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## USSR - AFGHANISTAN

## BREZHNEV SEEKS BORDER GUARANTEE, CONCEDES U.S. OIL CONCERNS

Soviet President Brezhnev's carefully qualified offer in his election speech to withdraw troops from Afghanistan once a halt to "outside interference" is guaranteed may signify interest in working out some face-saving solution to the USSR's Afghan impasse. Taken in conjunction with his statement that U.S. concern over the safety of its oil routes is "understandable," Brezhnev's remarks on withdrawal could indicate receptiveness to a formula leading to withdrawal which would recognize Soviet interests in Afghanistan as well as U.S. concerns in the Persian Gulf. The impression that Moscow is seeking to signal interest in dialog was accentuated in subsequent remarks by Brezhnev and by Central Committee official Leonid Zamyatin, both of whom professed Soviet readiness to seek political solutions to existing problems. However, these followup statements, like the Brezhnev election address, also held the United States responsible for the deterioration of the international situation. It cannot be ruled out that Moscow is merely adopting a calculated pose of reasonableness and sincerity to counter international condemnation of the Soviet intervention.

As yet there has been no Soviet comment on press reports that President Carter, in a 25 February letter to Yugoslav President Tito, proposed that the United States and the USSR join other nations in guaranteeing Afghan neutrality; and Moscow, after its initial negative reaction, has said nothing further about the EEC foreign ministers' similar proposal last week.

Moscow promptly blamed the general strike and anti-Soviet protests in Kabul on Washington and various accomplices, but recent PRAVDA articles have acknowledged that the Afghan regime faces complicated religious, ethnic, communications, and educational problems within the country.

**BREZHNEV SPEECH** Brezhnev left Soviet options open in his lengthy discussion of Afghanistan in his republic supreme soviet election speech on 22 February. While echoing his 13 January PRAVDA interview in promising that Soviet "troops and military contingents" will be withdrawn when the reasons for their presence cease to apply, he added the proviso that the Afghan Government will also have to confirm that their presence is "no longer necessary."

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Brezhnev went on to declare emphatically that the USSR will be ready to "begin" withdrawal as soon as all outside interference has ceased--again leaving a loophole as to the timing of a total withdrawal. Calling in his next sentence on the United States and "Afghanistan's neighbors" to "guarantee" a complete cessation of such interference, he said the "need" for Soviet military aid would then end, but he did not specifically pledge that withdrawal would follow. A speech by Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in India on 12 February had raised the subject of guarantees without either mentioning a Soviet withdrawal or specifying the guarantors.\*

Brezhnev went on to accuse the United States of seeking to expand its influence in Asia and the Middle East and to exploit the natural resources of the region, but he also acknowledged the reasonableness of some U.S. concerns. Thus, he observed that Washington likes to talk about the necessity of insuring the safety of U.S. oil supply routes, and "in a way this is understandable." Brezhnev then asked rhetorically whether this could be achieved by turning the region into a powder keg when the result would be the opposite.

That some connection between the Afghan and Gulf situations may have been intended by Moscow was suggested in the way IZVESTIYA's authoritative political observer Aleksandr Bovin linked the two problems. In remarks on Moscow radio's weekly observers roundtable program on the 24th, Bovin described the U.S. positions on Afghanistan and the Gulf as similarly paradoxical because in both cases Washington by its actions is complicating the situations. In Afghanistan "they would like us to withdraw our troops," he said, but are doing everything to make this more difficult. And, citing Brezhnev, he added that the United States seeks stability in the Gulf--"and this is understandable because it affects their interests connected with oil"--but through its military presence and political pressure it is destabilizing the situation.

**SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS** Two further statements from Moscow in the week following Brezhnev's election speech underscored the impression that Moscow is seeking to appear open to a negotiated solution to the Afghan crisis even as it presses its attack on the Carter Administration. On 26 February Leonid Zamyatin, the Central Committee's senior international information official, offered his first press commentary on the Afghan crisis. In a LITERARY GAZETTE article, as publicized by TASS, Zamyatin blamed the Administration for the impasse in relations that has developed but

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\* Gromyko's remark--which was preceded by an Afghan Government statement linking guarantees with withdrawal--is discussed in the 21 February 1980 TRENDS, page 2.

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pointedly professed Moscow's "readiness and indeed resolve to achieve a political solution to all problems that exist or may arise." The next day Moscow reported remarks made by Brezhnev during a meeting with U.S. industrialist Armand Hammer in the Kremlin which struck a similar note. According to Moscow radio's domestic service, Brezhnev asserted that the "only sensible course" is to "search for mutually acceptable solutions to arising problems on an honest and just basis." However, Brezhnev was also reported to have said that the complications in bilateral relations are a "direct consequence of the current course of the U.S. Administration."

## AFGHAN INTERNAL PROBLEMS

Soviet reporting on the city-wide shutdown in Kabul which began on the 21st has focused on the arrest of "one American and 16 Pakistanis" to make the case that the turmoil was engineered by U.S. and "other imperialist special services," Pakistan, and China. The reports, notably vague as to the reason for the disorders, have maintained that an indignant citizenry, in collaboration with government, party, and people's organizations, "rendered harmless" assorted terrorists, bandits, and armed gangs of counterrevolutionaries and that the city is returning to normal.

A 24 February PRAVDA account from Kabul correspondent Mironov gave Soviet readers some inkling of the troubles the Afghan regime is encountering when it referred to government pledges regarding freedom of religion and assistance for agricultural production. Acknowledging unspecified "difficulties and current problems," Mironov also admitted that rebels and reactionary clergy had been able to enlist a "certain confused section of the population" in the unexplained "rebellion." Moscow had similarly used the term "rebellion" to describe the uprising in Herat last March which first prompted major Soviet press attention to the problems faced by the year-old revolutionary government. Some of the internal difficulties were mentioned in "A. Petrov" articles at that time, but since then the Soviet press has generally obscured the domestic problems.

Prior to the recent flareup in Kabul, an 18 February dispatch by PRAVDA's Mironov and Demchenko was atypically explicit in reviewing Afghan domestic problems and failed to make the usual effort to attribute all of the country's ills either to foreign interference or to the regime of the now-disgraced late President Amin. The correspondents acknowledged that the new regime has to overcome "flagrant errors" of the "recent past" but only once specifically referred to Amin. Thus, while they attributed to Amin the mistaken use of "ultrarevolutionary phraseology," they were imprecise in describing when and how the "simple people" of Afghanistan became "frightened away" from the regime and lost their trust in the leadership. They conceded that there are "deep rifts" among the people and even within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

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They acknowledged that the task of uniting such an "extraordinarily complex" country is not simple, and they singled out such problems as the ethnic and religious composition of the people, the large nomad population, the difficulty faced by "central power" in reaching isolated areas where "the word of the mullah or tribal elder" has force of law, and the overwhelming difficulty--"how many years will it take?"--to achieve literacy when 80 to 90 percent of the population is illiterate. The correspondents warned that the goal is distant: The Soviet forces are creating "favorable external conditions" for Afghanistan, they said, but "within it" there is still much to be done to establish a "peaceful life."

## Moscow's Afghan Problem: New Decisions Impending

The major problems the USSR has encountered in Afghanistan are going to force the USSR in the near future to make serious decisions about its future course there. Last week's disturbances in Kabul will probably hasten the process.

During the two months the Soviets have been in Afghanistan, the political and security situation has steadily deteriorated:

- The Soviet-installed government has proven incompetent and is viewed as a Soviet puppet by the overwhelming majority of the populace.
- Islamic ~~sumor~~<sup>favor</sup> and nationalist opposition to "the foreign infidel" is fueling broad popular opposition to the Soviets.
- The insurgents have continued their resistance in areas where Soviet forces have been active and have intensified it elsewhere.
- The Afghan army has continued to disintegrate; there are now only a handful of effective units and the Soviets cannot count even on their loyalty.

-- The performance of the Soviet military has probably disappointed the USSR and casualties may have been higher than anticipated.

The disturbances in Kabul have indicated the depth of opposition to the USSR and has probably convinced Moscow that, if security is to be maintained, Soviet forces are going to have to play a more aggressive role throughout Afghanistan. When the Soviets entered the country, they undoubtedly were hoping that the Babrak Karmal government would gain wider support, and seemed to expect that the Afghan security forces would continue to police many rural and most urban areas. The USSR hoped that its direct military role could be confined to ensuring that the regime was not challenged, and generally restricted its military and counterinsurgent operations to controlling the key communications routes and the Northern provinces bordering the USSR.

The international reaction ~~to the Soviet invasion~~ to Afghanistan has compounded the Soviet decisionmakers' problems. International condemnation--particularly from the US--has been stronger and more persistent than the Soviets apparently expected. The Soviets are fearful that their future actions in Afghanistan could sharply reduce participation in the Olympics and push the West Europeans toward closer support of the US.

There are already some signs of strains and uncertainty within the Soviet leadership over Afghanistan. Several reports indicate that some Soviet officials--apparently including Boris Ponomarev, a candidate member of the Politburo and a party official with an important role in formulating foreign policy--are unhappy with the impact of the Soviet invasion on broader Soviet foreign and domestic interests.

#### Soviet Options

As the Kremlin contemplates Afghanistan, it could weigh several broad options ranging from outright withdrawal to a massive, all-out counterinsurgency effort. Some probably are rejected out of hand while others will involve difficult policy tradeoffs.

Withdrawal seems extremely unlikely. In addition to being a major setback to Soviet prestige and Moscow's self image as a great power, it would be a humiliating admission of incompetence by the present Soviet leadership. It would almost certainly lead to a militantly anti-Soviet, Islamic influenced government, which Moscow could not accept.

Interest has been stirred in a possible Negotiated settlement by Brezhnev's call last week for a "guaranteed"

end to foreign interference and by Soviet feelers regarding an international agreement on Afghanistan. It seems unlikely at this point, however, that the USSR is seriously interested in pursuing this course.

The Soviets realize that whatever the international context of their pullout, a withdrawal would lead to the collapse of any Soviet installed regime. Despite their hyperbole about foreign intervention, the Soviets recognize that the insurgents have derived most of their domestic weapons and supplies from within Afghanistan, that there is no united insurgent leadership to talk with, and that international guarantees could not materially change the internal security situation. Even Brezhnev alluded to this in his speech when he advanced his one-sided formula that Soviet withdrawal could only "commence" after Moscow was convinced that foreign interference had "fully terminated"--in other words that the insurgency had ended.

Furthermore, the Soviets have already rejected some "neutrality" formulations, saying they would not protect Soviet vital interests nor perpetuate a revolutionary regime. In short, Moscow is unlikely to be interested in a political solution until they are convinced that a pro-Soviet regime could survive.



The Soviets could hope to sit tight, counting on their present force level to maintain a minimal degree of control, ensure the survival of a puppet government and allow international attention to Afghanistan to die away. But the recent disturbances in Kabul indicate that this option has probably already been foreclosed.

If Moscow maintained its present level and form of military activity, it would permit the insurgents to gather momentum and determine the time and place of battle. It would turn the cities into virtual rebel strongholds. It would expose Soviet forces to continual insurgent harassment and a steady drain of casualties.

There were already signs before the Kabul disturbances that Moscow was moving to improve its position by additional commitment of troops. Within the last few weeks, the Soviets have committed one division they had been holding in reserve and had begun forming several specially configured heliborne units for counterinsurgency opposition. In addition, one division is moving toward Afghanistan from Kiev in the Western USSR and may be committed.

The Soviets could calculate that the infusion of several additional divisions and additional tactical aircraft and

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helicopters in Afghanistan--say a doubling of their force in Afghanistan to around 140,000 men--could check the deteriorating security situation and administer a severe blow to the insurgents when the weather turns better this spring and summer. It is our view that a force this size could contain the insurgency but not erradicate it ~~and not~~ permanently pacify the countryside.

If the Soviets have made a similar calculation (they may well be more optimistic about their military <sup>than we are)</sup> ~~Aspects~~, they could inject an even more substantial force, hoping that it could quickly eliminate the insurgency and even enable them to put Afghanistan behind them. This would be in keeping with the Soviet military <sup>praxis</sup> ~~tendency~~ to employ overwhelming superiority.

But the commitment of say 300,000 men would probably involve serious economic and military dislocation and stimulate internal friction and increased international criticism.

### Outlook

We think the Soviets are likely to conclude that they need ~~even~~ more troops in Afghanistan to reduce insurgent activity to a more tolerable level, ensure their continued

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control of the cities and maintain a pro-Soviet government there. Because the Soviets probably do not have a clear idea of the force levels needed to suppress the insurgency and because of the controversy a deeper involvement ~~could~~ will generate both in Moscow and abroad, we think the Soviets will opt for what it might think <sup>would be</sup> the minimum necessary increase. This might be an increase of several divisions or so--maybe 40,000 men. If Moscow opts for such an increase, we think it will be accompanied by a sharply intensified level of Soviet initiated fighting this spring and summer, as the Soviets try to break the insurgency.

Such a move would probably be accompanied by a change in the political leadership in Kabul. There have been many signs that Moscow is looking for new faces ~~who might~~ <sup>to</sup> check the deterioration in the Afghan government and military. ~~and~~ <sup>Moscow might think such a government would</sup> rally enough backing to avoid the appearance abroad of a regime totally dependent on and subservient to the USSR.

We also think the Soviets may accompany this move by intensified overtures abroad to mitigate the impact of increased fighting and to salvage the Olympics and "detente" in Europe. One element of this program could be stress on Soviet interest in an international solution to forestall "foreign interference." Moscow would hope this approach would

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~~be to~~ put the blame on the US for Moscow's continued presence in Afghanistan, encourage those eager to downplay the significance of the Soviet invasion and drive an additional wedge into US relations with its European allies.

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