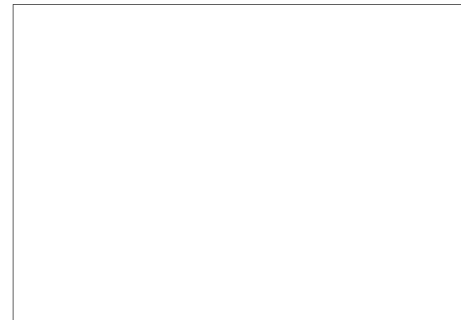


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# Afghanistan Situation Report



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18 March 1986

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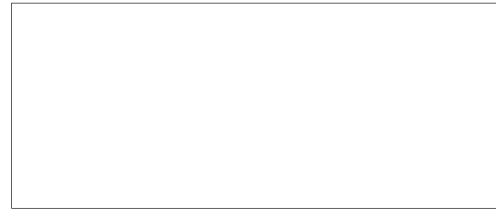
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**AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT**

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**CONTENTS**

**LATE-WINTER COMBAT CONTINUES**

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Fighting continued at an unusually intense pace for the winter in many areas of Afghanistan.

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**MORE SENIOR AFGHAN ARMY OFFICERS ARRESTED**

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Scores of Afghan Army officers, most of them from the Khalqi faction, have been arrested during the past few months on charges that include coup plotting and involvement with insurgent groups.

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**KABUL'S "RECONCILIATION WITH THE PEOPLE"**

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The Kabul regime is actively trying to elicit the cooperation of tribes in Zabol, Helmand, and Qandahar Provinces by offering money, political and other economic incentives, and promising reduced military activity.

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**AFGHAN MEDIA PROJECT LEAKED**

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Pakistani press reporting on the proposed Afghan media center will increase Islamabad's apprehensions about cooperating with Washington on cross-border humanitarian aid.

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**IN BRIEF**



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**PERSPECTIVE**

**THE WAR IN THE WEST**



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Combat activity was at a high level in western Afghanistan in 1985 as the Soviets aggressively attempted to dislodge the insurgents. They probably will continue their efforts in 1986, but do not have enough forces committed to the area to establish control over the cities, much less the countryside.



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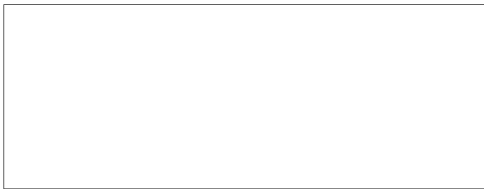
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**LATE-WINTER COMBAT CONTINUES** 

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Military activity continued at a comparatively high level last week. In western Afghanistan, Soviet units conducted sweep operations near Herat,

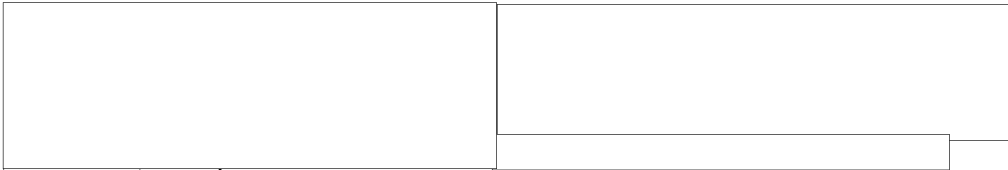


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US Embassy in Kabul have said supporting Soviet air strikes have caused considerable damage in the Herat area. The Embassy also reports continuing clashes in Qandahar and environs, where the Soviets intensified efforts last month to quell resistance activity.






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 an increase in helicopters at Gardeyz, prior to a combat operation in Paktia Province last week.  the Embassy claims the Soviets wound up an unsuccessful operation in Lowgar Province last week. Although there were at least two rocket attacks on the capital and a military outpost southwest of the city was hit by insurgents, Kabul was relatively calm. 

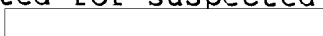
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**MORE SENIOR AFGHAN ARMY OFFICERS ARRESTED** 

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In late January 1986, 45 senior Afghan officers in the Ministry of Defense were arrested for suspected involvement with insurgent groups, 

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 Most of those detained, including eight general officers, were members of the Khalqi (Masses) faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). 

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**Comment:** Scores of Afghan Army officers and government officials have been arrested in recent months on charges of coup plotting, working for foreign intelligence, and collaborating with the

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[REDACTED]

Jamiat-i-Islami and Hizbi Islami (Gulbiddin) insurgent organizations. The scale of the arrests and the Khalqi affiliation of many of the detainees suggest that a purge is under way. It probably was instigated by Najibullah, former head of the Afghan intelligence service, who has a reputation for anti-Khalqi views. He is in a better position to oversee such an action since being named Central Committee Secretary for the Ministries of State Security, Interior, and Defense last November. In any event, the loss of experienced senior officers is something the Army can ill afford and will fuel factional infighting in the PDPA and the military. [REDACTED]

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**KABUL'S "RECONCILIATION WITH THE PEOPLE"** [REDACTED]

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The Kabul regime is seeking to secure the cooperation or neutrality of tribes in Helmand, Qandahar, and Zabol Provinces, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] It has offered villagers generous financial and technical assistance to return to their farms and promised the release of some local insurgents. The regime pledged to prevent bombardment of villages, to provide villagers a voice in the government, and not to implement land reform or restrict private enterprise. In return, the villagers were asked to reopen schools, accept "mild taxation", provide conscripts, reorganize local ruling bodies, and help maintain security. Regime officials argued that a prolonged conflict benefits only external powers and claimed that the Soviets would withdraw within six months if peace were maintained. [REDACTED]

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Since the initial approaches six weeks ago, some villagers have received aid, and military actions against villages have decreased, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Two insurgent commanders have been freed, while several well-known tribesmen have been appointed as non-party representatives to the Revolutionary Council. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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**Comment:** The regime's political campaign in the south is part of its effort to broaden the social base of the revolution and acquire the legitimacy it needs to stay in power. Kabul is willing to curb military actions and provide financial and political inducements, so long as it believes its campaign is working. Steady progress in the campaign would be a boon for Kabul's counterinsurgency effort and difficult for the insurgents to match.



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**AFGHAN MEDIA PROJECT LEAKED**



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A recent newspaper report on the proposed Afghan media center is likely to reinforce Islamabad's sensitivities about the risks of public cooperation with Washington in humanitarian assistance programs. The Muslim, a Rawalpindi daily that has been critical of Islamabad's Afghan policy, reported that the US Ambassador in Islamabad and the Minister of Information had recently met to discuss collaboration in the USIS effort, which it described as "designed to project to the ordinary American about the plight of the refugees." The Soviet news agency TASS has picked up the story.



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**Comment:** Islamabad will be watching domestic and Soviet reaction to the leak. The incident almost certainly will further delay a Pakistani decision on cross-border humanitarian aid.



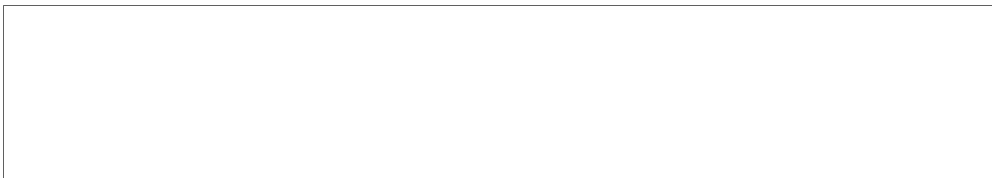
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**IN BRIEF**

-- In a recent press interview--his first in nearly a year--former Afghan King Zahir Shah said he remains devoted to the Afghan cause, but has no plans to return to Afghanistan. The king, now in his seventies, has been living in exile in Rome since the monarchy was toppled in 1973.



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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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-- Afghan resistance leader Abdul Haq met with British Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in London last week, according to press reports. The Soviet news agency TASS sharply criticized the meeting, and authorities in Kabul delivered a protest note to the British Embassy. [Redacted]

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-- The Italian Communist Party Youth Organization has mounted a petition drive which calls on Moscow to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Its campaign is slated to last two months, and the youth organization hopes to obtain 300,000 signatures on a petition it plans to deliver to the Soviet Embassy in Rome. The gesture probably is an attempt by the group to demonstrate that its stand on international issues can differ from Moscow's. [Redacted]

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-- Fuel deliveries from the Soviet Union have increased since late February 1986, [Redacted]

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[Redacted]. In addition, a much smaller percentage of the 400 to 500 fuel truckloads arriving weekly are being rejected now because of poor fuel quality than in earlier months. Increased deliveries and improved fuel quality will help ease the severe shortages of electricity that have plagued Kabul recently. [Redacted]

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-- Last week, the 42nd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission adopted its annual resolution on self-determination in Afghanistan, which calls for the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops. Introduced by Pakistan, the resolution was cosponsored by 27 Third World and Islamic countries. The vote of 31 in favor, 6 against, and 5 absentions was almost the same as last year's. [Redacted]

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-- An Afghan regime representative went to Libya last week to attend a conference on "the aggression of imperialism." Despite lukewarm relations with Tripoli, Kabul probably was eager to participate in an anti-US forum. For its


[Redacted]

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part, Libya most likely regarded the invitation to the Afghan regime as a way to curry favor with the Soviets without jeopardizing relations with other Arab states. 

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**PERSPECTIVE**

**THE WAR IN THE WEST**



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Since early 1985, the Soviets have made concerted efforts to bring western Afghanistan under control. They have improved the structure and capabilities of forces in Herat and Farah Provinces, including introduction of a new Special Purpose Forces (Spetsnaz) battalion--the first elite unit in the region. Even with these improvements, Soviet and Afghan regime forces probably are insufficient to reestablish control over Herat city or to shut down resistance supply lines, much less to dominate the countryside.



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**The Importance of the Area**

Western Afghanistan is important to the USSR because of its proximity to Iran as well as for its logistical significance to the Soviet war effort in Afghanistan:

- Herat is Afghanistan's third largest city, with a population of about 1.1 million. Without control of Herat, the government cannot collect revenues, conscript armed forces, or maintain transportation networks in about one-fourth of the country.
- Over the long run, the Soviets could not capitalize on the presence of their military forces along Iran's eastern border without a more extensive infrastructure and a significantly reduced insurgent threat to military facilities in western Afghanistan.
- Supplies from the USSR to the western and southern portions of the country pass through Herat and Shindand, while a fuel pipeline parallels the road to Shindand.



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**Force Improvements in Western Afghanistan**

Until early 1985, the Soviets tried to control the western region with one understrength motorized rifle division, supported by three squadrons of aircraft--one



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helicopter and two fighter. With so few forces, the Soviets could not easily conduct offensive operations or even provide adequate security for their own military facilities, Herat city, or important roads.

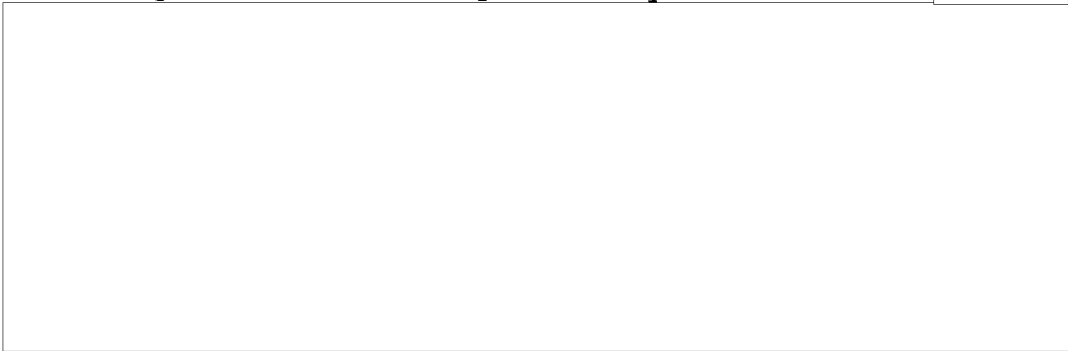


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The deployment to Herat in March 1985 of a new motorized rifle regiment was an early indicator of Soviet plans to intensify activity in the west.



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In addition, early this year the Soviets stationed a new Spetsnaz battalion north of Farah--the first such unit committed to the western region. They probably will deploy a separate battalion of 152-mm self-propelled field guns to Shindand, and there are indications that as many as two battalions of towed 240-mm mortars will also be located there.

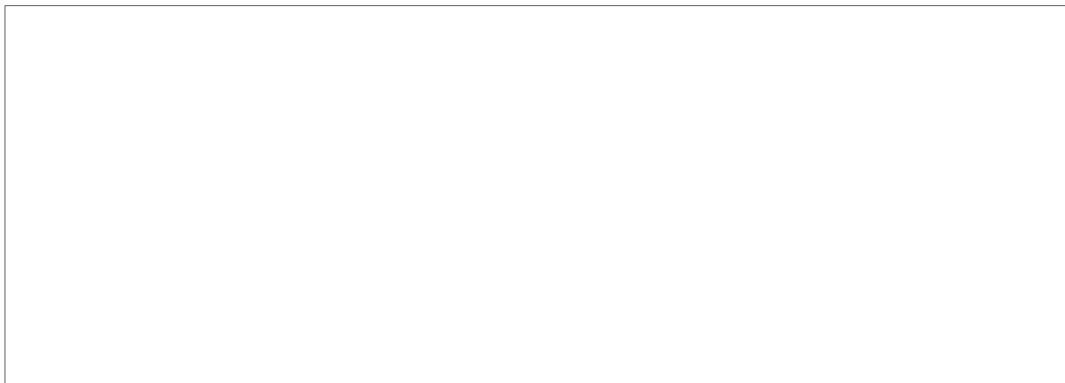


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A year-long upgrading of the airfield at Shindand is nearing completion. Construction includes a new aircraft dispersal area that is large enough to accommodate a fighter squadron, new parking aprons, and taxiways. These improvements will eliminate the vulnerability of wing-to-wing parking and facilitate more extensive air operations.



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**The Insurgency in the West**

In Herat Province, Jamiat-i-Islami commander Ismail Khan is the preeminent insurgent leader. His influence extends into Farah, Ghowr, and Badghis Provinces, and he directly controls as many as 2,000 of the estimated total of 7,000 to 11,000 insurgents in northwestern Afghanistan. Some Western observers believe that the predominance of ethnic Tajiks and widespread influence of a Sufi brotherhood have provided a social bond among western Afghans not apparent elsewhere in the northern tier and have made Ismail's organizational tasks easier.



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The insurgents' ability to sustain fighting in the west continues to be constrained by shortages of supplies. The region is remote from Pakistan, and caravans must transit extremely difficult terrain. Few supplies come from Iran; Iran has even occasionally hampered deliveries from Pakistan.



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**Combat Operations Since 1985.**



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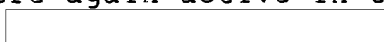
**Early July 1985.** Insurgent forces already established in Herat city launched an offensive that expanded their control to about two-thirds of the urban area, according to the US Embassy in Kabul. With Afghan Army forces, supported by Soviet air and artillery strikes, unable to repulse the guerrillas, Soviet forces from both Shindand and Herat moved in.



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But the offensive only temporarily quieted the city; insurgent groups were again active in the city before the end of August.



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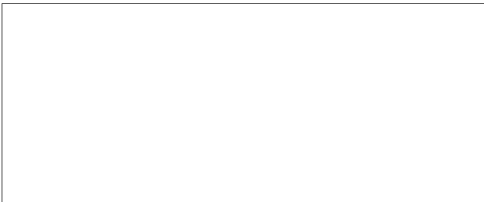


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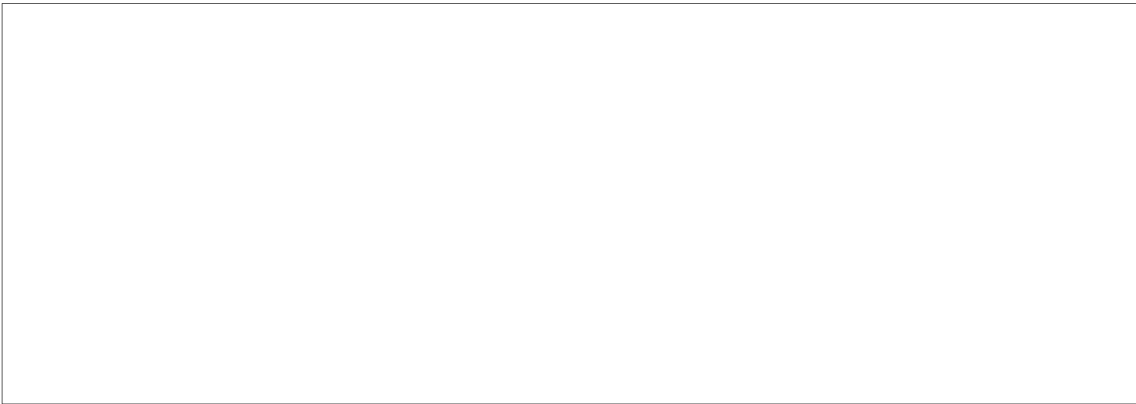


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What Next?



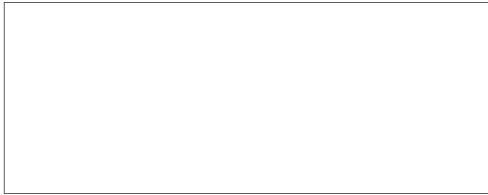
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Even with the recent buildup, Soviet and Afghan forces are insufficient to defeat the insurgents conclusively, to sever resistance supply routes, or to reestablish control over Herat city. Without major force additions, Moscow at best is likely to keep the




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insurgents off balance and limit the damage along its own  
lines of communications during the coming year. 

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