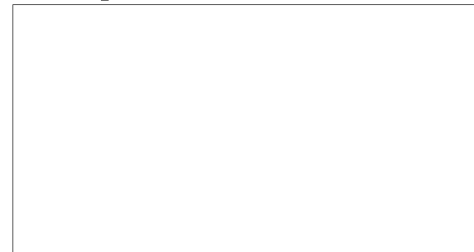




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Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces



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An Intelligence Assessment

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NESA 84-10181CX

May 1984

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Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces



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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by 
 Office of Near Eastern and South Asian
Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and
may be directed to the Chief, South Asia Division,
NESA, 

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**Afghanistan: Prospects
for the Insurgents
in the Western Provinces**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 20 April 1984
was used in this report.*

Resistance activity will continue to undermine government and Soviet security in the three western provinces—Herat, Farah, and Nimruz—that make up a quarter of Afghanistan. We believe that increasing insurgent effectiveness will hinder Soviet efforts to build bases in southwestern Afghanistan that could threaten US interests in South Asia and the Persian Gulf:

- The 15,000 insurgents active in the area have attacked supply lines, raided airfields, and continually contested government control of the country's third-largest city with successes comparable to those of some better armed guerrilla bands operating in eastern Afghanistan.
- We believe that the resistance forces will continue to expand and that increasing cooperation among groups will help reduce supply shortages and gradually lead to more effective insurgent operations.

Although the Soviets probably see the fighting in the west as secondary to that in eastern Afghanistan, they probably recognize that the resistance in the west has put increasing demands on limited Soviet and Afghan forces and could develop insurgent strongholds like those in the east. We expect that the Afghan Government will increase its air and ground units in the area but that Soviet and Afghan forces will remain far too few and ineffective to destroy the insurgency:

- The Soviets might need to permanently deploy at least two additional divisions to significantly reduce the resistance in the west. Such an augmentation would occur, however, only as part of a massive Soviet reinforcement in Afghanistan, which is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Iran has given military aid to the Afghan resistance primarily to develop pro-Iranian Shia insurgent groups in the western provinces and especially in central Afghanistan and to try to expand Iranian influence in the country:

- We believe that Tehran will try to limit the activities of Afghan insurgents and refugees in Iran. The Iranians refuse to let their country become a major resistance supply base and sanctuary because of the threat that would be posed to Iranian security by large numbers of independent Afghan insurgent groups based in Iran.

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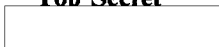
Expanding insurgent activity in the western provinces will increase the chances of border incidents between Iranian and Soviet or Afghan forces, causing relations between Moscow and Tehran to worsen further:

- Despite concern about Iranian aid to the insurgents, we believe the Soviets will launch no major or long-range attacks into Iran because of the lack of long-term benefits against the Afghan insurgents and the possible impact on future Soviet relations with Iran.
- Continued deterioration of the border situation probably would compel Iran and the USSR to consider deploying military forces to the Iran-Afghanistan border region—probably from Iranian forces on the Iraqi front and Soviet forces elsewhere in Afghanistan.



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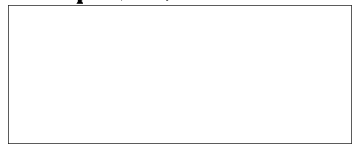
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Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents in the Western Provinces



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The Strategic Western Provinces of Afghanistan

Insurgent activity in Herat, Farah, and Nimruz Provinces has involved about 15 percent of the estimated full- and part-time armed guerrillas fighting in Afghanistan. They operate in an area covering about a quarter of the country. Although fewer in number, less well armed, and developing more slowly than the resistance in eastern Afghanistan, insurgent groups in the west have steadily become more effective and have sometimes achieved successes comparable to those of some groups operating in the east.

Increasing insurgent operations in the western region since 1979 have helped prevent the Soviets from taking advantage of one of the potential strategic benefits of the occupation of Afghanistan and have raised new liabilities for Moscow. Without firm control of the region, the Soviets cannot safely build or maintain bases there to project their military power into South Asia and the Persian Gulf. Insurgent operations across and near the Iranian border and Soviet and Afghan counterattacks have become serious irritants in Soviet relations with Iran. Insurgent attacks on the main road from the USSR have hampered the flow of supplies to western and southern parts of the country, helping to isolate Qandahar and Herat, the second- and third-largest cities in Afghanistan.

Resistance Effectiveness and Tactics

Resistance groups in western Afghanistan have steadily become more effective, raising military costs to the Afghan regime and Soviet forces in the region. The city of Herat has come under periodic insurgent attack. Government control often has been limited to a few towns, and in many the resistance controls all but the government garrisons after sundown. Afghan Ministry of Defense estimates suggest that the government has not controlled more than 30 percent of the three provinces since the Soviet invasion.



The Battle for Herat City

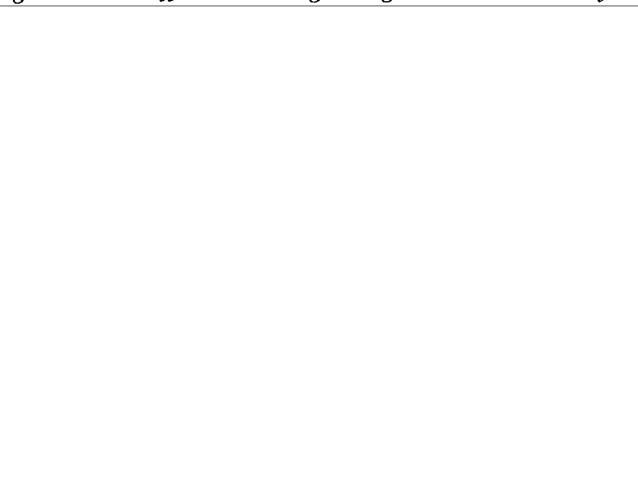
Attacks by 3,000 to 4,000 insurgents in and around Herat have made Afghanistan's third-largest city a constant trouble spot for the Soviets and the Afghan Government.



insurgents controlled 90 percent of the city between 1600 hours and dawn.



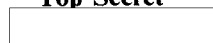
the insurgents elected their own mayor and set prices and taxes in the city's bazaar. Embassy sources stated that in October 1983 insurgent attacks closed the road to the airport for three days. The same sources indicate that a month later insurgents killed 26 government officials during a single attack in the city.



Resistance forces have demonstrated a great ability to escape destruction by retreating into the nearby mountains or into Iran, only to return to the Herat area later. Embassy sources reported that insurgent activity around the city resumed after the April offensive. They reported in August 1983 that government security around Herat had again deteriorated.



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Iranian-Afghan Border Area



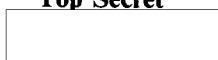
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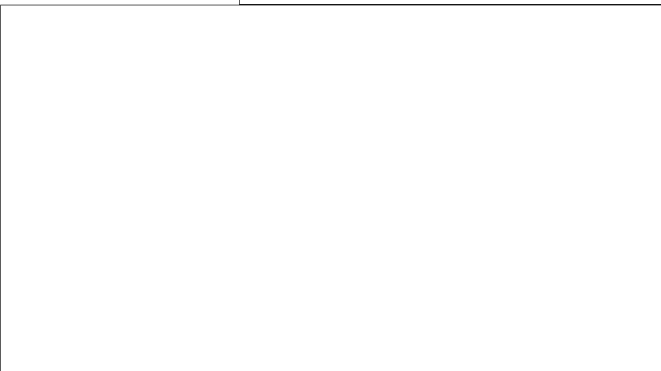


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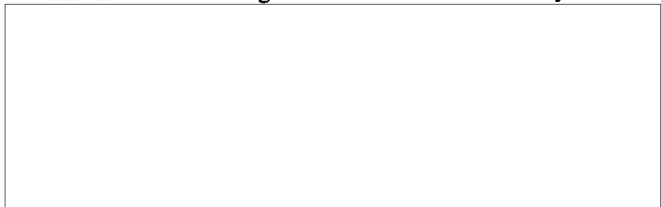
Resistance groups in the west have been most effective in concentrating their attacks on outposts and the main Soviet and Afghan supply road that extends almost 600 kilometers from the Soviet border through Herat to Qandahar City.

[redacted] we estimate that the insurgents, using mines or small-arms fire, have destroyed or damaged between 500 and 1,000 vehicles in the region since the Soviet invasion in late 1979. [redacted] insurgent attacks destroyed at least 45 armored vehicles and 150 trucks in the three provinces in the year ending June 1983. [redacted] strong insurgent attacks on outposts in Farah Province in 1983 had forced regime officials to flee to Kabul.

Some insurgent groups have improved their tactics and intelligence to avoid or limit the effects of enemy sweep operations and to take advantage of the nearby border with Iran.



Guerrillas in the three provinces also have improved their ability to cope with enemy air attacks. We estimate [redacted] insurgent small-arms fire has shot down as many as 40 Soviet and Afghan aircraft in the three provinces since the Soviet invasion. Embassy sources reported that insurgent ground fire severely damaged commercial aircraft landing at Herat Airfield in early 1983.



These tactics have helped keep insurgent casualties low and morale generally high, although the war

appears to be causing some hardships.



[redacted] Insurgent losses also were light during intensive Soviet and Afghan attacks around Herat in April 1983, according to Embassy sources. The war, however, had caused malnutrition among some insurgent groups and civilians in early 1983.

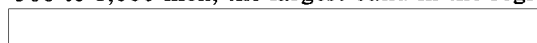
Organization, Manpower, and Cooperation

We believe that the increasing success of the resistance since the Soviet invasion has helped increase insurgent manpower considerably.



[redacted] We estimate that there are about 15,000 full- and part-time armed guerrillas in the three western provinces.

Insurgent forces in the region are fragmented into many small independent groups with no overall organization or leadership. The lack of cohesion among local insurgent groups has made it easier for the Afghan Government to maintain a degree of control over parts of the city of Herat. Embassy reports in 1982 and 1983 noted that there were at least 23 groups operating in the three provinces. The Jamiat-i-Islami insurgent group in Herat Province has become the most effective and, with an estimated 500 to 1,000 men, the largest band in the region,



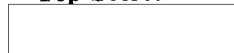
We believe that cooperation among these groups has increased slowly, helping to raise overall insurgent effectiveness. In late 1982 [redacted]

[redacted] the eight major insurgent groups in Nimruz and Farah Provinces operated independently in military activities but cooperated on logistics.



The Jamiat-i-Islami group in Herat Province has

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made considerable efforts to expand its influence and cooperation with groups in neighboring provinces. [Redacted]

The relatively small number of Shias in the area, estimated to be around 15 percent of the population, has so far limited Iran's influence in the western provinces. [Redacted]

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Weapons and Supplies

A lack of weapons and ammunition, in our view, has hindered insurgent capabilities and effectiveness in the region and may have weakened civilian support for the resistance. [Redacted]

the two largest pro-Iranian groups, totaling a few hundred men each, are the Hezbollah in Herat Province and the Reza in Nimruz Province. We estimate that the two to four known pro-Iranian groups in the three provinces have between 500 and 1,000 armed men. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] many bands were especially short of heavy machineguns and mortars and had few automatic weapons. [Redacted] civilian morale had suffered because of the lack of air defense weapons necessary to defend villages against air attacks. The Jamiat-i-Islami insurgent organization around Herat City, however, is relatively well armed with small arms and machineguns [Redacted]

families of Afghan insurgents fighting in Afghanistan were held hostage in Iran as a way to force the men to support pro-Iranian insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Iranian authorities also have forced Shia refugees in Iran to join pro-Iranian political organizations to receive identity cards and food rations. [Redacted] generally reliable source.² [Redacted]

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Long supply lines from Pakistan have forced resistance groups in the west to build their arsenals slowly from local sources. Accounts from insurgents state that most of their arms have been captured from regime forces or have come from defectors. Groups in the west have received relatively small amounts of weapons [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Iranian Involvement With the Afghan Insurgency

Relations With the Afghan Resistance and Refugees

We believe Iran wants to build insurgent groups in the western provinces that will remain loyal to Iran and increase Iranian influence in the region. High-ranking Iranian clerics and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard are assisting some Afghan insurgents in Iran and Afghanistan. [Redacted]

Increasing religious and economic tensions between Iranians and the estimated 1 million Afghan refugees in Iran have undermined that country's relations with some Afghan resistance groups. Afghan insurgent leaders have become increasingly concerned over food shortages, harassment, and poor treatment of Afghan refugees by Iran. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Long-simmering economic problems caused Afghan refugees to riot in several Iranian cities in December 1983. Embassy sources in Islamabad stated in early 1983 that 40,000 Afghan Sunnis were in Iranian refugee camps. Other Embassy sources report that thousands of Afghan Sunnis left Iran in late 1983 because of harassment and to escape being sent to refugee camps. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Ayatollah Montazeri—Ayatollah Khomeini's heir apparent—had been involved in supporting Shias in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion. [Redacted] [Redacted] the Guard was actively supporting the Afghan insurgents. [Redacted]

² Iranian efforts to develop pro-Iranian groups in the predominantly Shia area of central Afghanistan appear to have been more successful. [Redacted]

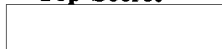
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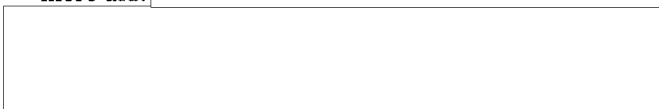
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Military Assistance

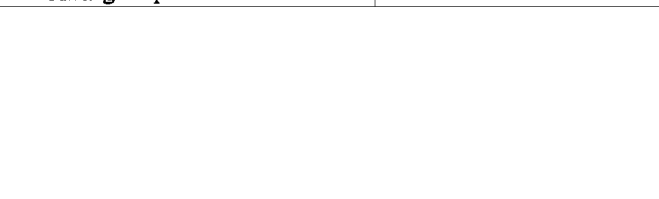
Iran apparently has provided relatively small amounts of aid to the Afghan resistance in the western provinces and mostly to pro-Iranian bands. Jamiat commanders around the city of Herat complained in 1983 that they had received few arms from Iran.



In late 1982, Afghan insurgents and the general populace expressed considerable resentment because Iran refused to give the resistance more aid.

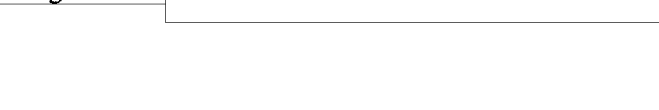


Iran's control of cross-border movement also is used to favor pro-Iranian groups. Afghan insurgent groups in the western provinces complained in early 1983 that Iranian Revolutionary Guards let only pro-Iranian Shia groups cross the border.



Although Iran has increased its efforts to control the border, we judge that insurgent groups can still cross the frontier in many areas.

The Iranians have trained few Afghan insurgents in Iran. We estimate that Iranian Revolutionary Guards instruct between 1,000 and 2,000 Afghan Shia insurgents in small arms and guerrilla warfare each year. Reliable sources assert that training is given only to pro-Iranian Afghan Shias, who must agree to foster pro-Iranian organizations when they return to Afghanistan.



Soviet and Afghan Government Activities

Soviet and Afghan officials have become increasingly concerned over the deteriorating security situation in the western provinces and Iran's support for the Afghan insurgents.³



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Military Buildup and Operations

The gradual increase in insurgent activity has forced the Soviets and Afghans to deploy more Afghan forces to the western provinces despite the need for troops and aircraft in other parts of the country.



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additional Afghan units also were sent to Farah Province in early August. We estimate that Afghan forces in the west increased by about 3,000 men in 1983.



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Afghan and Soviet officials also have made plans to strengthen their air capabilities against insurgents in the region. the Afghan Air Force assigned new helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to Herat Province in April 1983.



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a dir runway at an airfield 9 kilometers from the Iranian border had been lengthened by 1,000 meters. Although this base could not support fighters or bombers, it could support transports or helicopters aiding ground combat operations near the Iranian border.



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The additional ground and air capabilities have been used, in our view, primarily to try to reduce insurgent infiltration from Iran.



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Iranian Attitudes Regarding the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 has been a major cause of soured relations between the Khomeini regime and the USSR. There is a broad consensus among Iranian clerical factions against any modification of Tehran's attitude toward events in Afghanistan.

Tehran does not recognize the Babrak government and has been aiding some Afghan insurgent groups, ignoring protests from Moscow and Kabul. Iranian media regularly praise insurgent activities and criticize Kabul's links to Moscow. Iran wants a cleric-led Islamic regime established in Afghanistan and will not participate in negotiations that do not anticipate such a result.

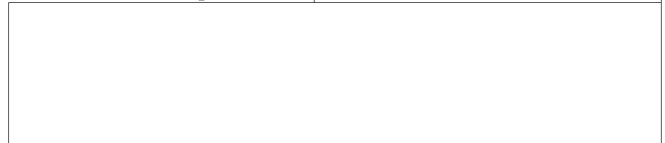
Soviet and Afghan units, however, have used multi-battalion sweep operations as their primary tactic against insurgent groups in the west. The relatively flat terrain of most of the three provinces has helped Soviet motorized and tank units in these attacks.



We believe these efforts have generally failed to destroy the resistance groups or reduce infiltration. Insurgent activity resumes relatively quickly after Soviet and Afghan units depart. Despite encirclement efforts during operations near the city of Herat in April 1983, for example, insurgent groups managed to escape into Iran.



The poor performance of Afghan, and sometimes of Soviet, troops also has helped undermine the effectiveness of such operations.



Demonstrators protest the invasion of Afghanistan storm the Soviet Embassy in Tehran, January 1980.

Most Afghan troops have been press-ganged into service, have had only a few days' training, and do poorly on the battlefield.



We judge that there are far too few Soviet and Afghan Government forces in the region to destroy insurgent groups, maintain control in key areas, or significantly reduce infiltration.



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Iranian Revolutionary Guards protect the Soviet Embassy after its attack by demonstrators protesting the invasion of Afghanistan, January 1980.



Afghan refugees in Tehran burn the Soviet flag on the third anniversary of the Soviet-backed government in Kabul, April 1981.

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Subversion in Afghanistan and Iran

To weaken the resistance, the Soviets and Afghans have tried to foment tension between Iranians and Afghan refugees, as well as Shias and Sunnis in Iran and Afghanistan.

Prospects and Implications

Prospects for the Resistance in the Western Provinces

We believe that slowly improving organization and cooperation among insurgent groups will lead to more effective resistance operations in the western provinces. Increasing combat success and low casualties

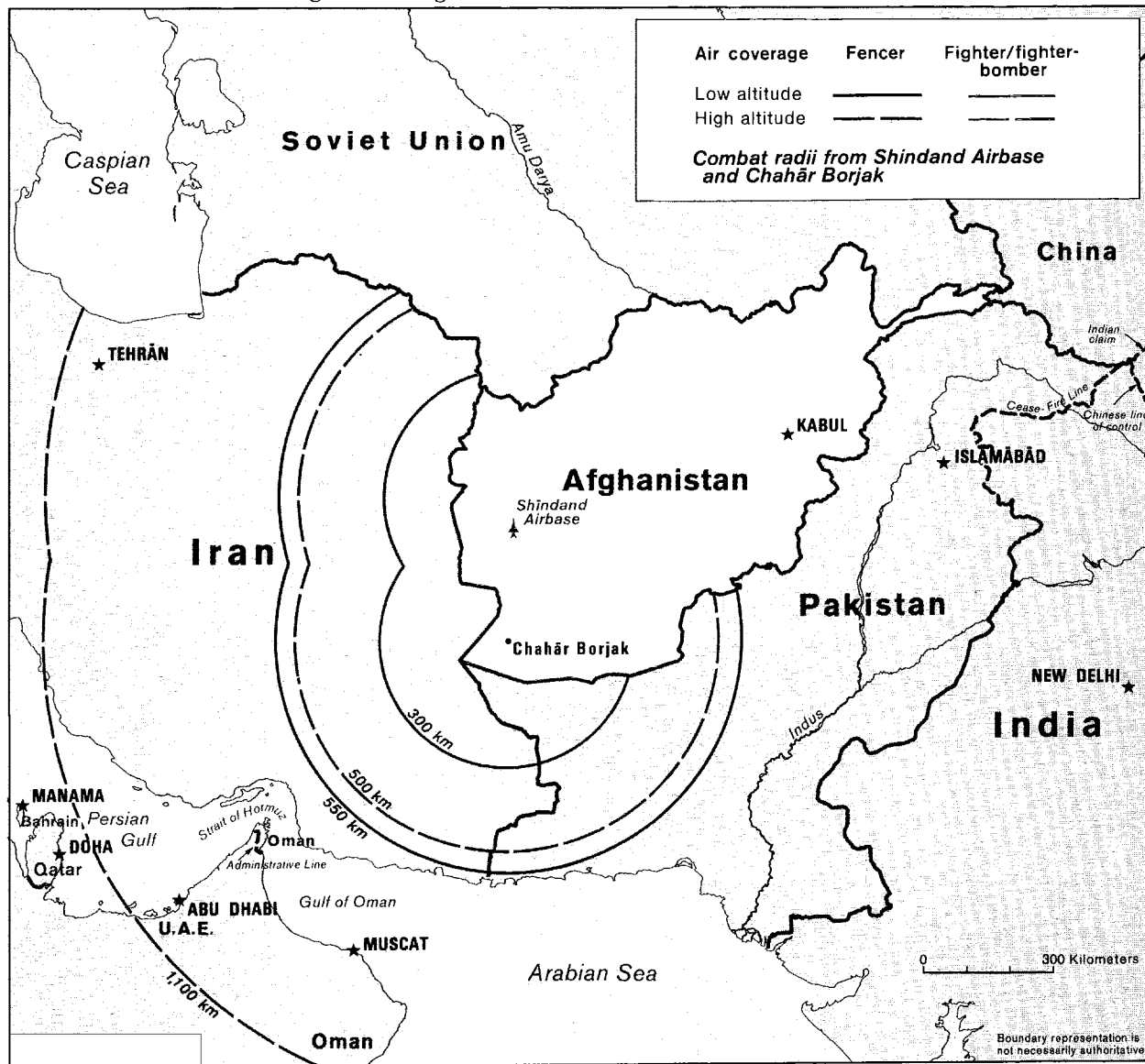
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Potential Soviet Air Coverage From Afghanistan



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will help maintain insurgent morale and provide sufficient recruits to replace losses and expand forces in the next two years. Resistance forces will continue to experience some equipment shortages, but we believe collaboration on logistics will help the many groups establish better supply lines to Pakistan. Such joint efforts may well foster sharing of information, training of personnel, and, eventually, coordinated military operations.

The Jamiat-i-Islami organization probably will be the most successful insurgent group in promoting cooperation and expanding its control among insurgent groups in the west. We believe it will continue to use its effective organization in Herat Province and growing contacts with other guerrilla bands in nearby regions to increase resistance cooperation. The efforts

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The Strategic Implications of Soviet Airpower in Afghanistan

Our analysis shows that a new airfield in southwestern Afghanistan would not bring most tactical aircraft now in the Soviet Air Forces within operational range of Persian Gulf targets. We expect that by the end of the 1980s, however, the Soviets will have begun deploying new aerial tankers and new tactical aircraft to the Soviet Air Forces that may have aerial refueling capabilities. If operated together with tankers from airfields in Afghanistan, such tactical fighters could strike targets throughout southwest Asia.

[Redacted]

Basing longer range aircraft, such as the Backfire bomber, at airbases in Afghanistan would significantly improve the Soviets' ability to attack more distant targets, including US carrier task forces in the Indian Ocean and the US base on Diego Garcia. (Unescorted Backfire bombers already can strike Persian Gulf targets from bases in the USSR.) We believe, however, that the Soviets would need to lengthen the runways at existing airbases in Afghanistan to support Backfire bomber operations.

The construction of major new airbases in southwestern Afghanistan would be costly and confront extreme logistic difficulties that would be worsened by increasingly effective insurgent attacks on supply lines, construction sites, and construction equipment. Imagery shows that Soviet airbases in the USSR usually are located along major lines of communication, including railroads. There are no railroads in Afghanistan, and the economic infrastructure, especially the poor road system, would hamper efforts to build and support an airbase in southwestern Afghanistan, even in peacetime.

of Jamiat and other groups to expand their control, however, could cause more infighting among insurgent groups, especially between pro-Iranian Shia and more moderate Sunni bands.

We judge that the growing use of hit-and-run guerrilla tactics will help individual insurgent groups in the

western provinces to survive and to inflict considerable damage on the enemy in the next two years. We expect that, as bands slowly grow larger and become better armed, they will become more effective in attacks on vulnerable border and road security outposts and on convoys in the three provinces. Greater access to mortars and more experience in their use will lead to more effective hit-and-run raids against airfields, such as at Shindand and Herat, and Soviet and Afghan garrisons. Although resistance groups probably will launch more attacks on Herat, they will not be able to take and maintain control of this or any other major city against major Soviet and Afghan counterattacks.

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Iranian Involvement in the Afghan Insurgency

Although Iran in our view will not give significant aid to independent Afghan insurgent groups in the western provinces, Tehran will continue to provide military support and training to pro-Iranian insurgent groups in the region and probably would increase this assistance if the war with Iraq ended. We judge that, by infiltrating a few hundred additional trained and armed men a month to each of the three provinces, Iran could make the pro-Iranian insurgent groups an important military force in the region in about a year. Such growth in resistance forces would increase Soviet and Afghan regime military problems but also would cause more infighting between pro-Iranian and independent insurgent groups.

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Iranian officials will try to limit the presence and activities of Afghan resistance groups and refugees in Iran. They will keep Iran from becoming a major resistance base and sanctuary such as Pakistan because of the potential security threats posed by the presence of large numbers of well-armed, independent Afghan insurgent groups. We believe the Iranians will continue to harass Afghan refugees and attempt to force them into camps, actions that will increase tensions between Iranians and Afghans in Iran and cause some refugees to flee to Pakistan.

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Soviet Options

We believe the Soviets might need to deploy permanently at least two additional motorized rifle divisions to significantly reduce the growing resistance in the

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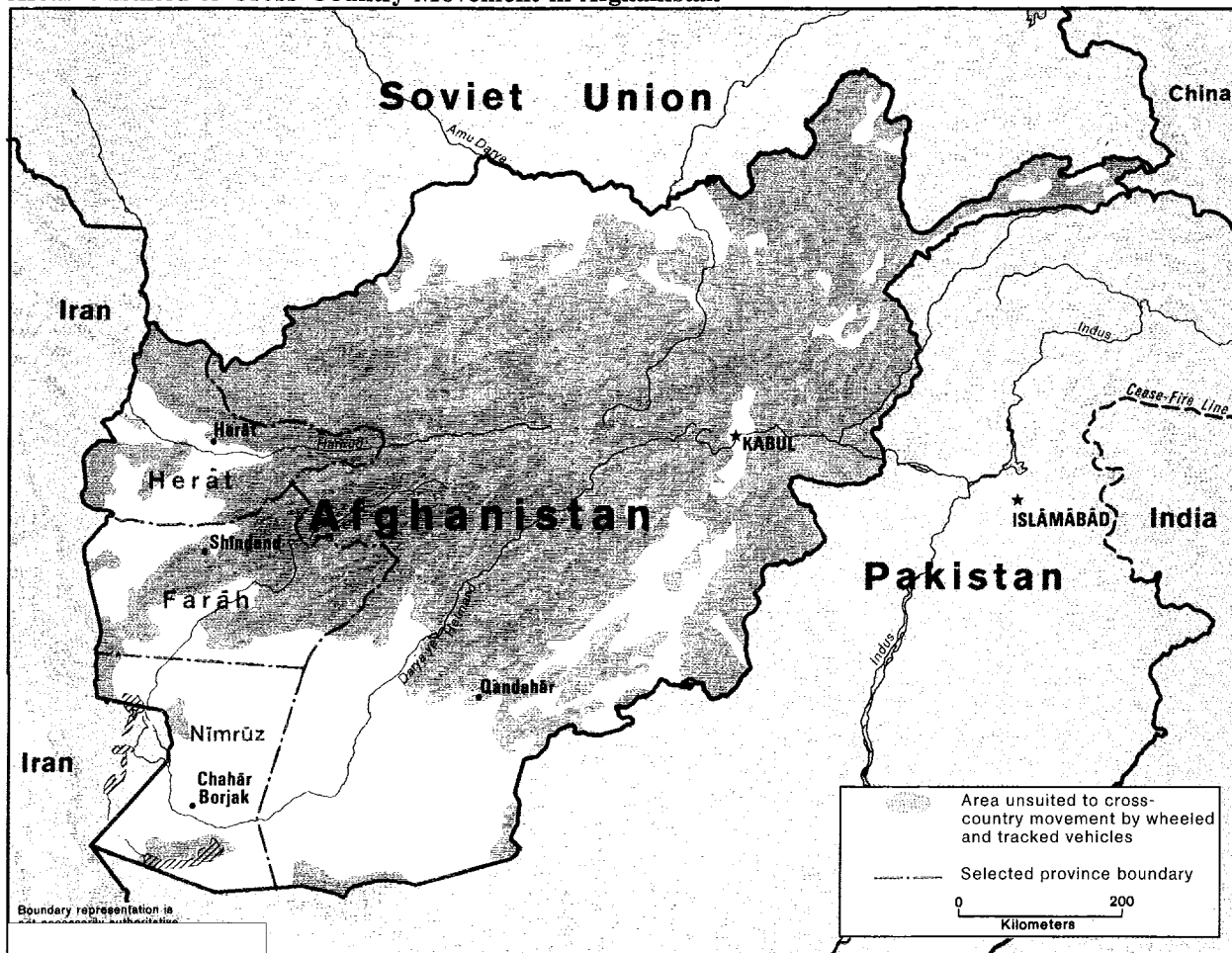
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Areas Unsited to Cross-Country Movement in Afghanistan



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western provinces. The Soviets, however, would undertake such a buildup only as part of a massive reinforcement throughout Afghanistan, which we do not see as likely in the foreseeable future. Although the Soviets might consider deploying a few thousand troops to bolster security in the area, we do not believe this would significantly improve the situation.

More intensive Soviet and Afghan operations in the western provinces probably would lead to increased violations of Iran's border. Tehran will protest such incidents but, because of the war with Iraq and its military weakness in the east, will try to avoid a major confrontation. We believe that the Soviets and Afghans will not launch deep or large-scale raids into Iran, because they realize that such attacks would involve serious international political costs and would not yield permanent gains against the resistance.

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Instead, we believe Soviet and Afghan forces will try to reduce the insurgency over the next year by deploying more Afghan forces to the western provinces and by launching more large-scale attacks. The Afghan units, however, will continue to be under strength, untrained, and unreliable. Although the efforts of Soviet and Afghan forces will temporarily weaken insurgent control in some areas, we believe that these forces will remain far too few and ineffective to curtail the insurgency.

We believe the Soviets are not now planning to invade and occupy all or part of Iran solely because of

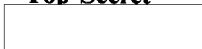
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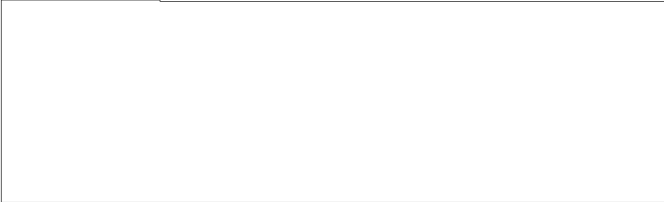
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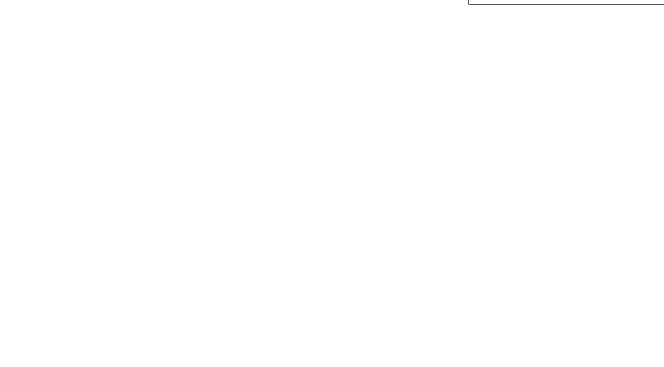
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Cross-Border Raids Into Iran

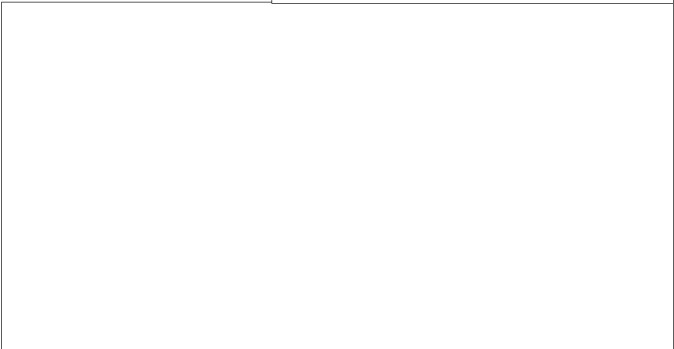
Soviet and Afghan air and ground forces have made shallow incursions across the border with Iran but have avoided large-scale or deep attacks. Embassy [redacted] report that in December 1983 the Soviet Ambassador in Kabul admitted that Soviet troops had followed insurgents into Iran on a number of occasions. [redacted]



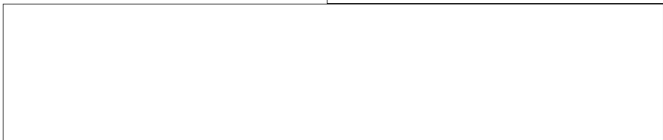
Although the Iranians have not made an issue of the small-scale incursions, they have sent strong protests to Kabul after several larger attacks. [redacted]



Iran's reluctance to respond militarily to the incursions probably stems in part from its military weakness in the east. We estimate that there are only a few regular army troops and a relatively small number of lightly armed border troops and Revolutionary Guards in the area. [redacted]



Afghan insurgent activity. [redacted]



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Along with their military efforts in Afghanistan, we believe the Soviets and Afghans will increase attempts to foment subversion in Iran to weaken the resistance groups and erode Iranian support for them. They will focus on religious and economic differences that will increase tension between Afghan refugees and Iranians. They also may launch clandestine attacks against Iranian leaders and facilities that can be blamed on the Afghan insurgents. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

Resistance activity in the western provinces, especially if augmented by more foreign material support through Pakistan, would make it more difficult for the Soviets to develop facilities capable of threatening US interests in South Asia and the Persian Gulf. Although the guerrillas could not prevent the Soviets from establishing new airbases, we judge that the threat of insurgent attacks would be a factor influencing the Soviets against stationing long-range bombers, fighters, or transport aircraft in western Afghanistan. Increasingly effective and widespread insurgent attacks also would hinder construction of the roads the Soviets would need to support bases in the area. Soviet military planners probably realize that, even after such roads were built, continuing resistance raids along supply lines could create problems for major regional operations. [redacted]

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A deterioration of the situation along the Iran-Afghanistan border, in our judgment, could cause Iran and the Soviets to divert some of their military forces to the area, weakening both countries' ability to threaten countries in the region that are friendly to the United States. Iran probably would consider redeploying some of its forces from the Iraqi front to the east, thus reducing its military capabilities against the Persian Gulf. Unless the Soviets augment their forces with troops from the USSR, they would have to consider moving some of their units from other parts of Afghanistan to the three western provinces. This would weaken their ability to fight the Afghan resistance in eastern Afghanistan and somewhat reduce the Soviet military threat to Pakistan. [redacted]

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