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Directorate of  
Intelligence

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# Afghanistan Situation Report



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1 October 1985

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NESA M 85-10199JX  
SOVA M 85-10178JX

1 October 1985

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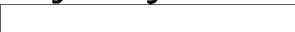



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**AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT**

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Fighting has decreased in Paktia Province  25X1  
 but the Soviets are conducting 25X1  
major air assaults in areas north of Kabul. 25X1  
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**TRIBAL JIRGA AIMED AT FOMENTING UNREST**  1 25X1


The Kabul regime called a meeting of border tribes in September partly to arm them against the insurgents and stir up tribal unrest in Pakistan aimed at undermining Islamabad's support for the guerrillas.  25X1

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**THE AFGHAN AIR FORCE: MOSCOW'S UNRELIABLE ALLY**  4 25X1

The Afghan Air Force is plagued by sabotage, poor morale, and defections that restrict its role in the war and force the Soviet Air Force to bear the lion's share of the fighting.  25X1

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 to  25X1

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**FIGHTING IN PAKTIA, MAZAR-E SHARIF DIES DOWN**



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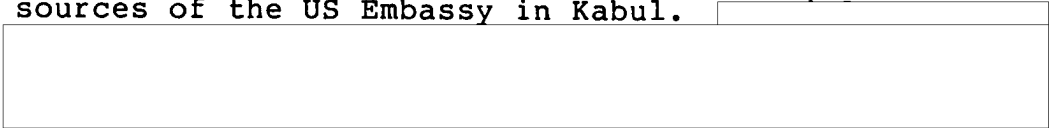
Fighting in Paktia Province, which resulted in numerous casualties, appears to have trailed off during the final week of September. Insurgent forces attacked outlying Afghan guard posts established during the height of the Soviet campaign, and drove the government's forces back into the main encampment at Khowst.



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With ground operations drawing to a close, the Soviets are relying more heavily on airstrikes against suspected insurgent positions and infiltration routes. On 24 September, the Soviets launched hundreds of air sorties during a major assault on the Shomali and Paghman areas just north of Kabul, according to sources of the US Embassy in Kabul.



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In the capital, insurgents are maintaining pressure on the Afghan government. They rocketed Kabul airport--inflicting limited damage--on the nights of 17 and 24 September, and attacked vehicle convoys along the Salang Highway on 23 September.



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**TRIBAL JIRGA AIMED AT FOMENTING UNREST**



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The Afghan regime used the September meeting of border tribes (jirga) to arm them and incite unrest along the Pakistan border.



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Babrak Karmal also appealed to Pushtun nationalism during the tribal assembly--an apparent attempt to revive Pushtun interest in a separate homeland.



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[Redacted]

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**Comment:** The jirga undoubtedly was called in part to step up pressure on Pakistan to alter its policies and to curb insurgent infiltration. Afghan Government efforts to buy off tribal groups with arms and money have been underway for at least three years with scant effect. In fact, some groups have turned their weapons against Afghan Army posts. [Redacted]

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Although the tribal region of Pakistan has long been well supplied with arms, tribal disputes have remained local and do not threaten Islamabad. Pushtun tribes, moreover, have never agreed on the issue of creating a separate homeland and most consider it less important than the insurgency. [Redacted]

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**IN BRIEF**

-- Satellite photography suggests that two Afghan Air Force MI-8 troop transport helicopters were sabotaged at Mazar-e Sharif airfield on 16 September. If true, this would be at least the third sabotage incident involving the Afghan Air Force that resulted in destroyed aircraft this year. [Redacted]

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-- [Redacted] an ammunition storage facility at Qonduz suffered extensive damage between 11 and 27 September, possibly as a result of negligence. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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-- The treasurer of the Afghan National Bank has vanished, taking with him all the bank's foreign currency, [Redacted] His departure follows the recent disappearance of KHAD's treasurer, who also embezzled KHAD's foreign currency. [Redacted]

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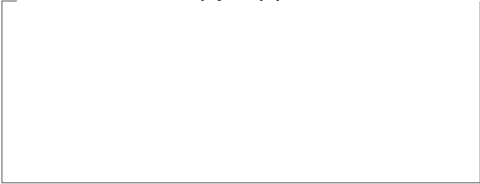
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**PERSPECTIVE**

**THE AFGHAN AIR FORCE: MOSCOW'S UNRELIABLE ALLY**



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The Afghan Air Force remains an unreliable Soviet ally that suffers from both a lack of combat will and internal unrest. These problems are largely caused by improved insurgent military performance, Soviet domination, Muslim sympathy for the insurgents, and feuding between the two factions of the Afghan ruling party. Although the Air Force's unreliability has limited its participation in the war, the Soviets believe the Air Force can play an important role over the longer term. Because prospects for improved performance are poor, however, we expect the Soviets will continue to assume the lion's share of the air war.

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**Reliability Problems**

The Afghan Air Force suffers from a lack of combat will, sabotage, and defections. Air Force defectors say Soviet advisers often fly with Afghan fighter pilots to prevent them from jettisoning their bombs before they reach insurgent targets. One defector asserts that pilots try to avoid approaching heavily armed insurgent bands closely even when Soviet advisers are present.

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Saboteurs are active in the Air Force.



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Air Force saboteurs destroyed two MIG-17s at an airfield in Mazar-e Sharif in September.

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Air Force officers blew up 21 Afghan planes at Shindand Airbase in June 1985; nearly succeeded in carrying out a similar action at Bagram Airbase; and tried twice to sabotage the aircraft of General Abdul Fatah, the second in command of the Air Force.

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Defections also plague the Air Force. Air Force pilots and crews defected to Pakistan with two MI-25 helicopters in 1985, and pilots defected with an AN-26 transport plane in 1984, an SU-22 fighter in 1983 and an MI-8 helicopter in 1981.

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Reasons for Poor Performance

We believe that improved insurgent military performance, Soviet domination, sympathy for the insurgents, and rivalry between the Afghan ruling party's two factions largely explain the Air Force's unreliability. Afghan Air Force defectors say that Afghan pilots are reluctant to close in on insurgent bases because insurgents have more heavy machineguns and SA-7 antiaircraft missiles than they have had in the past. One pilot defector says that the insurgents also have learned to fire at the upper surfaces of helicopters, which are less heavily armored than the lower surfaces. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet domination of the Afghan Air Force has also caused widespread resentment among Afghan airmen. One defector estimates that only a third of the pilots are pro-Soviet. Soviet advisers must approve all Air Force operations, and the Soviets control operations unilaterally in the northern provinces, [redacted]. The advisers choose all bombing targets and brief Afghan pilots only an hour before bombing missions, giving only the takeoff time, target coordinates, and a sketchy description of the target. They never allow Afghan pilots to attack targets of opportunity. [redacted]

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We believe that sympathy for the insurgents contributes to the Air Force's unreliability. Many support personnel who do not face insurgents in combat probably sympathize with the guerrillas, and even Air Force pilots are generally apolitical, in our view. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet mechanics closely monitor Afghan mechanics and never allow them to work on Soviet aircraft. [redacted]

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Political infighting between the Khalqi and Parchami factions of the ruling party also promotes poor morale. [redacted] each faction blamed the other for the Shindand incident. Soviet advisers have also criticized the two factions for their lack of cooperation and periodic clashes. We believe these tensions are exacerbated by the imbalance between the Parchami-dominated Air Force high command and the rank-and-file, where Khalqis outnumber Parchamis by two to one. [redacted]

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Implications

The Afghan Air Force's unreliability impedes the Soviet war effort, in our view. The lack of reliable pilots largely explains, for example, why the number of Afghan aircraft has only increased by about 10 percent since 1979. Air Force defectors, moreover, say the Air Force never participates in combat operations involving Soviet troops or combined Soviet-Afghan Army operations because Soviet officials consider Afghan pilots unreliable and are afraid they might bomb Soviet troops. [redacted] the

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Afghan secret police must devote more agents to monitoring Air Force personnel because of increased sabotage and defections. [redacted]

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Despite these problems, Moscow apparently still hopes the Air Force can play an important role in the war over the longer term. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviets are replacing Afghan air losses relatively quickly; the aircraft destroyed at Shindand Airbase in June were replaced shortly after the incident. Because substantial improvements in Afghan Air Force performance are unlikely any time soon, however, we believe the Soviets will continue to bear the brunt of the air war. [redacted]

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**Afghan Air Force Order of Battle**

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Our analysis of the capabilities of the Afghan Air Force [redacted] study of the main Afghan airbases: Kabul, Bagram, Qandahar, Shindand, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat. Most helicopters are based at Kabul, but most fighter-bombers are based at Bagram--reflecting the relatively greater strategic importance of eastern Afghanistan. The Air Force is commanded by Major General Abdul Qadr, an engineer who has been a member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan since its inception 20 years ago. [redacted]

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**Helicopters**

MI-8	76
MI-25	20

**Fighter-bombers**

MIG-21	62
MIG-15/17	58
SU-7	20
SU-22	10
IL-28	14

**Transports**

AN-26	34
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**Trainers**

L-39	<u>19</u>
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Total	313
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