



**NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER
FOR USSR**

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National Intelligence Council

NOTE FOR: DCI ✓
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The attached paper is for your information. It contains the assessment of analysts from throughout the CIA (NIOs, SOVA, NESAs and the Task Force) on recent Soviet military activity in Afghanistan. It judges that the increased use of air power and the introduction of SCUDs into Afghanistan are designed to prevent a debacle in Afghanistan while the Soviets are withdrawing. The Soviets also hope it will intimidate Pakistan into a more moderate position and encourage the resistance to adopt less aggressive tactics while the Soviets remain in the country. Agency analysts do not believe it will change Mujahadeen behavior, but it may have some effect on Pakistan's thinking. In any case, we believe the Soviet withdrawal will continue and probably remain on schedule.

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Implications of Moscow's Augmented Firepower in Afghanistan

~~The military situation in Afghanistan has been deteriorating more quickly than the Soviets probably anticipated. The Soviets may well believe that unless they move quickly to stem the tide their Afghan government could unravel while they are still in the country, seriously complicating their withdrawal militarily and embarrassing them politically.~~ While the decision to withdraw is not in question and even a delay is not thought to be likely, the employment of the BACKFIRE and SCUDs signals a Soviet willingness to use whatever airpower it takes to keep the Mujahadeen at bay and to prevent any debacle during the Soviet withdrawal.

~~They may also hope that it will intimidate Pakistan into a more moderate position and give some Mujahadeen elements an incentive to decrease their combat activity.~~ To encourage some political accommodation, the Afghanistan Prime Minister is likely to launch a new political initiative at the UN to add some luster to previous "national reconciliation" efforts. While these political/military tactics may encourage some Pakistani officials to push harder for a settlement with the Soviets, political initiatives that seek to preserve a role for the PDPA after the Soviets will be rejected by the resistance out of hand. Military intimidation, moreover, is not likely to be effective and may only encourage the Mujahadeen to go after Soviet forces rather than ease the pressure.

MILITARY SITUATION

The military situation in Afghanistan has become increasingly weighted against the Soviets and their Afghan allies since the withdrawal of Soviet troops began in May. The Mujahadeen have been aggressive throughout the country and nowhere is this more in evidence than at Qandahar, whose fall has been depicted as imminent in recent reporting. Even Kabul has fallen under the effects of increased shelling and increasing isolation.

The commitment of BACKFIRES represents a reintroduction of medium bombers into Afghanistan. Although not believed to be militarily significant in and of itself, the BACKFIRE's payload should enhance Soviet capabilities to inflict punishment on the Mujahadeen and those who support them. Their deployment is consistent with increased Soviet use of air power to 'take up the slack' left by withdrawing ground, artillery, and helicopter units. Although not as effective as these other instruments, air power is now the only viable and readily available means for hitting the resistance.

The introduction of obsolete SS-1 (SCUD) surface-to-surface, medium-range missiles, reportedly sighted in Kabul on 1 November, is also militarily consistent with a Soviet desire to increase available firepower during the withdrawal. It does not have sufficient accuracy to be used effectively against important military targets, but could, and probably would, be used as a terror weapon against population centers in Pakistan in response to rocket attacks against Kabul. These missiles would almost certainly be under Soviet, not Afghan control.

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The re-commitment of medium bombers as well as other advanced aircraft, has both political and military implications for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

~~The military objective is to reduce Mujahadeen military pressure on Qandahar. The Soviets also hope for a 'spinoff' effect which will reduce Mujahadeen military aggressiveness around Kabul and elsewhere if they are successful there.~~

~~The political objectives are four-fold:~~

- ~~Demonstrate support for the PDPA during the withdrawal process.~~ This constitutes strictly a short-term objective, since Soviet air power will not be able to 'hold' territory during the withdrawal nor support the government after the withdrawal. It is essential, nonetheless, to 'buck up' PDPA morale and to get them to hold fast. Soviet toughness also serves to dispell further the notion that they are abandoning an ally to its fate.
- ~~Provide a subtle 'show of force' for the Pakistanis.~~ The Soviets hope to:
 - exert pressure on the Mujahadeen through the Pakistani government. In this regard, they may be over-estimating the amount of influence/control the Pakistanis (or, for that matter, the Peshewar leadership) has over the Mujahadeen factions in the field.
 - play on the splits in the Pakistani leadership over whether to seek a deal with the Soviets during the withdrawal endgame. Some Pakistani leaders (Yaqub Khan) are arguing strongly for this because they perceive a potentially serious Soviet threat to the northwest territories and are more pessimistic about resistance prospects.
 - send a strong psychological signal that would lead other Pakistani leaders to adopt Khan's views more seriously and possibly to shape or move the upcoming Pakistani elections in Benazir Bhutto's favor.
- ~~Send a signal to the Mujahadeen to reduce military activity in the country until after the Soviet Union has withdrawn.~~ By inflicting maximum casualties on Mujahadeen fighting forces and Afghan civilians they hope to dampen any Mujahadeen intentions to embarass the Soviets either on the battlefield or by capturing a major city during the withdrawal process.
- ~~Gorbachev also wants to protect his domestic flank during the withdrawal.~~ He will actively pursue the withdrawal process but clearly intends to withdraw gracefully and with little damage to Soviet prestige as possible.

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CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Soviet Union, in committing BACKFIRES, is not trying to reverse the withdrawal process; in fact, withdrawal preparations are continuing. It clearly remains committed to the withdrawal of its forces and is attempting to prevent leaving under what they have termed, 'embarassing circumstances.' The fall of Qandahar would clearly constitute such an embarrassment.

2. The BACKFIRES demonstrate a Soviet willingness to employ additional firepower in an effort to maintain the military status-quo in Afghanistan during the withdrawal. So far, the Soviets have committed fewer medium bombers against the Mujahadeen at Qandahar than they committed to their offensive operations in 1984 in the Panjsher valley. The high-altitude bombing campaign there was regarded a failure and it is unlikely that its use around Qandahar will have any better results.

3. Commitment of additional air support elements is considered likely if they are perceived necessary to offset the firepower lost by withdrawing ground units. Such assets will probably be based inside the Soviet Union to avoid any conflict with the provisions of the Geneva agreement and to provide a safe base of operations.

4. Although the Soviets will continue to shift ground forces already deployed in Afghanistan to meet evolving threats, it is considered highly unlikely that the Soviets, would re-commit ground forces, unless it was absolutely necessary to save embattled or beseiged Soviet units.

5. It is unlikely that the Soviets will expand their air operations against Mujahadeen targets to include Pakistani military targets (there are none close enough to the border to provide plausible denial). Politically, it is now probably too late to affect Pakistani decision-making. Militarily, medium bombers operating against Pakistani air defenses would require air defense suppression to be effective. The BACKFIRE, particularly, would be a highly-visible, vulnerable target without considerable air defense suppression efforts. Moreover, such a move would have little impact on the ground in Afghanistan and is now probably too late to affect Pakistani decision-making. Any future attacks on Mujahadeen targets inside Pakistan would probably employ smaller front-line aircraft already inside Afghanistan.

6. The introduction of SS-1 (SCUD) missiles has substantially more political than military implications. The deployment of such 'advanced' weapons is probably intended to bolster failing PDPA morale and to provide more 'food for thought' for the Pakistani support for the Mujahadeen. Its timing on the eve of the UN General Assembly Meeting may also be intended to influence US policy-makers to exert pressure on the Mujahadeen to be less aggressive until the Soviet withdrawal is complete.

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