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# Dovish Soviet stance on Afghanistan called ploy to weaken rebels

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U.S. officials regard Soviet peace feelers on a settlement in Afghanistan as a ploy aimed at undermining international support for Afghan resistance fighters, according to the Pentagon's top expert on anti-communist insurgencies.

Elie D. Krakowski, a special assistant to Assistant Defense Secretary Richard Perle, called recent Soviet overtures an "exercise in deception."

"The message is that [the Soviets] are as determined as ever to destroy and subjugate the resistance," Mr. Krakowski told a Heritage Foundation audience last week.

Mr. Krakowski said more than one-third of Afghanistan's population has been killed or forced into exile as part of a Soviet policy of "migratory genocide." His observations are at odds with those who argue that the Soviet Union is bogged down in the 6-year-old war in Afghanistan.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev last month said he hoped "essential progress" on regional issues can be achieved this year in what some observers interpreted as a softening of Moscow's position on withdrawing an estimated 115,000 Soviet troops stationed in the country since the 1979 invasion.

United Nations-sponsored "proximity" talks between the Afghan regime and Pakistan are expected to resume next month in Geneva.

The United States, though not a party to the negotiations, supports a coalition of seven Afghan resistance groups operating inside Afghanistan and along the border with Pakistan.

Congress recently agreed to provide \$4 million in humanitarian aid to Afghan refugees, and covert U.S. weapons support is expected to reach \$250 million this year, according to intelligence sources. Some reports estimate the figure as high as \$450 million.

Last month the State Department sent a letter to the United Nations outlining the conditions under which the United States would support a negotiated settlement of the Afghanistan war, according to a State Department official.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said the letter indicated the United States would guarantee "non-interference" in Afghanistan that would, in effect, end U.S. military support for the Afghan resistance — but only if a Soviet troop withdrawal takes place first.

"If a Soviet withdrawal takes place, then there isn't a need for the resistance," the official said.

Actually, the resistance antedates the Soviet occupation. It sprang up after the pro-communist coup by Nur Mohammed Taraki ousted the Afghan government led by Sardar Mohammed Daoud.

The Soviets have been attempting to persuade Pakistan to recognize the Soviet-installed regime in Kabul by holding out the promise of a Soviet troop withdrawal plan reportedly in the possession of the Afghan foreign minister, Mr. Krakowski said.

"Should Soviet pressures for direct Pakistani negotiations with the puppet [Babrak] Karmal regime succeed — the price demanded for allowing the Pakistanis to see and discuss the withdrawal timetable — Moscow would have achieved the legitimacy that regime cannot otherwise attain," Mr. Krakowski said.

Without the support of Soviet military forces, the current Afghan regime would collapse "within hours" of a Soviet troop withdrawal, he said.

Mr. Krakowski said the Soviet peace offensive has been limited to official public statements that have not been repeated in discussions between U.S. and Soviet officials during talks on regional issues.

The official said recent reports that the United States would consider backing off its support for the resistance in the context of a Soviet troop withdrawal had undercut the morale of the seven resistance groups operating in Afghanistan and along the Pakistan-Afghani border region.

As a result of the reports, resistance forces are worried about a lack of U.S. support, the official said.

"The problem with talking about a settlement is that we are undermining confidence in the United States," the official said.

Officially, U.S. support for an Afghan political settlement "depends on the acceptability of a total package, which must include a total withdrawal of Soviet forces within a fixed and reasonable length of time," a State Department spokesman said.

Regarding support for the Afghan freedom fighters, "as long as the Soviets continue to pursue a military option, we will continue to support the Afghan struggle for freedom," State Department spokesman Deborah Cavin said.

Mr. Krakowski said the Soviet peace offensive in the West has not been matched by a decrease in Soviet military activities in Afghanistan or a decrease in diplomatic pressure on Pakistan.

"The opposite has been true," Mr. Krakowski said. "There has been a marked increase in Soviet arms shipments to Afghanistan in recent weeks and weapons don't come alone."

Intelligence sources said U.S. spy satellites have detected an increase in Soviet weapons deliveries, including shipments of Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships, and indications that the Soviets have begun modernizing air bases inside the country.

In addition to weapons, intelligence sources said the Soviets have stepped up special operations, using paramilitary "Spetsnaz" forces to carry out assassinations of mujahideen leaders throughout the country.

Administration officials say the Afghan resistance also has been receiving more shipments of higher quality armaments in the past year, including new Swiss-designed Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns. The 20mm gun was described as similar to a mobile cannon used by the Swiss Army.

"Last year was a good year; this one will be better — with more weapons coming in," one official said.