

Strategic Warning Staff

Washington, D.C. 20301

S-0086/SWS

13 December 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO/W

FROM : Director, SWS

SUBJECT : Soviet Actions in Afghanistan

1. I left the meeting on Afghanistan yesterday with the feeling that we had not accomplished much in the way of sharpening the Community perception of what the Soviets may be about in Afghanistan. Other than myself, most of those present seemed to continue to hold the view that the Soviets are moving tentatively with regard to their options in Afghanistan. E.g.,

-- They are setting up an enclave at Bagram to ensure that they have a base through which to either evacuate their advisors or insert more troops and material, whichever move is dictated by the evolution of a situation which is now uncertain.

-- They have decided to bolster the defenses of Bagram in response to increased insurgent probes.

-- They need some troops to protect their people against a massacre if the situation suddenly deteriorates.

-- Etc.

2. None of these actions, however, is likely to change the course of events in Afghanistan that is causing the Soviets grief. Yet there seemed to be a glimmer of consensus among those at the meeting that the act of sending their own combat units into another country in the midst of an insurgency reflects a significant political decision on the part of the Soviets. Why then should we shrink from believing that the Soviets -- having crossed this threshold -- will employ these troops in some way to tangibly impact on the situation that caused the threshold to be crossed.

3. The decision in this case was made with the benefit of a thorough (60 plus days) on-the-scene study of all aspects of the situation by a mission of high level authorities. (The Pavlovskiy mission.) We know from the composition of the study group and the activities in which they were engaged while in Afghanistan that their review went into the logistics of the situation, the effectiveness of such organs as the police, intelligence, the ministerial level offices, and communications security. A main feature of this study certainly must have been an assessment of the course of the insurgency and the ability of the DRA forces -- military and political -- to deal with it.

SECRET

SECRET

4. Our own assessment shows an Afghan army which is having great difficulty in maintaining its manpower strength, experiencing erosion of morale leading to desertions, mutinies, and outright defections. The DRA forces have produced no lasting gains against the insurgents. They have been able to win most pitched battles -- when the insurgents permit a pitched battle to occur -- but cannot consolidate gains. Among the reasons for this inability are (a) the shrinking strength of the armed forces, which forces them to be constantly shifting forces to meet the various outbreaks and thus allowing rebel forces to seep back into areas from which they had been driven, and (b) the deterioration of morale in DRA forces left to hold the positions gained by military action. At the heart of the problem is a regime rent by factionalism, for which mutiny is a constant problem, and which is demonstrably unable to promote the kind of cohesion and efficiency in its own military and political machinery that would be needed to deal effectively with the insurgency. What all this adds up to is a situation that could fly apart at any time, with a revolt of the armed forces being the most serious potential problem.

5. Moreover, the prognosis is that things will continue to go downhill. During last winter, a mild one, the insurgency gained strength. This summer, analysts both in Embassy Kabul and here in Washington forecast that if the regime could survive until winter the insurgents would have to pull back and the DRA forces could pull themselves together. The reverse appears to be happening. It is the DRA forces that seem to be pulling back and the insurgents who are gaining. The largest DRA offensive of the insurgency has recently been completed, yet the DRA forces ultimately pulled back and the rebels seeped back into the areas from which they had been driven by the offensive. The action must clearly be seen as proof that advisors and technicians, logistical support, and tactical guidance is not going to turn the situation around.

6. The Pavlovskiy mission had ample opportunity to study the situation first hand, and in all likelihood came to the same conclusion. The decision which led to the actions we are beginning to see would have been made on the basis of a dismal assessment of the present situation and of its likely course if something were not done about it, together with an evaluation by a team of high level authorities as to what would have to be done if the USSR wanted to solidify its politico-strategic objectives in Afghanistan.

7. We believe that the Soviet actions since Pavlovskiy's departure indicate that Moscow decided to act to save its position. Steps such as securing an enclave against future contingencies for evacuation and providing protection to Soviet citizens could not be perceived by the Soviets as "doing" anything about the situation. Indeed, such actions are more consistent with a lack of decision. In view of the prognosis, they amount to conceding to the probability of losing out and merely covering the exit.

SECRET

Even if the enclave were for the purpose of ensuring an entrance point for troops, merely holding an enclave would not change the deteriorating situation which created the potential need for troops. In effect, doing nothing more than holding an enclave against the potential need to land troops would make it likely that sooner or later the enclave would have to be used for just that purpose. "Wait and see" does not appear to be the objective of the course indicated by the recent Soviet actions.

8. "Doing something" about the situation means, in effect, ensuring that the next time the DRA forces, with Soviet help, undertake a large offensive against the insurgents they will not be forced to give back their winnings. This requires more military forces than the DRA can muster at present. Someone must hold the cities, main centers, airfields, and keep the roads open. Military forces are required to ensure the security of Kabul, both from revolts from within and from attacks by the insurgents. One of the reasons for the military failure and eroding morale of the Afghan armed forces to date is that they cannot accomplish all these things and to the Afghan troops there must appear little prospect that they ever will.

9. Another step toward rectifying the situation would be to produce a more effective, cohesive regime in Kabul. If nothing else, this would alleviate somewhat the drain on Afghan military strength in the countryside caused by the need to keep a large "Praetorean Guard" in Kabul. This suggests that ultimately Amin will have to go. His replacement, however, is unlikely to be chosen on the basis of his acceptability to the insurgents. He would still be "Russian-installed." What the Soviets are likely to seek is someone who can pull together the Marxist factions and various groups among the political and military leadership. This would enable the Afghan Marxists and their Soviet allies to concentrate on the insurgency.

10. For undertaking these objectives, the immediate need is efficient military forces. By their actions, the Soviets have indicated they are willing to take the large political step of putting their own combat units into a foreign country. Why should we shrink from estimating that they would be willing, once having taken this step, to use their troops in a way and in an amount that could benefit their long range position?

25X1

DOUGLAS J. MacEACHIN