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REMAKING AFGHANISTAN IN THE SOVIET IMAGE

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PESHAWAR, A DUSTY, FRONTIER city in northern Pakistan, lying just down the road from the Khyber Pass, is a place full of terrible stories these days. There is, for example, the tale of Mohammed Qasim Yusufi, a soft-spoken, 33-year-old former professor of agriculture at Kabul University, in neighboring Afghanistan, whose experience aptly sums up the disastrous events in his country since the Soviet Union invaded it on Dec. 27, 1979.

Mr. Yusufi felt, after several years of life under what the Afghans officially call the *Saur*, or April, Revolution that life had become untenable, so he decided to get out. Shortly before he left, he saw on Afghanistan's state-run television a news program about his native village, a place called Behsoud, once a collection of mud-brick houses with about 100 farming families. The television program showed Behsoud as a happy place: land reform was progressing, feudalism was being wiped out, support for the Communist revolution was growing among the villagers. Behsoud lies, it happens, near the

route from the capital, Kabul, to the Pakistan border. Because the village was his birthplace, Mr. Yusufi paid a final visit to it on his way into exile.

"If you go to my village," he said, evoking the difference between reality and the propaganda image, "you will see that it has been destroyed. You won't find more than five families there. The village has been terribly bombed."

Behsoud's condition is shared by many, perhaps most, villages in Afghanistan; Mr. Yusufi and other Afghan refugees contend. The Soviet Union, in its efforts to weaken support for the mujahedeen, the anti-Soviet resistance fighters, has started intense aerial bombardments of rural areas. The United Nations Human Rights Commission said in a recent report that the Soviet strategy is aimed apparently at forcibly evacuating large stretches of countryside. Refugees say that entire areas, such as the Panjshir Valley, northwest of Kabul, have been virtually abandoned. The policy has left an unknown

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number dead or displaced and created havoc in Afghan agriculture. A study prepared by Azam Gul, like Mr. Yusufi a former professor of agriculture at Kabul University, found that the output of wheat, corn and rice fell by 1982 to roughly one-quarter the levels of 1978. A study by some British doctors, based on information collected by Afghan refugees dispatched secretly to all parts of the country, concluded that malnutrition among children is prevalent and that famine threatens thousands of people. Yet, the Soviet-inspired news media, reporting on Behsoud and other villages in Afghanistan, routinely profess land reform and rural progress.

"In Behsoud village there is land and there is water, but there is no agriculture," Mr. Yusufi said. "The irrigation system has been destroyed. There are no farmers to cultivate the land."

TAKEN INDIVIDUALLY, PERHAPS, stories like that of Mohammed Qasim Yusufi are not of staggering dimensions, not by the standards of our bloody century. Taken together, however, and added to the information that has leaked from an Afghanistan that the Soviet Union has attempted to seal off from independent outside observation, the stories suggest that Soviet policy in Afghanistan is as audacious and ruthless as any the Russians have ever carried out in their satellite states. The Afghanistan that emerges in the refugees' accounts is a country not simply being subdued militarily by the Soviet Union but being remade in the Russians' own totalitarian image.

Several years ago, the way Afghan refugees tell it, the country's pro-Soviet leaders said that there only needed to be one million Afghans left in the country. They were quoted by refugees as saying that a revolutionary society could be constructed on that slender basis, even if the rest of the prewar population of 16 million were to flee or be destroyed. In fact, there is no absolute proof available in the West that the Afghan leaders made precisely that grim, bleak formulation. But the statement is consistent with what seems to be the guiding principle of the two complementary sides of the Soviet and Afghan Communist undertaking.

The first element is to strip away those who are troublesome, to sweep away the old and the inconvenient — and, in Afghanistan's crusty, feudal society, there is much that is old and inconvenient. The vast depopulation that has already occurred — one of history's great migrations — seems to be a result of this effort. One-third of the prewar population has already fled to Pakistan, Iran and other countries. Many others — nobody knows exactly how many — have left their homes in the countryside for the relatively safe cities, fleeing the bombardments that have become a regular part of the Soviet strategy.

The second, and less conspicuous, element suggested by Mr. Yusufi's evocation of the propaganda machinery now operating in Afghanistan, is an attempt to transfer onto Afghan soil the methods and institutions of the Soviet Union itself. This, as the Russians are finding out, will take some doing outside the urban areas. The people of the Afghan countryside, fiercely traditional, deeply religious, have always resisted control by any kind of central government, particularly any foreign government. Nonetheless, the Russians are striving to create, from a kind of ground zero if necessary, a new and more malleable society, one whose basic character harks back to the structures invented by Lenin and which have been implanted in such places as Eastern Europe and Indochina. "They are not that much concerned with the amount of territory controlled by the mujahedeen," Abdul Majid Mangal, a former diplomat in the Afghan Communist government and now a refugee in Peshawar, said. "Their strategy is to create nuclei of Sovietized society in the cities they control and to spread outward from them to the rest of the country."

There has been much speculation on why the Soviet Union is persisting in these policies in Afghanistan in the face of the huge financial burden an occupation force of 115,000 troops entails, not to mention the 10,000 Soviet soldiers killed in the war so far and the enormous propaganda loss Moscow has suffered elsewhere in the world. For its part, the Soviet Union says its aim is to protect the balance of power on its own borders by supporting Afghanistan's socialist revolution against "imperialist" countries, by which it means the United States, Pakistan and China. The Russians also stress that they are promoting "progressive" changes, providing scientific education, bringing about the equality of women and ending the reign of the old "exploiting classes."

The most widespread view in the West of the Soviet objectives is that the Russians are pushing southward, as they have throughout their history, seeking strategic advantage in South Asia and in the area of the Persian Gulf. Some commentators in the United States have argued that the Russians, in seeking this objective, will try to absorb Afghanistan as a new republic of the Soviet Union in much the same fashion as it absorbed Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan and the other Central Asian domains after the 1917 Revolution. Whatever the ultimate geopolitical objective, however, the actions undertaken in Afghanistan — and the ruthlessness with which they are being pursued — have their own inner logic. The Communist Party, in order to maintain its power in Moscow, must project an image of infallibility. That is what justifies its denial of the right of any opposition. The party portrays itself as arising out of historic inevitability, as the embodiment of progress, thereby justifying its use of virtually any means, no matter how brutal. Now, in its current conflict, the Soviet Union cannot allow itself to be bested in a country

on its very border. It is willing to pay the price and to take the actions necessary to prevail.

DESPITE THE Soviet effort to control all information coming from inside Afghanistan, the war in that country is not without its witnesses. Doctors belonging to medical relief organizations have worked at length inside guerrilla-controlled areas. Diplomats in Kabul have sent out dispatches. But the Afghans who have experienced Soviet control and have since escaped the country are the prime witnesses to events there. Last month, I spent 10 days interviewing such people in Peshawar, where there are more than two million Afghan refugees. Many of them, particularly the ordinary farmers and villagers, live in camps of tents and mud-brick houses outside of the city; others, professional people, former journalists, university professors, former government offi-

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cials, members of the old Afghan elite, have managed to settle in stucco and concrete homes inside Peshawar itself, where many participate in one of the dozen resistance groups based in the city. All of the Afghans I met were men; women in Afghanistan's traditional society in exile are not often seen by strangers. Many of the men spoke English; they wore the traditional Afghan costume of long, flowing tunics, baggy pants and sandals.

Admittedly, the testimony of any one of them — like the testimony of refugees anywhere — is subject to some question. These people are, after all, opponents of the Soviet-supported Kabul Government or they would, presumably, not have fled their country. Nonetheless, the stories they told, the descriptions and details they provided, proved so consistent that the exiles acquired, in my mind, a powerful degree of credibility.

ABDUL MAJID MANGAL is a former career diplomat in the Kabul Government whose last post was as the second-ranking official in the Afghan Embassy in the Soviet Union. Like Mr. Yusufi, he left for Pakistan in 1983. He said that in Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat, Kandahar and the other major urban areas of the country, Soviet-style institutions are already well established. He has a long list of them: the propaganda machinery, the state-controlled newspapers, the professional associations, the branches of the Communist Party in every neighborhood, office and school. There is also, of course, the secret police, or, as it is called after its Afghan initials, Khad, modeled on the K.G.B., the Soviet Union's own tentacular security apparatus. Soviet advisers have been placed at every level of government, where they control even the routine exercises of administration. The school system, from kindergartens to universities, has been revamped. Thousands of young people are sent to the Soviet Union for their educations, including children as young as 5 or 6 years old who are destined to

stay for a decade. It is estimated that some 12,000 Afghans are now studying at various universities and training institutes in the Soviet Union.

A strapping man, fluent in English, Mr. Mangal grew a thick black beard after arriving in Peshawar. He illustrated the extent of control directly exercised by Soviet officials in running the affairs of the Afghan Government by recounting the changes imposed on Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry. He said that Soviet influence at the Foreign Ministry grew in steps following the major stages of Soviet involvement itself, beginning with the Saur revolution of 1978, when the Communist Party, officially known as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, took power in a coup, installing Noor Mohammad Taraki as Prime Minister. "At that time, there were three categories of Soviet advisers in the Foreign Ministry who stayed for more than one year," Mr. Mangal said. "They had their own offices, with portraits of Lenin in every room. There were legal, political and economic advisers."

Mr. Taraki was overthrown and executed in 1979 by Hafizullah Amin, the leader of a rival, and apparently less pro-Soviet, faction of the Communist Party, thus setting the stage for the Soviet invasion — and Amin's murder — at the end of that year. Within months, according to Western intelligence experts, more than 100,000 Soviet troops were in the country to back a new government led by Babrak Karmal, who had flown in to take power in the wake of the arrival of Soviet troops.

Inside the Foreign Ministry, according to Mr. Mangal, the influence of the Soviet advisers then rapidly increased. Their first step was to order that all the professional diplomats in the Foreign Ministry who were not members of the Communist Party be sent to posts in the Soviet Union or other Eastern-bloc countries, apparently to keep them under control. Mr. Mangal, who was for five years the director of United Nations af-

fairs in the Foreign Ministry in Kabul, had been scheduled to take up a new post in New Delhi when the Soviet invasion took place. He ended up in Moscow instead; other non-

Communist professionals were sent to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia; all of them, Mr. Mangal said, eventually finding their way to exile in Pakistan or the West.

At the same time, the Russians began to build a cadre of new diplomats trained in what was called by the Russian advisers "Communist diplomacy." Students, often drawn from the families of prominent Afghan Communists, were selected for education in the Soviet Union. "There were 15 of them in 1982," Mr. Mangal said. "They were at the Moscow State University." In Kabul itself, Foreign Ministry officials were encouraged to study Russian. A diplomatic institute was formed inside the ministry to train diplomats who were not selected to go to Moscow, the teachers coming from the Soviet Union for periods of one to several months.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mangal said, foreign policy was entirely taken into the hands of the Soviet Union. "The top Soviet adviser in foreign policy is Vasily Safronchuk," Mr. Mangal said, "the head of the Middle East department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. He is the real foreign minister of the Kabul regime. Formerly, at the time of the first Communist coup, he was the No. 2 in the Soviet Embassy in Kabul. Now, from Moscow, he sends instructions to the Soviet Embassy, which then conveys them to the Foreign Ministry in Kabul."

Illustrating the tightness of Soviet control, Mr. Mangal said that when Afghanistan's Foreign Minister, Shah Mohammad Dost, goes to the United Nations, "he without exception passes through Moscow to pick up the statements that he will make. No Afghan drafts a single foreign-policy position on his own."

"This is true of the statements made by Afghanistan at the meetings of the non-aligned conference," he said, speaking of the group of 101 countries that claim to be neutral in the East-West conflict. "Each communiqué, each statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in Kabul is prepared, drafted and finalized in Moscow," Mr. Mangal said.

According to Aminullah Wardak, formerly an official in the secretariat of the Afghan Prime Minister's office, the Soviet control extends to virtually all of the business of the government. Mr. Wardak

left his post in Kabul in 1983 to live alongside a noisy commercial street on the edge of Peshawar in a house in which members of the Afghan resistance, wearing turbans and robes, frequently come to drink tea and to talk. Once, Mr. Wardak recalled, the Afghan Government concluded an agreement with Bulgaria, approved by the Afghan Council of Ministers in Kabul, for the large-scale purchase of shoes and uniforms. Then the Soviet advisers in the Interior Ministry and in the Prime Minister's office learned of the arrangement. "They were very angry that they had not been told about it in advance," Mr. Wardak said. "They ordered that the direct purchase be canceled. Instead, they arranged it so that the shoes were purchased from Bulgaria, but the cash payment went to Moscow, which transferred some barter goods to Bulgaria."

Baten Shah Safi, a former professor of pharmacology at Kabul University, said that Soviet advisers began, in 1979, to distribute teaching materials that had been translated directly from Russian texts, replacing West German materials that had been used earlier. Mr. Mangal, the former diplomat, testified that a history of the new Afghanistan was drafted by Soviet scholars in Moscow and then translated into the Afghan languages. "When I was in Moscow, I knew about

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this work," Mr Mangal said. "It was done by a panel of Soviet historians led by a Professor Akramovich, the head of Moscow's Institute for Oriental Studies." Mr. Mangal said the new history stressed two themes: that Afghanistan's history is dominated by the struggle of the working classes against "imperialism," especially British imperialism in the 19th century; and that the country's independence is largely owed to the "fraternal assistance" of the Soviet Union. "It gets to the very ethical and moral base of the character of Afghanistan," Mr. Mangal said. "The Soviets are trying to convey the message that each Afghan is patriotic only if he is a friend of the Soviet Union." Kabul radio programs mention the Soviet Union incessantly, "at least 200 times in 24 hours," according to Mr. Mangal.

Meanwhile, American imperialism is denounced almost as frequently as the Soviet contributions to Afghan society are extolled. Several Afghan refugees in Peshawar talked of officially organized anti-American demonstrations held in Kabul and filmed by television crews for news broadcasts both in the Soviet Union and in Kabul itself.

"Sometimes, letters are brought over to government offices announcing a demonstration," Aminullah Wardak, formerly of the Prime Minister's office, recalled. "For example, there was one held at the United States Embassy when the Voice of America began Persian-language programs. This was a big demonstration. The Communist Party member who brought the letter made you sign it to prove that you knew of the demonstration. Everybody has to gather at a certain spot. People make banners. Members of the party are there to watch, because sometimes people want to get away and go home. They force you to carry banners. You can't refuse."

Mr. Wardak remembers that in Kabul government offices, the typists worked for

the secret police. "Girls were sent to Moscow and trained to type in Persian," he said. "They are sent, after they come back to Kabul, to work in government offices. These girls are sent directly by the Prime Ministry. You have no choice in whether you want a particular girl to work for you or not. You just get a letter from the secretary or the assistant of the Prime Minister assigning a typist.

"Every day," Mr. Wardak said, "the typists had meetings between 2 and 4 P.M. My typist always locked her desk drawer when she left, but one day she left her key in the lock. I told a friend to stand watch at the door, and I opened the drawer. There was a small tape recorder and a pistol inside. She was very young, maybe 15 or 16 years old."

EVER SINCE ITS founding in 1965, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, the nation's Communist Party, has been composed of two hostile groups, called the Khalq and Parcham factions. Their bloody feuding has been the principal motor of political events in the country. Two party chairmen have been murdered since the initial Communist coup of 1978, which in itself led to the execution of the pre-coup leader, Mohammad Daud Khan. The factions have exchanged bitter accusations; one is charged with murdering 15,000 political prisoners, the other with killing 17,000 political enemies.

In fact, these numbers, like much in present-day Afghanistan, are impossible to verify. It is not possible, either, to confirm independently Mr. Wardak's suspicion that his typist worked for the secret police. But the evidence supplied by exiles is that, since the 1978 coup, Afghanistan has been swept by a mood of fear even as the secret police, the Khad, has surrounded itself with an aura of power and mystery.

"The Prime Ministry had three gates," Mr. Wardak said. "The Prime Minister's office was in the center of the compound. The two sides were for the exclusive use of the Khad. Near one gate was the Khad political office. At another gate there was a very strong guard; the gate was only for Khad members. The people who worked in the Prime Minister's office were not allowed to go into the Khad areas. The personnel were warned that when they went in and out of the courtyard they should not look to either side, but should just go directly in and out. When the Government sent students to the Soviet Union, the young

people first had to register with the Khad at the political office. Sometimes, I looked out at them from my window. It was very crowded every day. They put them into buses and took them directly to the airport."

Accompanying the apparatus of the Khad, the refugees say, are the seeds of the same system of ranking and privilege that exists in the Soviet Union. Within every institution there are powerful individuals who belong to the party committee, known in Afghanistan as the Sazman Iwalia, or the First Organization. Mr. Yusufi described how the process worked at Kabul University. "It was an assembly of students and faculty that made all decisions about teaching at the university," he said. "Gradually, the number of people who could attend the meetings was reduced until only two or three party members made all decisions — teacher promotions, scholarships, seminars to be taught, sports and social activities, research projects." The old faculty, he said, used the derisive term "machine-made faculty" to refer to the flood of new teaching staff.

For the masses of people, a host of institutions has been created, again mimicking Soviet society. Newspapers

that existed before the revolution have been transformed into propaganda organs, many of them named after their counterparts in the Soviet Union. There are also the professional associations, the unions of writers, musicians and artists. For an individual to make a living at those activities, membership is required. There are unions of farmers and religious leaders and party-controlled trade unions. Each, the Afghan exiles say, has a Soviet adviser and issues membership cards. At the apex of the system is an organization called the Fatherland Front. It publishes its own newspaper, organizes assemblies and encourages the notion, as Mr. Mangal put it, that to be Communist and pro-Soviet is to be patriotic.

Several children's organizations have been created, one of the most interesting being Parwadeshgah Watan, or the Fatherland Orphanages. It exists presumably for children whose parents have been killed in the war. Last November, Kabul radio announced that 870 children from the orphanages would be sent to the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union for 10 years of education. Some Afghan exiles in Peshawar say that not all of these children are orphans. They say some have merely been separated from their parents and put under the control of the state.

TO READ THE HISTORY of such Soviet Socialist Republics as Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan is to see close parallels to what is happening in Afghanistan. Turkic or Persian-speaking Moslem domains in Central Asia were conquered toward the end of the 19th century as Russia expanded inexorably southward and eastward. The czars were content to leave the local pattern of lives untouched, but after the triumph of Leninism in 1917, the new Communist rulers tried to install Commu-

nist parties in Central Asia. This provoked a bitter war. In Uzbekistan, one Soviet writer complained that the guerrillas were men on horseback who "dissolved in the neighboring villages literally before the eyes of our troops." In Tadzhikistan, it took the Soviet armies five years to crush the opposition and another five years to quell peasant resistance to such Stalinist initiatives as forced collectivization.

In Afghanistan today there are differences, one being that Moscow does not claim it as a part of the Soviet Union. But the greatest difference may, in fact, be the extent of the opposition from within the country and, correspondingly, the degree of brutality being used to stamp it out. In Peshawar, guerrilla commanders, who make occasional visits to Pakistan and, increasingly, to the West, testify that, in its early stages, the Soviet war was more limited and classical than it is today. The fight was for control of territory; it was directed against the mujahedeen themselves. But, despite repeated offensives, the failure of the Soviet to gain firm control of territory outside of the major cities led to an intensification of the military effort and the turn to what appears to be an intentional effort to depopulate the countryside.

Abdul Haq, the chief resistance leader in Kabul Province, the area around the Afghan capital, says the altered military policy began roughly a year ago. Mr. Haq, a man of great physical presence, stout, bearded, and gruff, was interviewed in Peshawar, where he had stopped off from inside Afghanistan before traveling to Europe. He and other members of the resistance spoke specifically of three new Soviet tactics.

One is the intense bombing of villages and agricultural land by planes and helicopters. Second is the use of commando parties to enter villages and guerrilla areas in an effort to destroy resistance fighters. Third is a policy of quick and immediate retaliation against civilian populations for mujahedeen assaults on Soviet targets.

"Our problem is that they are fighting with our children, with our people, with our farm animals," Mr. Haq said. "Around Kabul Province, some 90 percent of the villages have been cleared. In the last 2 or 3 months, 5,000 to 6,000 people only from Kabul Province have come to Pakistan as refugees."

According to Pakistani refugee officials, three relatively new camps near Peshawar alone have received heavy influxes of new residents. This does not mean that the overall refugee flow has increased. Officials at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees say that the greatest number of escapees from Afghanistan came in the first two years after the Soviet invasion, when tribal leaders made essentially political decisions not to live under Soviet domination. But both Pakistani and Western officials agree that many of the new refugees — who are flowing into Pakistan at an estimated rate of 3,000 to 5,000 a month — are escaping the violence of the war itself, particularly the bombing.

At the Red Cross Hospital in Peshawar, some 3,000 victims of the war are treated every year. Over the last five years, the organization has repeatedly asked both the Karmal regime and the Soviet Union to be allowed to set up hospitals inside Afghanistan itself to treat war victims, but it has so far been

refused permission. It takes about 7 to 10 days for a wounded person to be brought, usually by mule or camel, or even on the backs of relatives, from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Dr. Bjarne Ranheim, a Norwegian who is medical director at the hospital, said that the most common wounds were caused by bombings, mines and burns.

THE REFUGEES AND the leaders of the resistance express great confidence that they will prevail in their war against the Soviet invaders. They have a certain religious faith in this, believing that God is on their side. They have faith, too, in the Afghan national identity and the Afghan stubbornness. People subjected to constant propaganda barrages often turn into skeptics. Students who study in the Soviet Union may become cynical about the Soviet system rather than turning into compliant and enthusiastic Marxists.

But, the precedents of the Soviet Central Asian republics indicate the existence of a formula that has proved effective in the past. In the 1920's, the Tadzhik rebels — who were called "bandits" by the Soviet press just as the Afghan mujahedeen are today — were, over the years, worn down by Soviet persistence, ruthlessness and firepower. Even if the Afghan resistance is stronger — and there are signs that its power is considerable — eventually the mountain war of attrition can be expected to take a heavy toll. At the same time, the other Soviet effort in the war, the awesome weight of the organized state, presses against the spirit of independence. The result in the past has been satellite states. The Soviet aim, over the long run, is to bring this about in Afghanistan. ■