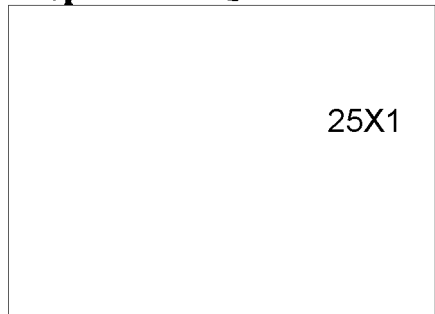


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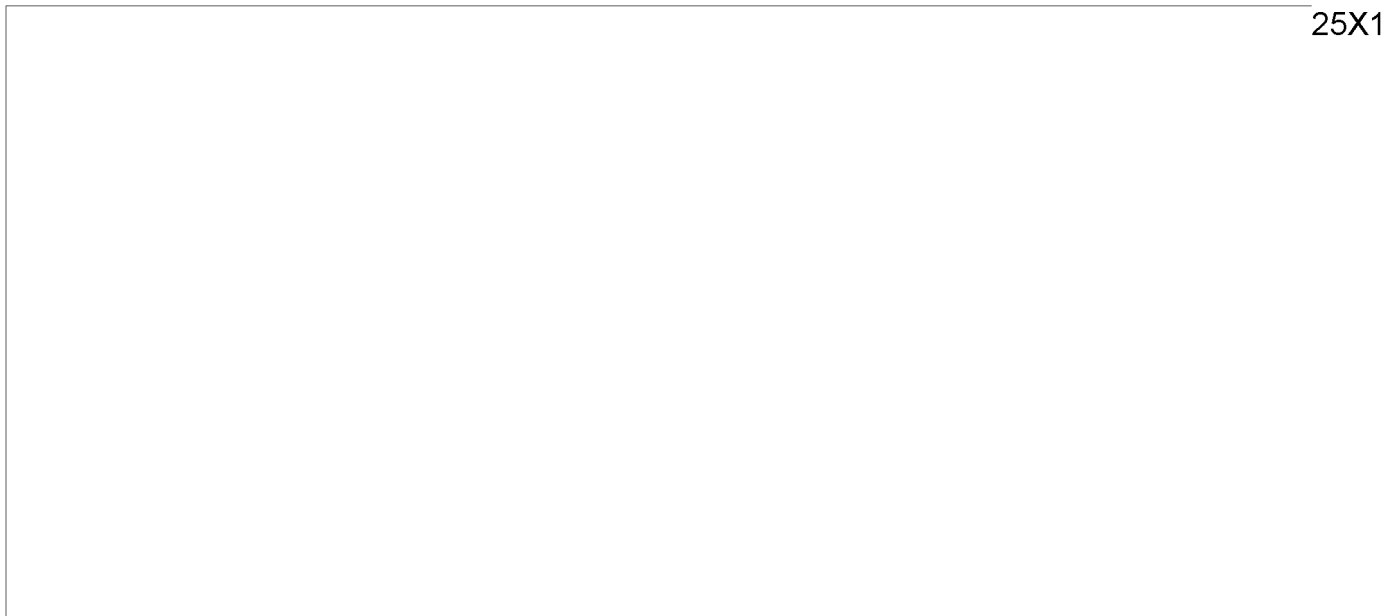


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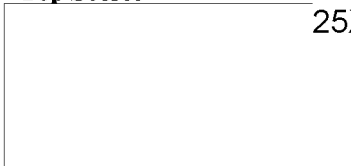
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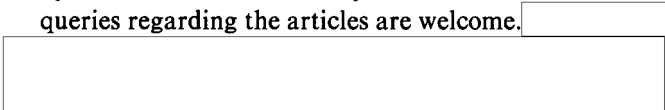
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May 1988

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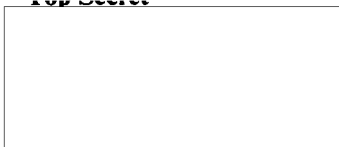
Contents

Articles	Page
	25X1
	25X1



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The Iranian Factor in Moscow's Withdrawal From Afghanistan



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Over the past several months Moscow has expressed some concern about Iran's meddling in Afghanistan after the Soviet troop withdrawal.

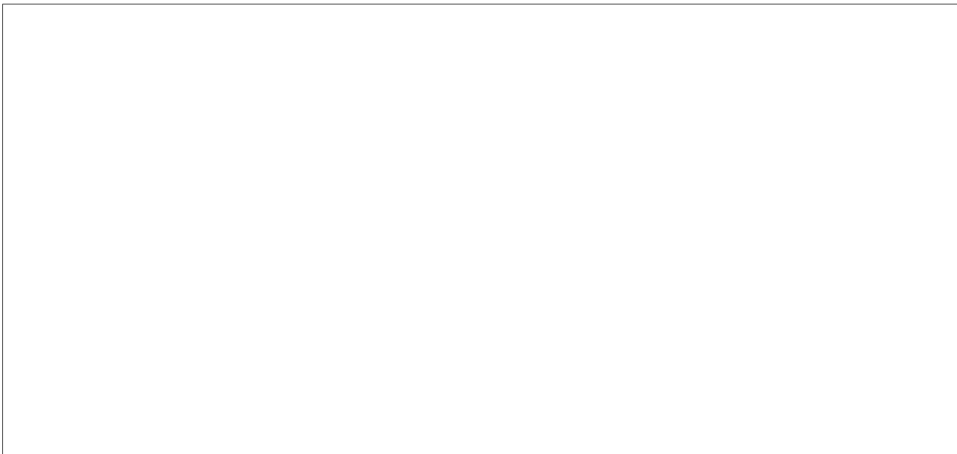
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they have been reluctant to engage the Iranians in serious discussions. In the wake of the Geneva accords, the Soviets probably will continue avoiding talks with Iran, convinced that these would not resolve conflicting interests between them but risk a negative spillover to other areas of their bilateral relationship.

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**The Iranian Factor
in Moscow's Withdrawal
From Afghanistan**



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Moscow continues to be concerned about longstand-
ing Iranian designs on Afghanistan and Tehran's
strong opposition to the Geneva accords and is search-
ing for ways to minimize Iranian meddling after the
withdrawal of Soviet forces. The Soviets made some
efforts to win Tehran's support for the Afghan settle-
ment and the postwithdrawal Afghan regime but did
not push hard, probably convinced that participation
by an intransigent Iran could scuttle the agreement.



Aware that the conflict of their respective interests in
Afghanistan is unlikely to be resolved in the near
future, the Soviets are for now probably less interest-
ed in serious discussions with the Iranians. We think
Moscow will continue to temporize, while publicly
seeking assurances from Tehran that it will not
meddle in Afghanistan after the Soviet troop with-
drawal, hoping to avoid a confrontation that could
damage other areas of its bilateral relationship with
Iran.



Soviet Concern Over Iranian Involvement

A recurrent theme in Soviet statements about Tehran
as a factor in the Afghan settlement has been the
concern that Iran would decline to abide by the
Geneva accords and cause mischief in Afghanistan
after the Soviet troop withdrawal. Soviet press com-
mentaries have called on the Iranians to provide a
"positive contribution" to the Afghan peace process.
In Gorbachev's 8 February statement announcing
Moscow's plan to withdraw from Afghanistan, the
General Secretary urged Iran not to stand in the way
of a political settlement but did not make Iranian
support for a settlement a precondition for Soviet
signature.

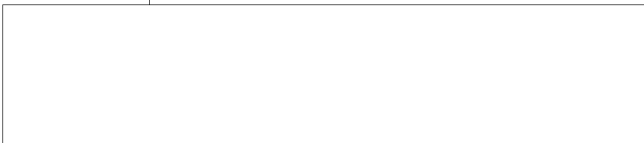


Publicly, Iran has remained intractable. Tehran has
consistently objected to the Geneva negotiations and
called for the inclusion of pro-Iranian mujahedin in
any future Afghan government. Iran viewed the talks
as a ploy by Moscow to delay withdrawal and feared
Pakistan would use the negotiations to sell out the

resistance.



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The 2-3 million Shias living in the poor and remote
mountain region of Hazarehjat in central Afghanistan
have been radicalized by the Afghan war and the rise
of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The Shias generally
have been isolated from Afghan society and alienated
from both the pro-Soviet Kabul regime and the
Peshawar-based resistance parties, which are Sunni
dominated. Tehran has used Afghan Shia groups not
only to further both Iranian influence in Afghanistan
and Iran's image as sponsor of the "Islamic struggle,"
but also as a means for disseminating Iranian propa-
ganda and controlling the Afghan refugee community
within Iran. Iran has 21 camps where Afghan fighters
receive military training. Iranian clergy are involved
throughout the training program, teaching both the
value of martyrdom and techniques for spreading the
Khomeini revolution throughout Afghanistan.

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Iran's control over its Shia clients, however, is not
likely to help Tehran extend its influence elsewhere in
Sunni-dominated Afghanistan. Moreover, Iran proba-
bly would not significantly increase its military sup-
port to the Afghan resistance while the war with Iraq
continues and Afghan Sunni leaders remain deeply
suspicious of Iranian motives.

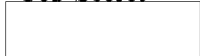


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Moscow's concerns about Iranian activities in Af-
ghanistan may be an outgrowth of Soviet sensitivities
to the issue of Muslim fundamentalism in the larger
context with its potential repercussion in the USSR's
volatile ethnic situation. Nevertheless, although they
may have an exaggerated perception of Iran's ability
to influence events in Afghanistan, Soviet officials
appear genuinely concerned that Iran may be able to

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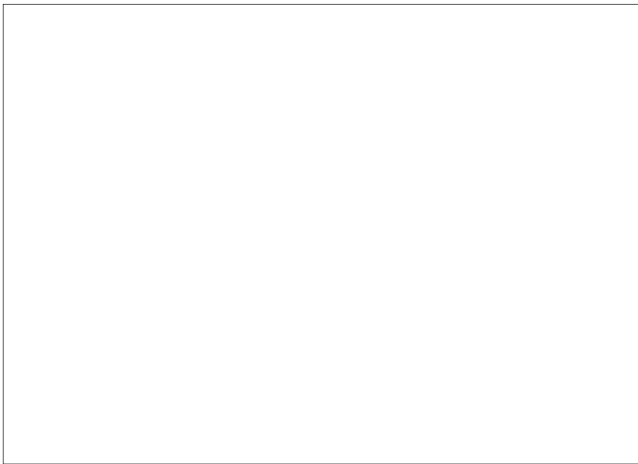
increase its long-term influence in Afghanistan through its ties to pro-Iranian mujahedin—who are largely from Afghanistan’s Shia minority and play only a minor role in the resistance. 


Publicly, the Soviets have distanced themselves from bilateral negotiations with Tehran, claiming that Iranian views on the Geneva agreement were a matter to be addressed by UN Special Representative Cordovez and that Cordovez himself would have to negotiate Iran’s specific role in observing the agreements. On the other hand, they have sought to involve Tehran in the multilateral UN talks and gain its implied endorsement of the results, asserting, for example, that Tehran consistently had been engaged as an observer in the UN-sponsored proximity talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan in Geneva and that UN Special Representative Cordovez regularly informed Tehran about the negotiations. The Soviet Ambassador to Tehran in a January press conference warned that, if Iran were to abstain from participating in the Afghan talks, the emerging situation would not be “to the benefit of the Islamic Republic.” 


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According to the US Embassy in Damascus, an Iraqi source said that in January the Soviets had asked Syria to intercede with Tehran to help assure an orderly Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Iran at that time responded that it would not cooperate and would make the Soviet withdrawal as difficult and as bloody as possible. It is unlikely, however, that Tehran will carry out its threats. The Iranians probably reacted more with an eye to the Iran-Iraq war and were trying to exploit Moscow’s defensiveness about Iraq’s launching of extended-range Soviet-made missiles against Iranian cities. 

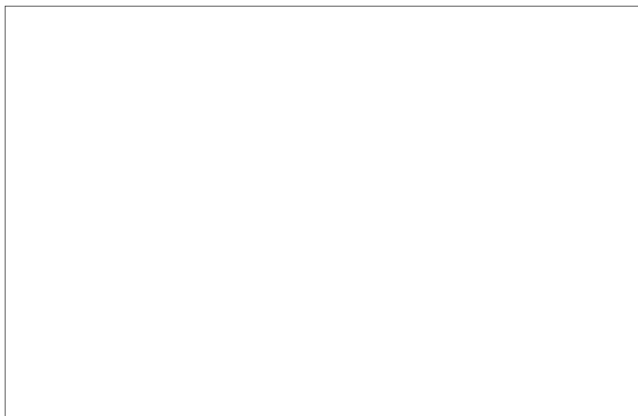
Linking Afghanistan to Other Bilateral Issues
Moscow undoubtedly would like to avoid having its differences with Tehran over Afghanistan undo the progress made since last summer in Soviet-Iranian bilateral ties. Over the past year, Moscow has shown tactical agility in maneuvering toward improved relations with Tehran in spite of growing Arab unhappiness over this policy. The Soviets undoubtedly hope that working out a modus vivendi with Tehran on Afghanistan could lead to a significant improvement in the overall bilateral relationship. In view of earlier Iranian threats to complicate the Soviet withdrawal, Moscow was probably encouraged by developments such as Majles speaker Rafsanjani’s public statement in early February that, if Soviet forces honor their word to withdraw from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic will have no other problem with the Soviet Union. 


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Soviet Tactics Toward Iran



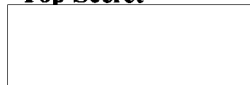
 Moscow may have promised support to Iran on the Iran-Iraq war by continuing to delay as long as possible a UN vote on an arms embargo resolution against Tehran in return for Iranian restraint in Afghanistan. A Dutch Foreign Minister told a US diplomat that, according

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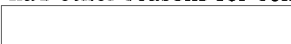
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to the Dutch Embassy in Tehran, the Soviets were prepared to hold up a follow-on to UN Resolution 598 if Iran helped the Soviets "depart honorably" from Afghanistan. 



Iran, nevertheless, probably believes it has gained increased leverage with the USSR because of Moscow's concern that Iran might attempt to sabotage the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Tehran probably is using the implied threat of interfering with the Soviet withdrawal to pressure Moscow to continue to stall passage of a UN arms embargo and to weigh in with Baghdad to end the war of the cities. Soviet statements that the war of the cities and Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Kurdish tribesmen make this an inauspicious time to pass an embargo almost certainly have encouraged Tehran to believe this tactic is working. Iran probably discounts the fact that Moscow may have had other reasons for continuing its delaying tactics. 

Outlook


Although Moscow has achieved a Geneva settlement on Afghanistan without Iranian participation, it almost certainly still hopes to minimize meddling by

Tehran after Soviet troops leave. The Soviets probably are aware that Afghanistan will continue to cloud the bilateral relationship, and they will seek a formula for dealing with the problem that minimizes damage to their broader objectives in Iran. 

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Moscow probably is aware of its limited options and is likely to delay taking any action to prevent Iranian interference until the denouement of the Afghan internal situation in the wake of the withdrawal of Soviet forces. If the mujahedin take over the government, the Soviets will have little leverage over what Iran does in Afghanistan, but they probably believe that Iran also will not have the ability to impose its will among the dominant Sunni rebel groups. Any action Moscow might decide to take to convince Iran to cease interfering in Afghanistan—such as increasing Soviet military aid to Iraq or augmenting Soviet troops along the Soviet-Iranian border—is likely to have a minimal impact on the overall Afghan domestic situation while negatively affecting the long-term bilateral relationship with Tehran. If, however, the Najibullah regime in Kabul survives the Soviet withdrawal—in our view, a less likely scenario—Moscow will be better positioned to counter Iranian mischief. Nonetheless, Soviet options—including continuation of military aid to the pro-Soviet Afghan Government, public calls for Iran to desist from meddling, and threats to hold back on political and economic issues important to Iran—would be few and potentially harmful to broader Soviet interests in Iran. 

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