



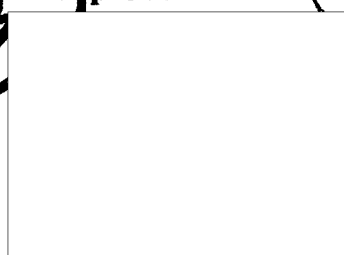
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# Afghanistan Situation Report



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20 November 1984

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**AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT**

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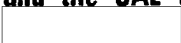
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The average price of basic food items in Kabul is 16 percent higher this year than two years ago. 

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**ARAB DELEGATION ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE INSURGENT DISUNITY**

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Resistance leader Sayyaf closed his Peshawar office following the efforts of a delegation from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE to reconcile dissension among the resistance groups. 

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The Soviets are shifting from a strategy of attrition toward consolidation in Afghanistan. 


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Soviet resources in Afghanistan are too limited to implement a broad consolidation strategy in the near term. 

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and the Office of Soviet Analysis. Questions or comments on the issues raised in the publication should be directed 

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**FOOD PRICES IN KABUL** 

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Market surveys taken by US Embassy officers during October of this year indicated that the average price of basic food items in Kabul is about 16 percent higher than two years earlier. Prices for bread, flour, sugar, and tea were essentially unchanged, but vegetable oil and lamb prices increased by 64 percent and 29 percent, respectively. 

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**Comment:**

The average annual price increase for food of about 8 percent is modest given the war situation and generally indicates that food supplies are adequate, at least in Kabul. The Soviets have made sizable food deliveries to Kabul to help to ensure that a degree of normality exists in the Afghan capital. Moreover, food prices for many in the capital are heavily subsidized by the government which has its costs underwritten by Soviet financial assistance. Surveys taken in provinces outside Kabul, however, indicate prices for food staples have risen by more than 25 percent annually in most areas over the past two years, although no faster than non-food items. 

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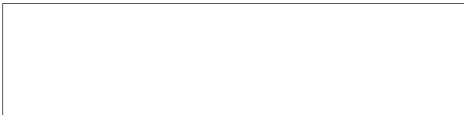
**ARAB DELEGATION ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE RESISTANCE DISUNITY** 

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In mid-October, a delegation from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates met with at least four leaders of the fundamentalist alliance in Peshawar in an attempt to reconcile

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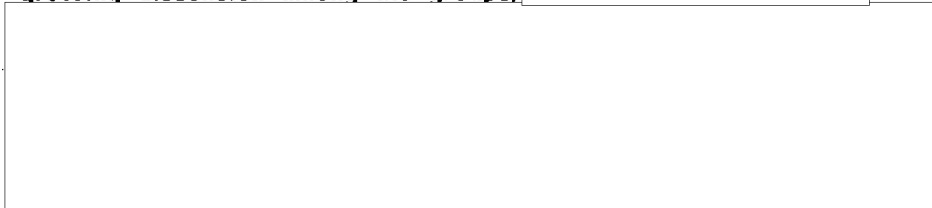
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growing dissension among the groups.

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**Comment:**

Sayyaf's decision to close his party office probably was made at the request of the delegation. It may be a sign that he will devote more energy to the alliance itself. Even so, squabbling among the Peshawar resistance leaders over distribution of funds and other issues will probably continue.

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**IN BRIEF**

-- On 15 November the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan by a 119 to 20 vote. Last year, 116 nations voted in favor; 114 backed the appeal two years ago.

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-- Two Soviet Army deserters from Afghanistan who resettled in Britain this past summer voluntarily returned to the USSR on 11 November, according to press reports. The US Embassy in Islamabad reports this incident has infuriated Afghan resistance leaders and upset Pakistan officials involved in exfiltration matters.

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-- [redacted] who recently returned from southern Tajikistan, says that the area's local inhabitants told him that small insurgent bands regularly cross into the Soviet Union from Afghanistan to rest.

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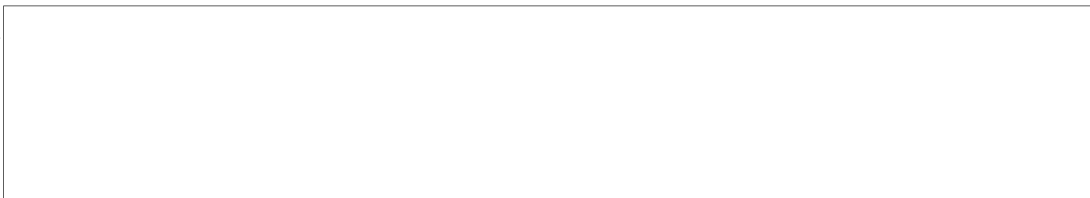
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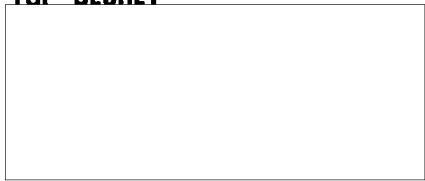




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**PERSPECTIVES**

**SOVIET STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN: ATTRITION OR CONSOLIDATION?**

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The two perspectives this week discuss Soviet military strategy in Afghanistan. The first author views counterinsurgency strategies as a spectrum with attrition on one end and consolidation on the other. He contends the Soviets may be shifting from a predominantly attrition strategy toward consolidation. The authors of the second perspective argue that Soviet strategy has always been based on both attrition and consolidation, but that resources have been too limited to consolidate effectively. The two strategies are not mutually exclusive and neither perspective argues that the Soviets have, or will follow a strategy based solely on attrition or consolidation.

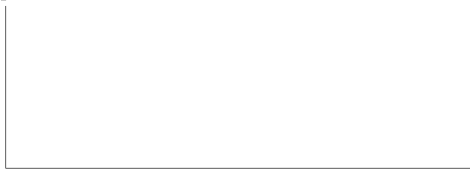
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**PERSPECTIVE**

**NEW WRINKLES IN SOVIET STRATEGY**



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**Soviet counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan have incorporated features of two basic strategies--attrition and consolidation--with emphasis on attrition. Recent developments in the Panjsher Valley, however, suggest a shift toward consolidation. Such a shift could work to the insurgents' disadvantage without entailing a greater long-term commitment of Soviet forces or provoking a more strident worldwide condemnation of the USSR. More Soviet troops, however, would probably be needed in the short term until Afghan units are properly trained and more effective.**



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**Strategic and Tactical Experimentation**

**Despite modifications of their tactics, the Soviets have pursued an attrition strategy over the past five years. They have also used some elements of a consolidation strategy such as attempting to divide and weaken the resistance through bribes and to win popular support through propaganda and economic aid. Such efforts increased appreciably under Andropov but still occupy only a secondary place in overall Soviet strategy.**



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**The heavy reliance on attrition has brought the Soviets little success so far. An intensification of this strategy might make it more successful, but this option probably is unpalatable to Moscow. Massive reinforcement--300,000 to 400,000 troops--would substantially raise military, political, and economic costs and diminish Soviet global military preparedness. In particular, more aggressive attrition tactics would raise the Soviet casualty rate, something the Soviet leadership wishes to avoid for domestic reasons.**



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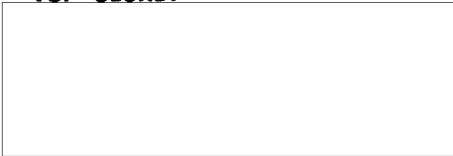
**In theory, Moscow could gain much by changing the emphasis to consolidation:**

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-- Although the Soviets would have to increase their force levels in the near term so that Afghan units could be withdrawn from combat and garrison duties for extensive training, these additional troops could be withdrawn once Afghans were able to take over the major burden of the struggle.

-- By deemphasizing the more brutal aspects of Soviet activities in Afghanistan and lowering the Soviet profile in the long run, the Soviets would dampen international condemnation of their policy.

-- If the Soviets can deny territory to the insurgents, particularly areas that have long been considered resistance strongholds, they would create a perception of their own capability and of Afghan regime legitimacy that likely would lessen foreign materiel and diplomatic support for the insurgents, albeit gradually. 

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**Indications of Change**

The Soviet offensive last spring in the Panjsher Valley was patterned after the three preceding campaigns, all of which were consistent with an attrition strategy. The Soviets clearly were more determined to consolidate their hold in this seventh attempt to secure the valley than in earlier attempts, however:

-- Soviet garrisoning of the valley has been much more extensive than in previous campaigns.

--  the Kabul regime is trying--so far with little success--to resettle areas with civilians loyal to the regime or hostile to the Panjsher resistance fighters. 

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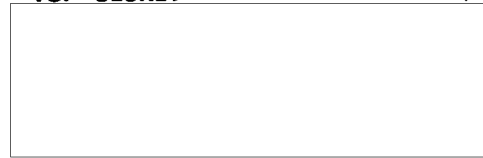
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The Soviet consolidation effort in the Panjsher may be an exception, reflecting the valley's unique strategic importance. If, however, the most recent developments point to a shift in Soviet strategy, we would expect to see some of the following indicators, first in the Panjsher Valley:



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- Continued reinforcement of garrisons and improved security for lines of communication.
- Less aggressive use of airpower to limit civilian casualties and collateral damage.
- Small-scale operations to clear additional areas and establish new garrisons.
- Small-unit patrolling to maintain contact with the populace.
- Redoubled efforts to resettle the valley.
- Extensive rebuilding of the valley's infrastructure.
- Increased intelligence targeting against civilians with relatively less against the insurgents. 

Indicators of a shift in other parts of the country could include:

- Operations that resemble the gamut of operations in Panjsher VII.
- Continued strong defense of strategic urban areas accompanied by small-scale offensive operations against targets of opportunity to keep insurgents off balance.
- A decrease in the overall number of Soviet offensive operations, accompanied by concerted campaigns against strategic areas throughout the country.
- A greater Soviet role, in the short term, in combat and garrison duties so that Afghan units can be withdrawn for training purposes.
- Stepped-up efforts to divide insurgent forces through bribes, ceasefires, and promises of a greater share of the political spoils in Afghanistan.
- An increase in the numbers of students or officials sent to the USSR for training, especially training that improves KHAD's capabilities.


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-- A more concerted effort to turn the Afghan ruling party into a viable political organization and a plausible representative of Afghan nationalism. 

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**Implications**

We believe that a Soviet shift toward a consolidation strategy would appreciably increase their effectiveness against the resistance. The insurgents, if denied access to territory vital to their economic and cultural well-being, would most likely be unable to continue effectively an insurgency rooted in tribal structures and organization. Efforts by the insurgents to develop a more modern, politically organized insurgency--such as that used by the Viet Cong--would be a radical departure. The insurgents could continue to operate as isolated bands, harassing Soviet and regime forces from the most inaccessible areas of Afghanistan, but such harassment would be less of an overall threat to the Soviets. 

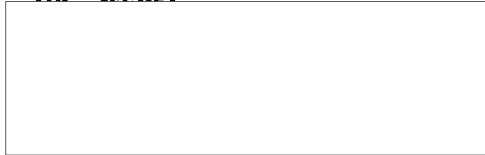
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**PERSPECTIVE**


**SOVIET TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY AND STRATEGIC CONTINUITY**




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We reject the contention in the preceding perspective that the Soviets thus far have considered the consolidation of the Kabul regime's political position to be of secondary importance. It is, in fact, the primary reason the Soviets are in Afghanistan. 

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We judge that resource constraints on Soviet commanders rather than policy preference have determined the degree to which they could pursue attrition and consolidation objectives. Low force levels in Afghanistan have made it difficult to secure and hold territory, making the Soviets concentrate on temporarily clearing key areas and inflicting casualties on insurgents. The Soviets nonetheless recognize that they are involved in a political as well as a military struggle and have complemented their military efforts whenever possible with economic, educational, governmental, and propaganda programs designed to consolidate Communist rule. 

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Before the Panjsher VII campaign, the Soviets were already pursuing the policies that have been identified as indicators of a shift in strategy.

-- Soviet and Afghan forces have defended strategic urban areas and mounted limited attacks against targets of opportunity. The Soviets evidently hope that improved intelligence will allow more effective strikes against such targets.

-- The Soviets and the Afghan regime were trying to divide the insurgents through bribery and offers of ceasefires from the time of the invasion and have particularly pursued such efforts since 1981.

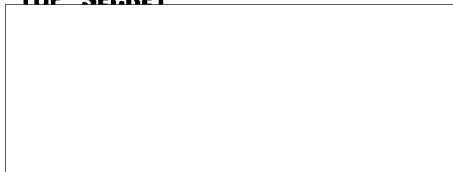
-- Soviets have long planned to train as many Afghan students and officials as possible in the USSR in order to develop a loyal indigenous base. Soviet training was significant before the Communist coup in 1978 and has increased steadily since.

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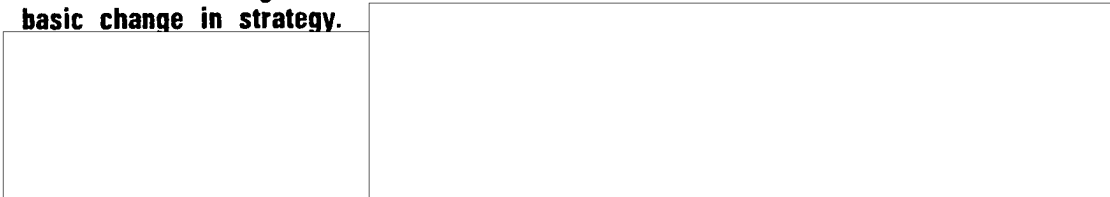
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-- The Soviets have also emphasized efforts to turn the Afghan ruling party and armed forces into effective organizations. (S NF)

We see nothing to indicate that Soviet commanders are contemplating a basic change in strategy.



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The difficulties of shifting more to a consolidation strategy argue against it.

-- We judge that the Afghan Army will not be able to shoulder a greater portion of the war effort for the foreseeable future. The Soviets are increasing their role in combat operations not to allow more training for Afghan units, but because even the best-trained Afghans have proven ineffective.

-- The small base of support for the ruling party in Kabul and its deep internal rivalries make it a poor vehicle for consolidating control.

-- The government has little to offer most Afghans. Central government programs--whether or not Communist-inspired--are unwelcome in most rural areas. Moreover, government control is so tenuous in most rural areas that Kabul is not in a position to offer the local population a share of the economic or political spoils.

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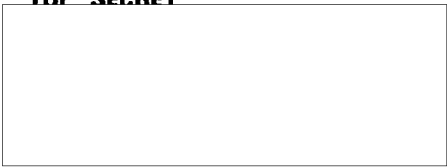
In our view, the Soviets can begin to deal with basically political problems only when they have some degree of military control in an area. In order for the Soviets to implement a broad consolidation strategy in the near term, we estimate that they would have to substantially increase their forces in Afghanistan to take and hold more territory long enough to change popular attitudes or to deny the insurgents support. This would require a dramatic change to the economy-of-force approach the Soviets have followed thus far, and would be no "cheaper"

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than any large reinforcement undertaken in support of an intensified attrition strategy.



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