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# Soviet Ready to Bolster Its Afghan Force

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 23 — The Soviet Union is preparing to send more military forces and equipment, particularly helicopters, into Afghanistan, according to military analysts here.

The analysts are surprised, they said, because only a few weeks ago they saw no signs of such a move. They thought then that Moscow would not send more troops into Afghanistan so it could give priority to forces that might be needed for Poland.

The Soviet high command, which sent a survey team of senior officers to Kabul recently, appears to have decided that it must add to its 85,000 to 90,000 troops in Afghanistan because they are bogged down.

United States officials said they had seen evidence of preparations for the reinforcements in the Soviet Union near Afghanistan, including the assembly of helicopters and the gathering of ground forces. The officials would not discuss how they got their information, but it is known that satellites have the areas under constant surveillance.

In the two years since Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan, they have been unable to defeat the Afghan resistance and have barely been able to contain it, the analysts said, despite the overwhelming superiority of Soviet firepower and sophisticated weapons.

## Some Reasons for Failure

They said that Soviet leaders had been slow to adapt their tactics, which are designed for conventional land warfare, to counterinsurgency, that Soviet troops suffered from poor morale and discipline and that many weapons, such as tanks and armored personnel carriers, were inadequate for the constant skirmishing with elusive Afghans.

On the other side, the officials said that the Afghans had steadily become better armed, that they had improved their tactics and that they had been able to tie down many Soviet soldiers in routine guard duty while they controlled large parts of the countryside.

The analysts said that Afghans had even been able to bring down Russian helicopters with rifles. Afghan marksmen high up on mountainsides shoot down on the lightly armored tops of Russian Hind helicopters, they said. Some also disabled helicopters by shooting the rear rotor.

The analysts said they had reports that Afghan machine-gunners had tried

to shoot down MIG jet fighters as they flew down valleys. The machine-gunners fired from the mountainsides hoping that the MIG's would fly into the hail of bullets. The analysts said they thought the Afghans had had only limited success with that technique.

## Problems of Morale

Steady casualties have hurt the morale of Soviet soldiers, the analysts said. Up to 5,000 have been killed in the two years, they said, and perhaps as many more have been wounded.

They said the bodies had been returned to the Soviet Union for burial, but that the Soviet press had almost ignored the fighting in Afghanistan. The officials said that, so far as they could determine, relatives of the soldiers have not protested the war.

With boredom a prime enemy of morale, the analysts said, Soviet soldiers had turned to heavy drinking and in some instances to drugs. Some Soviet soldiers have sold their rifles in the black market to get money for alcohol and drugs, they said.

In addition, many Soviet soldiers have contracted hepatitis and other illnesses because of unsanitary water supplies. The medical problem has been aggravated by Afghanistan's relatively poor medical facilities, they said.

The analysts said that the Soviet forces had come to rely on helicopters more and more but they said Soviet pilots and tactics were about 15 years behind the United States, or back where the United States was in the early days of the Vietnam War.

Specifically, they said that Soviet helicopters were not built for Afghanistan's high altitudes and, because they were heavy, often could not reach the tops of mountains where insurgents take refuge.

On the ground, the analysts said, Soviet tanks have become nearly static pillboxes useful only for general support fire for infantry troops. Moreover, some are unable to raise their guns high enough to fire at insurgents on mountainsides.

Similarly, armored personnel carriers, which are intended to carry troops into battle and support them with covering fire, have been forced to stay on roads with their troops buttoned up inside. Otherwise, the soldiers could be cut down in ambushes.

As for the Afghan Army, the analysts said, it has become little more than a shadow force. The Afghan Government sent out a call for 130,000 men in October and only 8,000 came forward.