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PROGRAM Afghanistan: Caught in the Struggle STATION WHMM-TV

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SUBJECT Full Text

ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE: When there is war, children suffer. This child is one of hundreds of Afghan children maimed by booby-trapped mines the Soviets have scattered by the thousands in the fields of Afghanistan. This child, like most Afghan wounded, endures the indescribable pain without tears.

Refugee camps, the fallout of any armed conflict, and a common sight in the global community since World War II. Almost four million Afghan women, old people and children, the largest refugee population in the world, wait, wait for food and medicine, wait for shelter, wait for firewood, wait for their men to return from the fighting, wait for the country to be free so they can go home.

The Afghans need not suffer this way, and for the children of Afghanistan there would be an alternative. If the resistance ceased and they accepted communist control, they would have the privilege of being on the safe side of Russian airpower.

Here is Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, Iran, Pakistan, and India. Afghanistan is mostly mountains, the Western Himalayas. These mountains are the only barrier between Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf. A few key passes -- the legendary Khyber Pass is one of them -- are the only way to get from here to here. And this desert is an open highway to Iran and the Persian Gulf.

I'm Arnaud de Borchgrave. For the last 35 years I have worked as a foreign correspondent, reporting from over 90 countries. For 4000 years, from prehistoric times down to the last century, no would-be conqueror who held the mountains of Afghanistan and wanted to move south has been stopped on the

plains of Pakistan and India, as flat as Kansas. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the Mogul emperors, they all came through the Afghan mountain range.

Now the Soviets are in Afghanistan. Why? Moscow says that the Soviet Army was invited in to help a country that was being attacked by American, Chinese, and other agents of imperialism. Few outside the Soviet Bloc accept that explanation.

Some analysts say that Soviet motives are defensive, that Moscow is afraid of instability and trouble on its southern borders. Other analysts believe that Soviet moves are part of an overall strategy to gain control of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, threaten the oil fields and the oil routes, the lifeline of Western Europe and Japan.

If this theory is correct, then control of the Afghan mountains is important to more than the Afghan people. Only one thing is stopping the Soviets from controlling those mountains, the Afghan resistance, the Afghan Mujahadeen.

December 27th, 1979. The Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan. For almost two years before the invasion, the Afghans resisted the Soviet-assisted communist regime of Hafizullah Amin. When the Afghan resistance came close to overthrowing Amin, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, killing Amin and announcing Babrak Karmal as the new president.

Even with an invasion force of 85,000, the Soviets still met fierce resistance, often from Afghans armed only with homemade weapons.

In a broadcast taped and transmitted from the Soviet Union, Babrak Karmal welcomed the limited military contingent of the friendly Soviet Union. Within 48 hours, Karmal, an Afghan who had been Amin's chief rival, was flown to Afghanistan by the Russians and installed in the presidential palace under Russian guard.

MAN: When we came back to school, the major change that came, the principal was communist principal and he was protected by the two Russian soldiers. And another change was that they dropped the subject which was the translating of Koran and other subject about political science, which they just teach communism.

WOMAN: They didn't want us to demonstrate and they shot some of the girls that were in the girls school, and they shot on us and there was some girls was killed. And we finally broke the gate and we run out the gate. And there was some tanks of Russians and soldiers. And we continued our demonstration, and they arrested us.

DE BORCHGRAVE: As the fighting intensified, the population began to move. They walked to Iran and south to Pakistan, refugees.

MAN: The exodus of Afghans from Afghanistan is unparalleled in contemporary history. Close to four million Afghans have sought exile in bordering countries, mainly in Pakistan, 25 percent of Afghanistan's population. One must realize how terrible conditions must be in Afghanistan, how much it takes to move that many people into something which is, in a loose way, hopeless.

DE BORCHGRAVE: The resistance, although fragmented, has had tactical successes against the Soviets. In May of 1982, the freedom fighters won a major victory against the Soviets in the Panshir Valley, an area that has eluded Soviet control since the invasion. Some analysts call it the first major defeat of the Soviets on the battlefield since World War II.

The Russian dead are almost always removed by the Soviets when they withdraw. The dead of the Afghan Army, fighting with the Soviets, are often left behind. But the price of resisting the Soviets is high. In an effort to crush the resistance, the Soviets have zeroed in on food. Crops and irrigation systems have been destroyed. Hunger varies from one place to another, depending on how much a village is suspected of supporting the Mujahadeen, the resistance fighters.

MAN: The Soviets were forced, have now been forced to do much of the fighting themselves. They do this not by occupying territory, but rather by adopting a strategy of preventing the Afghan guerrillas from using an area to fight the Soviets. They do this by making sure there are no people in this area to support the guerrillas and no food to feed them. So they have massive attacks on the Afghan people and their agriculture.

DE BORCHGRAVE: Pilots, during air attacks near Kandahar, seem to fire indiscriminately at villages. The Mujahadeen sit nearby. They don't fire for fear of giving their position away.

A family of 12 lived in this house. They were all killed. Seventeen people died in this air raid.

MAN: In the summer of 1982, when I was in the Logar (?) province, south of Kabul, gunship helicopters bombed villages every day in the province. The worst off were the children. They were so nervous and frightened. A couple of times they thought I was a Russian trying to kill them with my camera, and ran away crying.

On the 3rd of December, 1982, the Russian forces from

Bardak (?) attacked the village. People and innocent children were dragged out of their homes and murdered. All together, ten children.

In this area, there were no doctors. And many times farmers came running with their sick children and found out, to their desperation, that I was only a journalist.

DE BORCHGRAVE: The price paid by the refugees has escalated, too. Little protection from extreme temperatures, summer heat of over 120 degrees and subfreezing winter temperatures; shortages of food, water and medical care, and problems with hygiene and sewage, a part of everyday life.

As severe as the conditions have become on the refugees, life inside Afghanistan has become a tightrope walk between the resistance and the secret police. Afghans suspected of spying for the Russians are tried by the freedom fighters. Even young children are questioned.

These 12-year-old boys are suspected spies. The fear in their faces tells of their plight if they cannot prove their innocence. But they had been confused with two other boys and were released.

This man also was arrested by the freedom fighters as a suspected spy for the Russians. Substantial evidence proved his guilt and he was shot as a traitor a few minutes after this film was taken.

During a raid, the freedom fighters captured files about Afghans who had been outstanding students under their Russian masters. They are targets for later punishment.

The Russian presence pits Afghan against Afghan. The balancing act is complex. There is also a tremendous price to pay when one decides to oppose the Russians. Helping the resistance brings arrest, imprisonment, torture, and execution. An estimated 25,000 executions, much of the educated leadership, and thousands imprisoned.

In spite of that price, more half of the Afghan Army has deserted. Many have joined the resistance. Young boys and older men are now subject to forced induction to fill the dwindling ranks of the Afghan Army. Russian troops are forced to pick up the slack.

How much longer will the Afghans be able to resist the Soviets? Some say the Soviet gamble is that the resistance, though militarily more effective, will eventually be cut off from support and supplies, and forgotten, and Soviet strategic goals realized.

MAN: Out of seven Soviet divisions now in Afghanistan, only one is involved in fighting the Afghan resistance. The other six, based in almost uninhabited southwestern desert, are being trained for a rapid dash to the Persian Gulf or any part of Iran. In addition to Afghanistan, the Soviets have overt military installation in Iraq, Syria, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Libya, a covert infrastructure in Iran, Chad, southern Sudan, North Yemen.

The Soviets have four major goals in this area: warm-water ports and naval bases, the oilfields, Israel's military infrastructure, and the Suez Canal.

In Afghanistan, the Russians have already built six permanent air bases for the year around, all their operations. From there they can provide fire bomber air cover all across Iran into Persian Gulf.

Afghanistan is also serving them as a testing ground for new aircraft and prototypes of various new weapons systems and military concepts. Soviet reports of training exercise held near Farah in September 1981 boasted that in less than two weeks the Farah base forces entering part of Iran drove more than 800 miles across the eastern desert. The Strait of Hormuz is little more than half that distance, less than 500 miles from that division's permanent base.

As long as the Soviets retain access to the military infrastructure they have created in Afghanistan and can control it, their offers to withdraw the Soviet Army will be strategicaly meaningless, merely cosmetic gestures for international consumption.

DE BORCHGRAVE: The Afghan Communists call themselves the PDP, the People's Democratic Party. But they were not elected. The PDP Communist Party, fashioned after the Soviet Communist Party, had fewer than 5000 members out of a population of 16 million at the time of the Russian invasion. Through a bloody coup, they took power in 1978 with the backing of Afghan Air Force personnel trained by the Russians.

MAN: In 1964 I was a medical officer who got sent to Russia for advanced training. Personally, I saw how they approached a few officers and select for secret indoctrination. Among those was officers that did the coup of 1978.

NARRATOR: The Afghan regime is totally dependent on Soviet military backing to keep them in power. The Russians control the Afghan Army and civil administration. The Russians also run the schools and Afghan ministries.

Afghanistan was the first independent neutral country

invaded by the Soviets since World War II. But with the passage of time, the story of the Russians in Afghanistan faded from media reports, partly because reporters are barred, unlike the freedom they enjoyed to report in Vietnam, or more recently in El Salvador and Lebanon, except for the view invited by the regime. Reporting in Afghanistan can be hazardous.

MAN: The worst fear, I think, is the helicopters. When you see an MI-24 coming in at you, it's a terrifying experience.

One day I was in a vilage in Pateer (?) province. We were waiting, and four Soviet MI-24s, so-called flying tanks, came into the valley on what are presumed to have been a reconnaissance mission. The helicopters were circling the valley, coming closer and closer to us each time. I was filming them throughout. I had no expectation of the helicopters attacking the village. When they did, I was taken totally by surprise.

As it was, eight helicopters took part in the attack and rocketed the village for 20 minutes. Throughout the attack, there were some Mujahadeen outside returning fire with their small weapons.

After the Soviets withdrew, after that 20 minutes of rocketing, we went outside. The villagers were evacuating the village, trying to get out in case the gunships returned. There was incredible destruction. All the villagers' livestock was tied up outside and was either dead or dying. We found out that one woman and her child had been killed during the attack. And in the attack that had occurred down the road, I saw four men being carted away, dead.

DE BORCHGRAVE: By 1980, chemical warfare reports were coming from Afghanistan on an increasingly frequent basis.

MAN: In June 1980, I was with a group of Mujahadeen near the village of Tarba (?). In the morning we were woke up by helicopters. They were flying around, and this was in the seventh day of constant helicopter attacks around the villages. We ran out of the village when the helicopters came. We had to leave one man behind. He was wounded and we couldn't carry him out.

The Falquin (?) helicopters dropped a couple of what we thought at the moment were bombs. The only thing we saw was a kind of an explosion and a yellow cloud. Then the second wave of helicopters came in and bombed the village with rockets. Most of them were high-explosive and burning material. So everything in the village was bombed.

Then the Afghans told me that the first wave was a gas

attack. Well, at that moment I didn't believe it because it was rather unbelievable that they were doing it. And a lot of Afghans were claiming it before, and I never saw any evidence of it.

We came in the village a couple of hours later and we found the man we left behind dead. His face was swollen. They took him out and brought him to another place. I saw the man back the next morning, and then the face was completely swollen, disintegrated, like if he had been dead for three or four weeks. It was really strange. And everybody who was in the village, had been into it, was having blisters on his hands and his face. The faces were swollen.

MAN: It seems that a wide variety of agents are being used, from the old classic, if you will, nerve agents to a number of agents that we don't fully understand as yet. Mycotoxins, which have bee found in Southeast Asia, apparently are also being used in Afghanistan. That's a new kind of agent, rather hideous, and extremely lethal. Riot-control agents are apparently also being used. And there are some agents that have been reported and which have symptoms that are not fully understood, which cause sudden onset of death without any prior symptoms.

DE BORCHGRAVE: Plastic mines camouflaged to look like stones or leaves. Soviet helicopters scatter them by the thousands in the fields and on mountain paths. They're designed to maim, not kill. And these tiny booby traps have been responsible for maiming hundreds of men, women and children.

The use of camouflaged mines in civilian areas was outlawed by an international convention signed by the Soviet Union in April 1981. At the time of the signing, Russian helicopters were dropping the mines. They are still dropping them.

For those that oppose the Soviets, there is little medical care. The International Red Cross is not allowed to work in Afghanistan. Since the invasion, a handful of French doctors make secret trips into Afghanistan and provide medical care to the people.

This hospital was marked with a cross, but the Soviets still strafed it.

It is estimated that half a million Afghan civilians have died, and no one knows how many have been wounded. But still the Afghans resist.

MAN: We're trying to move through the city at the moment as quietly as possible. The game is to reach the customs

house undetected and bring considerable firepower to bear on it, in the hope that people inside will surrender quickly. Everybody is keeping as quiet as possible as we go through those areas of the city that contain places like the jail and the police station.

They've taken [unintelligible] to try and hit the customs house with a recoilless rifle. We've just heard a loudspeaker announcing what sounded like an Afghan Army unit. And quite a fierce fire fight at the moment preventing us from moving off this route.

We've just been told that some of the Mujahadeen of the Nationalist Army Front have succeeded in getting inside the customs house. They called on the army to surrender. But when they went to take control, one of their commanders was killed by an army grenade. A stream of fire hit the building and set it ablaze.

The body of the rebel commander was carried away. Twenty Afghan soldiers were killed, but no weapons or ammunition were taken. Yet the guerrillas had proved a point. A column of flame signaled their defiance in the center of Russian-held territory.

DE BORCHGRAVE: I was one of the American correspondents expelled from Afghanistan three weeks after the invasion. And as I went to get my exit visa at the Interior Ministry, the man sitting behind the desk noticed in my U.S. passport I had been born in Belgium. And lowering his voice, he asked me in French whether I spoke French. And when I told him I did, he pointed at some Russian advisers at the end of the room and said, "They have not read their history books. Not one of them will leave this country alive."

Conflicts like Afghanistan are always described in terms of the superpowers, as if the United States and the Soviet Union were the same. It's called the mirror-image syndrome. But they are not the same. The values and objectives of the Soviet leaders are not compatible with personal or national freedom. Lenin said that the communists have a right and a duty to extend the communist system to all countries of the world. He also said that the purpose of terror is to terrorize. In the communist system, the individual is of no importance and has no rights other than to serve the state.

The principles of Lenin are not obsolete. And since World War II, scenes like this, of Soviet troops in Prague, have been common. In East Berlin in 1953, Hungary '56, Czechoslovakia '68, and in Afghanistan in 1979. There have been these repeated examples of the Soviet military enforcing the new communist

imperialism, now known as the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Yet the Soviets escape the full fury of worldwide condemnation. The issue is not Afghanistan. The issue is not Middle Eastern oil. The issue is freedom.

At the United Nations, U.S. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick said that Afghanistan can only be conquered by destroying the Afghan people. The world must not allow this to happen, she added. Because if Afghanistan is conquered, no independent nation will be safe.

Is she right or is she mistaken? Perhaps it it something we ought to start thinking about.