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# Q&A: Afghan freedom fighters mature as support holds

Karen McKay, executive director of the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, on the ongoing battle of the Afghan freedom fighters.

*Today marks the third observance of Free Afghanistan Day. Proclaimed on March 21, 1982, by President Reagan, it coincides with the traditional Afghan New Year. The person perhaps most responsible for keeping Afghanistan's too-easily-forgotten war before the public is executive director of the Committee for a Free Afghanistan, Karen McKay. A major in the Army reserve, Ms. McKay is the untiring spokesman and advocate for the embattled Afghan freedom fighters. She spoke recently with Charlie Wheeler, assistant editor of The Washington Times' Commentary pages.*

**Q:** What role does Afghanistan play in the Soviet global strategy?

**A:** Afghanistan is playing the same role it's played for thousands of years. It has always been the necessary passage point — east, west, north, south for any conquering army. A hundred years ago, the British fought three wars in Afghanistan to try to stop the Russians from advancing on the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea — moves that would have threatened the British Empire. Today, the Soviets still have the need for warm water ports the czars had, which is why they were pushing for the Indian Ocean.

Add to that the vast oil reserves of the Persian Gulf. There are people who argue that the Russians don't need our oil because they have plenty of oil of their own. There are three things wrong with that. One — what oil they've got is very difficult to extract from the ground in Siberia. That's why they need our oil-drilling technology. Two — we know they're going to run out of oil. Their reserves are not all that great and three — even if they didn't need our oil, they need to deny it to us. Their game plan all over the globe is to position themselves so they are poised to sever our resource lifelines.

When you look at the map, every single vital resource lifeline that keeps this country and the western, the European and Japanese going now is threatened by the Soviets. That's where Afghanistan plays a part. From their bases in southern Afghanistan, the Soviets' MiG fighter-bombers are only 350 air-miles — 20 minutes — from the Straits of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf oilfields. That's what it's all about.

The Soviets have no intention of withdrawing from Afghanistan. They didn't go in there for a picnic. They didn't go in there for defensive reasons and they're not going to withdraw unless under ex-

tremely heavy duress. The only way that could happen is for them to pay such a heavy military cost and such a heavy political and diplomatic cost that they would decide to cut their losses and get out and wait for another time. They've been forced to withdraw from Iran in that way three times this century.

**Q:** Is it true the Soviets have placed SS-20 missiles in Afghanistan?

**A:** An Italian news magazine, *Il Borghese*, reported about a year ago that SS-20s were affirmed installed outside of Kabul. We know also from the Mujahideen that there is some kind of massive underground base in the middle of a mountain up in the Wakkhan corridor in an area called "the roof of the world." It's an area of tremendous mountains. Every day a long convoy of armored personnel carriers bearing covered materials enters that mountain and come out empty. In other parts of the country, the Afghans reported seeing gigantic missiles being transported on lowboys and other smaller missiles stacked like cordwood on the backs of long trucks entering these bases.

The Soviets are stepping up their entrenchment in Afghanistan. They've got 34 bases in the country. Six or eight of them are strategic long-range offensive bases along the borders of Iran, Pakistan and China. They've got Shindand, one of the most sophisticated combined arms bases in the world. They've got hardened underground hangars, they've got long runways that can handle their biggest aircraft. They've got fighter-bombers, long-range bombers. They've got MI-24 Hind helicopters, transfer helicopters, tanks. They have long-range surface-to-air missiles there as well as in other bases.

**Q:** What's your opinion of conflicting reports of aid going into Afghanistan and whether it's from us?

**A:** There are a lot of rumors and talk about a massive CIA operation to support the Afghans through third countries. I think Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame called it a CIA plot to kill Russian soldiers in Afghanistan with Soviet-made weapons. The fact is, if there were any significant outside support from...

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