

SUBJECT: Afghanistan: The War Against the Garrisons [redacted]

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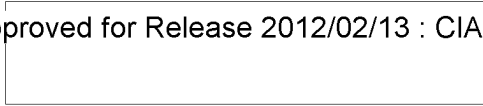
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Central Intelligence Agency



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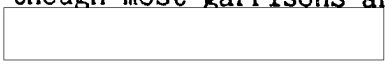
AFGHANISTAN: THE WAR AGAINST THE GARRISONS



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Summary

The Afghan resistance has mounted prolonged sieges against some Afghan army garrisons--primarily in eastern Afghanistan--with limited success. The garrisons range in size from several hundred to three thousand troops, have fortified artillery and infantry positions and are protected by extensive minefields. Typically, resistance forces--numbering between 500 and 2,000 insurgents--attempt to isolate the post from ground and aerial resupply. The insurgents mount artillery and mortar attacks, with occasional assaults against outlying outposts. The insurgent sieges have seldom caused significant casualties or damage and relatively few aircraft have been shot down even though most garrisons are heavily dependent on air resupply.

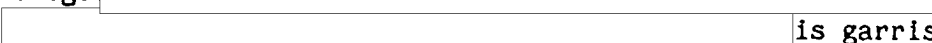


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Barikowt: The Typical Insurgent Siege

The nearly three year old blockade of the Afghan regiment-size garrison at Barikowt in Konarha Province is an example of a prolonged insurgent siege



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is garrisoned at Barikowt in the deep, narrow Konar Valley near the Pakistan border. The garrison was established in the early 1980's, probably in an effort to block several

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis: [redacted]

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insurgent infiltration routes from Pakistan into Konarha Province. Insurgents--mostly from the Hezbi-Islami (Gulbuddin) group--quickly surrounded the post and pressure on Barikowt has prompted periodic strenuous Soviet and Afghan efforts to prevent the garrison's destruction. Because the insurgent siege has effectively cut off roads leading to the post, the regiment almost always is supplied by air. In the spring of 1985, a multi-regimental Soviet and Afghan force swept up the Konar Valley and briefly lifted the siege, but the post was again cut off as soon as the Soviets and Afghans withdrew. Activity around Barikowt picked up in late 1986, when insurgents captured five of Barikowt's nine outlying outposts in heavy fighting. Some 400 regime reinforcements brought in by air from Asadabad and Kabul and extensive Soviet and Afghan tactical air support blunted resistance pressure, however. [REDACTED]

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### Pluses and Minuses

In our view, the siege of Barikowt points up the advantages and disadvantages to the resistance of such tactics. On the plus side, the resistance has been able to keep the garrison bottled up and prevent it from blocking insurgent supply lines. Kabul--which clearly wants to keep the garrison open if only to avoid the humiliation of a retreat--is forced to devote considerable resources to resupply and reinforce the post. [REDACTED]

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To maintain the siege, however, the resistance uses significant amounts of manpower which might be employed more productively in other areas or in activities such as convoy attacks. In addition, substantial amounts of ammunition are consumed in attacks which probably cause few casualties or damage. [REDACTED]

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A more aggressive prosecution of sieges involving direct attacks aimed at capturing large posts would provide political and military pay-offs for the insurgents, but serious risks are involved. Capture of a major regime post such as Barikowt or Khowst would be a major boost to insurgent morale and would provide a significant public relations victory. Direct attacks on the garrisons would, however, probably result in high casualties because of the extensive minefields and superior firepower of regime garrisons. Even if the guerrillas were able to seize a regime garrison, we believe--and there is considerable evidence that resistance military leaders share this view--that any attempt to hold the captured posts would be a serious mistake, allowing the Soviets to maximize their firepower advantage and cause high insurgent casualties. [REDACTED]

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### Masood's Approach

Masood's assault on the Farkhar garrison last August, involved a much more thorough approach and was carried out rapidly. [REDACTED]

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The garrison was overrun in a few days. Insurgent forces quickly abandoned the post after capturing large amounts of military equipment and supplies. The speed of the nighttime assault, the absence of Soviet advisers at Farkhar, and an inflexible regime command and control structure prevented air support from aiding the garrison. [Redacted]

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Impact of Air Defense Weapons

We believe air defense equipment currently used by insurgents around major besieged garrisons makes resupply difficult, but not impossible. Despite extensive air defense around Barikowt, [Redacted] and terrain favoring the guerrilla gunners, the insurgents were not able to choke off the garrison [Redacted]

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The acquisition of improved air defense equipment--especially advanced surface-to-air missiles--by insurgents engaged in a siege would enable them to tighten their grip on garrisons and make resupply efforts more costly. Sophisticated surface-to-air missiles enable the resistance to retain its mobility and give them the capability to engage aircraft. [Redacted]

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To date, [Redacted] the resistance has used its newly acquired Stingers primarily around major airfields and air corridors. [Redacted]

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Outlook

Insurgent successes against Farkhar and Nahrin as well as numerous recent successful assaults against battalion-size Afghan posts in Nangarhar, Paktia, and Qandahar Provinces suggests that parts of the resistance may be moving away from prolonged sieges toward attacks aimed at quickly overrunning smaller posts, seizing equipment and withdrawing. These efforts offer the highest payoff for the guerrillas, in our view, enabling them most easily to demonstrate the weaknesses of the Afghan army, replenish their stocks with captured equipment, reduce regime threats to base camps and supply routes, and boost resistance morale. [Redacted]

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Insurgent forces have successfully assaulted Afghan border battalions--which usually number 100-250 men--at posts in Nangarhar and Qandahar provinces and there are numerous similar targets throughout northern Afghanistan--especially in Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces. Most of these posts are isolated in mountainous terrain, at least partly

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dependent on aerial resupply, and vulnerable to insurgent pressure. These units include the border battalions located throughout the eastern, southern, and western borders as well as several Afghan army garrisons in Badakhshan Province. [redacted]

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