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Afghans 'Celebrate' Seven Years of Occupation

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The scene was the Hotel Kabul, Room 117, on Feb. 15, 1979. Inside, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Spike Dubs sat in an armchair, the hostage of two Muslim gunmen who demanded the release of three of their leaders being held by the Marxist Afghan regime. Outside the hotel, Afghan police and snipers had taken up positions. American Embassy officials pleaded for a negotiated release and a patient response in dealing with the terrorists.

When the Afghan police had arrived four hours earlier, Soviet security advisers had come with them. Now one of the Soviets, wearing a flak jacket and carrying a rifle, assumed a prone firing position in front of the door of Room 117. A backup squad also took aim. Outside, three other Soviets stepped out onto the balcony next to Room 117 and when one raised his hand, a hail of bullets resulted, lasting 40 seconds. When the Russian waved his hand again, the firing ceased. Inside Room 117, the kidnapers lay dead. So did Ambassador Dubs.

Ten months later the Soviet Union invaded and began its official occupation of Afghanistan. What has followed is a war between the Soviets and the Mujahedeen, who are freedom fighters seeking to rid their country of its Soviet masters. With the beginning of 1986, the Soviet-Afghan conflict has now entered its seventh year. Experts say they see no end in sight.

There are now 118,000 Soviet troops stationed and fighting in Afghanistan, with another 40,000 troops along its border. The years of conflict have taken a heavy toll. Over a million Afghans have died. Another four million are refugees in either Pakistan

or Iran. And yet, despite the impossible odds of being outmanned and desperately underequipped, the Mujahedeen fight on in an unrelenting quest to preserve their freedom and culture.

What makes this example of Soviet imperialism so intolerable is not only the fact that a war of aggression and expansion is being waged, but further, that the Soviets are carrying out a policy of systematic genocide against the Afghan population, frequently including the death of innocent women and children and the destruction of entire communities.

During the six years of the Afghan war, the Soviets have dropped or planted more than two million mines, some of which have been in the shape of toys so as to attract children. Moscow's methods have gone as far as to include the use of chemical weapons, incendiary bombs and napalm. In one instance, when troops from the Marxist Afghan army defected, the people of an entire village were tied, stacked like wood, drenched with gasoline and set on fire to be burned alive.

In his New Year television address to the American people, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said: "As I face you today, I want to say that the Soviet people are dedicated to peace — that supreme value equal to the gift of life. For the Soviet people, the year 1986 marks the beginning of a new stage in carrying out our constructive plans. Those are peaceful plans; we have made them known to the whole world."

If the Soviets are as dedicated to peace as they say, their actions speak

louder than their words. Let them withdraw from Afghanistan as a sign of good faith. Let them at least allow the International Red Cross to enter Afghanistan so that the innocent victims, wounded and hungry, may be treated. Let the Soviets allow outside medical assistance so that the infant mortality rate, which reached 85 per cent last winter, can be reduced.

On the first anniversary of Ambassador Dubs' murder, Moscow-sponsored Radio Kabul broadcast a message in English that said: "It is now known that the killing of Ambassador Dubs was carried out by the CIA." The announcer went on to explain that the killing was merely to give the United States the excuse to break off relations with Afghanistan and halt aid.

The truth of the matter was that Dubs had made significant progress in weaning the Afghan government away from Moscow. His actions had become a threat to the Soviet direction and purpose for Afghanistan. Small wonder that his safety was of little consequence to his "rescuers."

As Americans, living in peace, we would do well to remember the struggle of the people of Afghanistan. Our leaders would do well to keep that struggle firmly in mind as they begin to build new lines of communication with a Soviet regime which initiated and perpetuates total war in Afghanistan. And we must all realize, as we look, with hope, to a new year in which the prospects for peace might be improved that, in the final analysis, governments and people alike must be judged by their deeds and not simply by their rhetoric. ■