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# How the Soviet Army Crushed Afghanistan

*But rebels may find ways to fight back*



*When you are wounded and  
left on Afghanistan's plains,  
And the women come out  
to cut up what remains,  
Just roll to your rifle and blow out  
your brains  
And go to your God like a soldier.*

That was Rudyard Kipling's tribute to Afghanistan, a barren moonscape of a land at the "crossroads of the world," and to its proud and savage people. Conquered by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. and by Genghis Khan in the 13th century A.D., Afghanistan in the Victorian era served as a buffer between Imperial Russia and the British raj. The Afghans accepted it all, but they exacted a bloody price. For generations, the Hindus of India prayed for deliverance from "the venom of the cobra, the teeth of the tiger and the vengeance of the Afghan."

Today the target of the Afghans' anger is the Soviet force of 50,000 troops who have invaded and seized control of their land. "*Shoravi Padar Lanath!*" cried beggars and shopkeepers alike in the streets of Kabul, Afghanistan's shabby, snow-covered capital. The curse ("God-damn the Russians!") replaced morning pleasantries in the city's ancient bazaar. "Afghanistan is no more," lamented a bootblack in the shopping district of Share Nau. "We have lost everything."

And so it seemed. A week earlier, in a lightning invasion, four Soviet divisions moved into Afghanistan, the iron fist behind a coup that ended the three-month-old regime of President Hafizullah Amin. The unfortunate Amin, 50, who had turned out to be a more independent-minded nationalist than Moscow wanted, thus became the third leader of Afghanistan to be overthrown and killed within the past 20 months. In his place the Soviets installed Babrak Karmal, 50, a former Deputy Prime Minister who had long been considered a Russian protégé.

The Soviet seizure had apparently been taking shape for several months. Moscow had disliked the truculent Amin ever since he had replaced a Soviet favorite, Noor Mohammed Taraki, in the coup of Sept. 15. As the Muslim insurgency kept gaining strength in the countryside, Moscow proposed to Amin that Soviet combat forces be brought in to put down the rebellion. Amin refused.

On Dec. 24, the Soviets made a last attempt to persuade Amin to cooperate, but again he said no. Apparently seeking to protect himself, or perhaps on Soviet orders, he moved from the People's House

in central Kabul to the Darulaman Palace, seven miles away, taking his elite guard and eight tanks along with him. It was too late, and the defense was too weak. That same night, the Soviets began their airlift of troops into Kabul.

Between Dec. 24 and 27, at least 350 Soviet aircraft landed at Kabul International Airport and at Bagram airbase, 25 miles north of the capital. The planes had been mustered from bases throughout the Soviet Union; they carried an airborne division from near Moscow and support troops from Turkestan. On Dec. 27, Russian airborne troops stormed the Darulaman Palace. Amin was captured and shot, along with some of his relatives. The only other serious clash was a skirmish outside Radio Afghanistan, just across from the U.S. embassy. In both fights, Afghan troops loyal to Amin resisted as best they could and inflicted about 250 casualties, but they were no match for the Soviets. By the next day, Dec. 28, the capital was entirely in Soviet hands. Amin, whom the Soviet press had treated with respect until only a few days earlier, was now being described as "a man who was in the service of the CIA" and a "usurper" who condemned former President Taraki to death.

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