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Afghans Continue Pierce Fighting

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Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan, Jan. 2—Soviet troops were reported today to have thrown tanks and sophisticated attack helicopters against Moslem rebels in fierce fighting about 100 miles northwest of Kabul, the capital city.

Western diplomatic sources said the Soviets were believed to be encountering sharp resistance in rugged Bamian Province, a stronghold of anti-Marxist tribesmen. Information about the battles came from four different Western embassies.

"There are said to be many casualties on both sides," one diplomat said of the Bamian fighting.

[The new Soviet-installed Afghan president, Babrak Karmal, ignoring violent protests abroad against Moscow's role in the strategic country, said he would request more defense aid from Moscow, Vietnam and Cuba to root out "all enemies" of his government, Radio Afghanistan reported, according to United Press International.]

Soviet troops, who invaded Afghanistan last Thursday, also were in the western Afghan city of Herat, about 60 miles from the western border with Iran, and in Jalalabad, about 50 miles from the eastern border with Pakistan, Afghan and Western sources said.

Throughout the country, the task facing Soviet troops was complicated by snowy conditions and rocky terrain. There are no roads through many of the mountains. A foot of snow is on the ground here, and some mountains are covered by several feet of snow.

It has been impossible for journalists to confirm the reports of fighting outside Kabul, Afghan officials have been turning most Western reporters away upon arrival at the airport and the few who have entered Afghanistan have been barred from going beyond the capital city. Officials deported 13 journalists today, including me.

Despite reports of sharp fighting in the countryside, Kabul itself was quiet today. The last major disturbance was late Sunday near the offices of Radio Afghanistan, but several people who left Afghanistan reported hearing sporadic gunfire yesterday.

Windows at the West German Embassy were shot out during the fighting Sunday, which is believed to have involved Soviet and dissident Afghan Army units, according to Western diplomats.

Last weekend, reporters here watched vast columns of light tanks, personnel carriers and trucks loaded with Soviet troops streaming out of the capital for the provinces.

Two Soviet tanks remained parked in front of the offices of Radio Afghanistan. Soviet soldiers dressed in bulky brown jackets and thick fur caps stand guard at the post office, Interior Ministry and other important buildings.

Kabul International Airport was ringed by Soviet troops and tanks.

Afghan police control traffic, and unarmed Afghan troops are manning the roadblock near the airport, but there are few signs that the Afghan Army is functioning as an important fighting force alongside the Soviet troops.

An estimated 35,000 to 45,000 Soviet troops are believed to be in Afghanistan, and several thousand more are reportedly poised near the Soviet-Afghan border in case they are needed.

In Kabul, Afghan soldiers were seen wandering around the streets—mostly without weapons—or standing guard at military garrisons or government buildings. Soviet officers could be seen inside the walls of two military garrisons near the airport.

Although new Cabinet ministers have been named, the government ministries are not functioning, reportedly because bureaucrats fear purges. Soviets were said to be filling key slots in the Interior Ministry and other important posts, diplomats said.

No mail has been delivered since the coup, Afghan sources said, and two of the city's three telephone exchanges do not work. There are no telephone or telex links to foreign countries.

The city phone system was destroyed in the opening minutes of the coup by a satchel charge, evidently set by a Soviet soldier to signal the start of the offensive. The explosion blew an enormous hole in the street at the post and telegraph building, and Soviet soldiers were repairing the damage New Year's Day.

Karmal unveiled his new government today and promised to "abolish all antidemocratic and antihuman regulations," release political prisoners and "respect the sacred principles of Islam."

As the Soviets consolidated their hold on the country, Karmal publicly attacked his predecessor, Hafizullah Amin, as "a CIA agent" and "scheming spy." Amin was executed during

the coup, published the text of Karmal's speech last night on Afghan television. It was his first television appearance since the takeover and he still has not appeared in public, according to diplomats here.

Diplomatic sources said Karmal had evidently not returned to Afghanistan, reportedly from Czechoslovakia, until last weekend.

During the speech, Karmal pledged to restore human rights, release political prisoners jailed under Amin and respect Islam, to which 99 percent of Afghans ascribe.

He also said the government welcomes "the national, Islamic, anti-imperialist" revolution in neighboring Iran, whose government has condemned the Soviet incursion.

News services reported these developments:

Karmal was quoted on the official Radio Afghanistan as saying he would request even more defense aid from Moscow and Soviet allies until opposition to his rule is completely put down.

"We announce to the world that as long as the enemies of Afghanistan do not refrain from interfering with our sovereign territory, we . . . shall ask for further assistance from the U.S.S.R. and other peace-loving countries," Karmal said.

"We shall ask for help from . . . Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, the Palestinian Arab people and others," he was quoted as saying. "We shall not back down."

A Radio Afghanistan broadcast also urged the 400,000 Afghan refugees who fled the country during the rule of Amin to return home. Most are living in Pakistan or Iran.

Travelers crossing the Afghan border into Pakistan reported seeing Soviet tanks with guns trained on Afghan garrisons, according to the Manchester Guardian.

Other travelers said the Durulaman Palace, where Amin reportedly was killed, appeared to be completely destroyed. The palace, on the southern edge of Kabul, reportedly was the scene of a major battle at the time of the coup.

Diplomatic sources in New Delhi said Soviet armored forces were moving from Kabul to Paktia Province, where a large anticommunist Moslem rebel force was dug in.