Khowst in Paktia Province. Most of the routes from neighboring Nangarhar, Lowgar, and Paktia Provinces in Afghanistan funnel into the Kurram Valley, which provides access to the Pushtun tribal gun and ammunition manufacturing center at Darra in the hills south of Peshawar. The Kurram Valley is a traditional invasion route into Pakistan from Afghanistan; at its closest point, Pakistani territory is only about 90 kilometers from Kabul. []

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The Numbers

By current best estimate, more than 700,000 Afghan refugees are located in the border areas of Pakistan, from Chitral in the north as far south and west as Dalbandin in Baluchistan Province. Most are in the North-West Frontier Province; fewer than 110,000 are in Baluchistan. The number in the northern areas has increased as refugees from the current military operations make their way to Pakistan. Most of them entered Bajaur District and Mohmand tribal territory. If Soviet antiguerrilla operations continue to expand, the refugee totals in Pakistan could approach more than 1 million by May or June. []

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Most of the refugee influx occurred during the last six months. A trickle of refugees began to flow toward Pakistan in May 1978. The number of registered refugees in camps increased from approximately 18,000 in January 1979 to 153,000 in September 1979, then doubled to 390,000 by January 1980. Many uncounted Afghans have been absorbed into tribes in Pakistan related to their own. []

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Currently, there are 53 loose concentrations of refugees, which in a broad sense can be considered camps. Of these, 23 are in the North-West Frontier Province and 30 in Baluchistan. The size of these encampments ranges from 500 to 11,000; the number fluctuates as refugees move in and out. Most of the refugees not in camps are in the North-West Frontier Province. Many of these are clustered in groups of three to eight families, encamped wherever water is available. Scarcity of water and forage in the arid border zone limits the size of encampments and dictates periodic moves. []

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**Composition of
Refugee Groups**

No clear pattern on the composition of the refugee groups emerges. Children up to 14 years old constitute a third to half the total number of refugees, and in most camps there are twice as many children as women. The ratio of men to women is high in some camps, low in others. The camps with comparatively large percentages of males are in Pishin and Zhob Districts in Baluchistan. One of the largest of the refugees camps, with 11,000 people near Loralai, for example, is 38-percent male, 31-percent female, and 31-percent children. At another encampment in Baluchistan, a group of 300 Hazara males—ages 18 to 35—arrived without women and children, saying that the trip would have been too arduous for them. They are seeking weapons, not food and shelter.

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Cross-border tribal ties, combined with the tendency to travel in extended family units, have enabled the refugees to survive without much government support. The need, however, for food, shelter, and sanitation systems is great. Most refugees eventually register with government agencies in order to establish eligibility for relief supplies, including UN aid administered by the Pakistani Government.

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Some clearly are not refugees in the normal meaning of the term. In determining refugee status, the Pakistani Government is systematically excluding *kuchis*, the nomads who annually migrate from the mountains in Afghanistan into the warmer valleys in Pakistan during the winter. Trying to justify their registration as refugees and thus their eligibility for government largesse, the *kuchis* say that although they arrived as usual last fall, they do not plan to return to Afghanistan this spring because of unsettled conditions there. Most of the *kuchis* are Ghilzais and are concentrated in Baluchistan and in the Gomal and Tochi River Valleys in Waziristan.

Almost all the 700,000 refugees—*kuchi* and nonnomadic alike—are Pushtuns. In the Peshawar Valley and to the north, they are mostly members of the Safi, Mohmand, Shinwari, and Khugiani tribes; in the Kurram and Waziristan areas, they are principally Jajis, Mangals, Jadrans, Waziris, Mahsuds, and Ghilzais. Most of the refugees in Baluchistan are from seminomadic Durrani tribes. Pushtuns who arrived from urban areas in Afghanistan flocked to Peshawar, the center of refugee activity, and to Quetta; the minority who could afford it moved on to Western Europe and the United States. Those from rural villages are scattered along—and are generally close to—the border. It is these rural Pushtun tribesmen, with warrior traditions and a conservative Islamic outlook, who make up the most inflexible and active opposition to Communist rule.

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**Spring in the
Borderlands:
A Season for
Change**

Military activity in the borderlands resumed in early March with the Afghan-Soviet guerrilla-clearing operations in the Konar Valley. Harsh winter conditions had restricted military activity in Afghanistan's eastern provinces, confining Soviet and Afghan military forces to strong points along the main roads and at Gardez and Khowst. With the recent increase in Soviet antiguerrilla operations in the provinces south of the Kabul River Valley, the Soviets may try to restrict tribal movements in the vicinity of the border in Afghanistan. This could reduce but not eliminate cross-border movement between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The rugged mountainous terrain, with hundreds of seldom-used border passes, makes effective patrolling extremely difficult.

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The concentration of refugees in the proximity of the border is an issue in Soviet-Pakistani relations that the Pakistanis may attempt to defuse. They may attempt to move the refugees into camps away from the border area to facilitate distribution of relief supplies, to better control the movement of the refugees in the frontier areas, and to reduce the inevitable tensions that will erupt between the refugees and the local population over grazing and water rights and other economically based issues. The refugees have exhibited a reluctance to leave the border area near their homelands and may resist the government's efforts to relocate them; moreover, many are not acclimated to the high summer temperatures at lower elevations in the hill lands.

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