



Directorate of Intelligence

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# Afghanistan Situation Report

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12 May 1987

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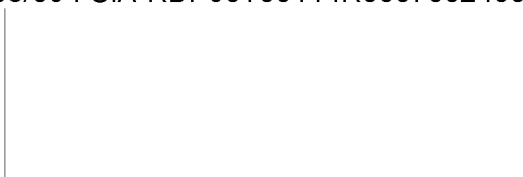
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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT



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Insurgent activity in and around Kabul picked up last week, and heavy fighting continued near Khowst in Paktia Province.



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MARKET CONDITIONS IMPROVE IN KABUL



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A market survey conducted in late April by the US Embassy in Kabul indicates that prices for most commodities have remained generally stable over the last month.



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MORE SOVIET-AFGHAN DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES



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Efforts by the Soviets and Afghans to improve the international image of the Kabul regime have had a few successes recently.



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POSSIBLE INSURGENT ELECTIONS



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Although Gulbuddin Hekmatyar recently claimed to be speaking for the resistance alliance when he announced planned elections for a representative assembly, his plans may not have the backing of the other leaders.



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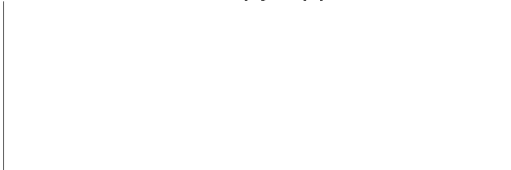
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**PERSPECTIVE**

**AFGHANISTAN AND THE DEFENSE OF THE SOVIET FAR EAST**  **8**

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The USSR's occupation of Afghanistan could, over the long run, provide Moscow with opportunities to reduce the vulnerability of overland transportation links to the Soviet Far East. 

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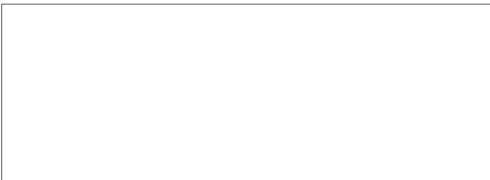


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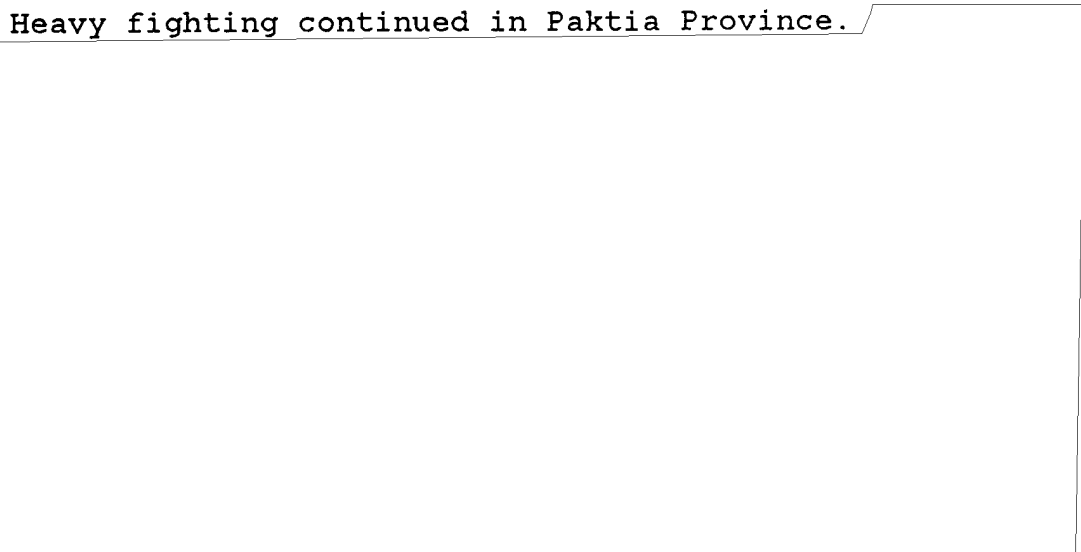
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**POCKETS OF FIGHTING** 


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According to the US Embassy in Kabul, insurgent activity north, south, and southwest of the city increased last week. The insurgents directed heavy machinegun, automatic rifle, and rocket fire on Soviet and Afghan installations. In addition, there were several bomb explosions in Kabul's commercial and residential areas that the US Embassy attributed to supporters of former Afghan leader Karmal. 

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Heavy fighting continued in Paktia Province. 

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Combat operations resumed in Nangarhar Province last week. Elements of the Soviet 66th Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade at Jalalabad departed garrison by 2 May,  Additional MI-24 Hind and MI-8 Hip helicopters also deployed to Jalalabad airfield on 11 May to support the operations.

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**MARKET CONDITIONS IMPROVE IN KABUL** 

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A market survey conducted in late April by the US Embassy in Kabul indicates that prices for most commodities have remained generally stable over the last month. In particular, wheat prices have plateaued after a substantial rise earlier this year and a 25-



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percent decrease last month. Meat, sugar, and petroleum products remain expensive and in short supply. 

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**COMMENT:** The fall in grain prices partly reflects the beneficial impact of heavy spring rains on agricultural prospects. Nevertheless, this year's grain harvest may be below normal in some parts of the country because of shortages of labor and seed. Meat shortages probably stem from a seasonal decline in the slaughter of stock as herders fatten animals for sale later in the year.




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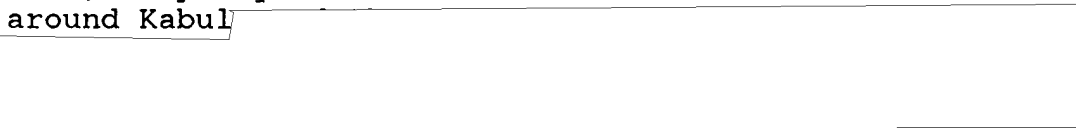
**MORE SOVIET-AFGHAN DIPLOMATIC SUCCESSES** 

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Indian Foreign Minister Tiwari during his visit to Kabul from 3 to 5 May publicly praised the Afghan regime's national reconciliation program, echoed the Soviet call for a "political settlement around Afghanistan," and dismissed the Afghan threat to Pakistan as "imaginary." Indian Minister of State Singh told US officials in New Delhi that the visit was important because India believes the PDPA--with or without Najib--will have to be part of any political settlement of the war. 

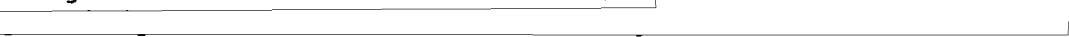
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In other diplomatically relevant developments, the League of the Red Cross began operations--costing about \$600,000 per year--to aid medical facilities in and around Kabul 



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**COMMENT:** Coming on the heels of the regime's official recognition by Zimbabwe and Cyprus, Tiwari's visit--the first by an Indian foreign minister since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan--and his public statements were a diplomatic plus point for Kabul and Moscow. The League of the Red Cross's decision 



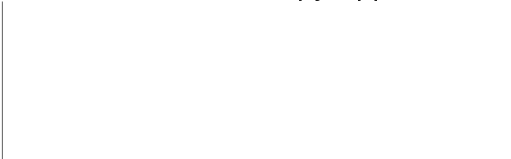
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will boost Kabul's image. The Soviets almost certainly are hoping that the Kabul regime's growing list of diplomatic successes will produce more Third World



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abstentions on the Afghanistan resolution when the UN General Assembly meets in October. [redacted]

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**POSSIBLE INSURGENT ELECTIONS** [redacted]

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Afghan insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar announced on 8 May that the seven resistance parties will soon hold elections for a representative assembly. He said refugees in Iran and Pakistan would elect 20 percent of the assembly, while Afghans in Afghanistan would elect the remainder. Gulbuddin also called for a cease-fire during which an interim government would preside over a Soviet withdrawal. Hizbi Islami factional leader Khalis--recently appointed alliance spokesman for the next six months--and Islamic Union party leader Sayyaf subsequently said they would only support an interim regime headed by one of the alliance leaders. [redacted]

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**COMMENT:** Although Gulbuddin claimed to be speaking for the resistance alliance, there is no conclusive evidence that all of the insurgent party leaders support the plan. Gulbuddin is a perennial troublemaker and his remarks may be aimed at disrupting alliance deliberations. He may also be trying to stem slipping support among his commanders by appearing more conciliatory on the question of an interim government. [redacted]

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The remarks by Khalis and Sayyaf suggest that Gulbuddin's announcement was premature. In recent weeks differences among the insurgent parties about the composition of a potential interim government appear to have widened. The seven leaders have also yet to reach a consensus on voting procedures, a possible role for former King Zahir Shah, or the participation of the PDPA in the post-Soviet political system in Afghanistan. In the near term, Gulbuddin's statements may make it more difficult for the alliance to agree on a program of political action. [redacted]

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**IN BRIEF**



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-- The US Embassy in Kabul reports that the International Trade Center (ITC) office in Kabul will close permanently in June. The ITC, which serves as the local executing agency for UNCTAD and GATT, has managed a single \$1.4 million project in Kabul since 1985. ITC officials argued the project aided local businessmen in maintaining trade contacts with non-East European countries, but Western donors to the ITC claimed the organization's presence in Kabul served mainly to help legitimize the regime. 

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-- During an official visit to Pakistan last week, French Foreign Minister Raimond announced a bilateral donation of 6,000 tons of wheat for the Afghan refugees, according to press reports. Last year France provided Islamabad with 5,000 tons of wheat for the refugees, besides donating wheat through the World Food Program. 

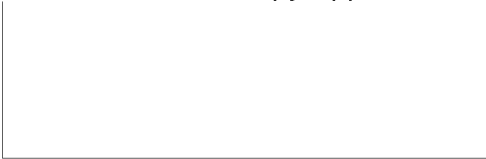
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-- Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil wrote to UN Secretary General Cordovez in early May asking him to arrange visits by Afghan regime envoys to refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan. Wakil charged that the two countries are blocking repatriation and said his envoys would try to persuade the refugees to return home. Wakil's letter is another in a series of Soviet-Afghan attempts to convince international opinion that Tehran and



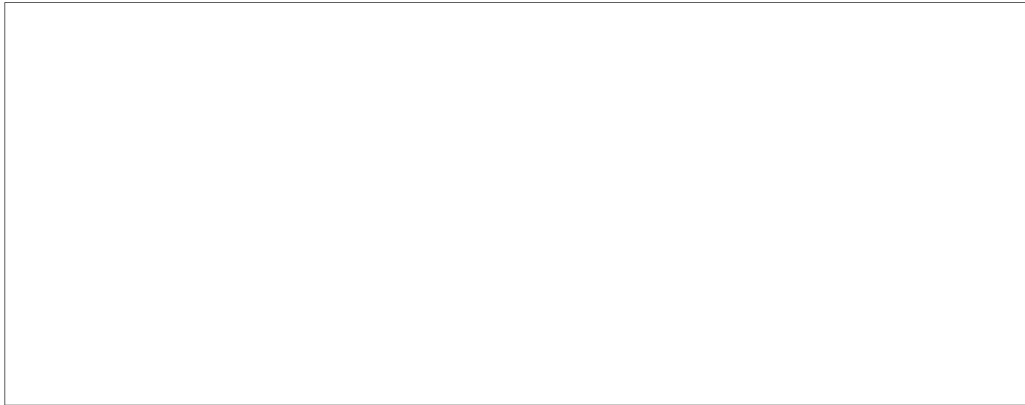
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Islamabad are preventing a political settlement of the war. [redacted]

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-- Abdul Wadud, the Hizbi Islami (Gulbuddin) general commander for Badakhshan Province who was recently killed, commanded 500 to 700 insurgents north of Keshem. [redacted]

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He is the second major field commander that Gulbuddin's group has lost in the past three months. [redacted]

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-- [redacted] elements of a new Afghan regime border force unit at Bayankhel in Paktia Province. The unit's garrison area includes a fire-support base and a network of nine security positions. Each position has extensive trenchworks, numerous bunkers and is occupied by tanks and armored personnel carriers. These defenses suggest the garrison was constructed to withstand insurgent artillery and ground attacks. [redacted]

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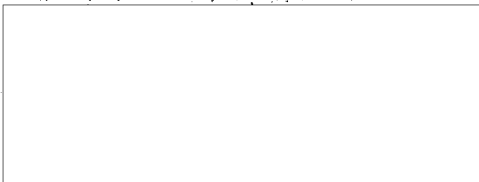


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**PERSPECTIVE****AFGHANISTAN AND THE DEFENSE OF THE SOVIET FAR EAST**   
Excerpts from an outside contractor's study


The military vulnerability of Soviet land routes to the Far East creates a strong need for a year-round sea route as a supplement or alternative. If Afghanistan could be secured, the Soviets could build a rail line connecting the USSR with future bases on the Indian Ocean, thereby avoiding Mediterranean choke points that hinder the Black Sea Fleet and substantially shortening the distance their forces would have to cover. 

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**The Strategic Requirement**

Russia's predicament concerning the military support of its far Eastern territories dates from the 19th century. After gaining control of Port Arthur, its first (and only) ice-free naval base on an open shore, Russia concentrated there its largest and most advanced battle fleet. The rapid military buildup required a permanent modern rail link to safeguard the connection with metropolitan Russia. But one of the chief reasons Russia lost to Japan in 1905 was that all its supplies had to go by land because of the Japanese naval blockade. 

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The same difficulties exist today, while the stakes have escalated. Soviet east-west land transportation relies exclusively on the railway system. The Trans-Siberian Railway remains the only proven land bridge but is overloaded by its double tasks of carrying military supplies and civilian goods. The heaviest traffic is between Krasnoyarsk and Vladivostok, also the stretch of track most vulnerable to Chinese cross-border incursions. 

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To alleviate this burden on the eastern Trans-Siberian Railway, Moscow decided in 1974 to build the 4,000-kilometer Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) north of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The line's 2,000 bridges and 30 kilometers of tunnels also make the BAM extremely vulnerable to Chinese rocket attacks and sabotage. 

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Efforts to complete the BAM appear related to the enormous military buildup in the Far Eastern zone in the 1960s. Since 1979 the Far Eastern theater along the Chinese frontier has been referred to as a principal (glavnyi) theater, putting it on a par with the theater facing NATO. The Pacific Fleet, the largest of the four separate Soviet fleets in terms of surface units, also covers the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. [redacted]

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As much as one-third of Soviet military manpower and materiel is now deployed in the Far East. The continuing buildup in the Far East suggests a Soviet effort to prepare for the worst case: a simultaneous outbreak of hostility against the United States in Europe as well as the Pacific, with China hostile too. The total military manpower in the Far Eastern theater is at least one million, and possibly as high as 1.4 million. East of Lake Baikal there is one Soviet soldier for every three male civilians. [redacted]

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Despite the very large numbers of troops and military equipment and fuel stockpiled there, Far Eastern theater forces could not function for longer than two months following the interruption of the Trans-Siberian Railway and imposition of an effective naval blockade. Moreover, within a radius of 3,200 kilometers of Khabarovsk, barely five million Soviet citizens face one hundred times as many Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. In any conflict short of nuclear exchange, the odds for Soviet forces in the Far East are poor. Thus, a sea route, and the naval forces and facilities to protect it, carry a high strategic priority. [redacted]

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#### Naval Ambitions and Constraints

During the last thirty years the Soviet Navy has been transformed from a coastal force into a blue water navy with global reach. Similarly, the Soviet merchant marine, with its wide variety of supporting "fishing" vessels, now exceeds US tonnage. The current construction of the first Soviet nuclear aircraft carrier further indicates that the Soviet Union aspires to parity with the United States as a seapower. The Soviet Navy already has more submarines, although many

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are still non-nuclear, and more minor combatants and auxiliary vessels, than the US. [REDACTED]

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Despite this naval expansion, the Soviet Union remains the second seapower. In large part, this reflects the constraints of the geography of the northern Eurasian land mass. Four separate Soviet fleets must be maintained. Furthermore, the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets are trapped behind narrow straits which could be sealed in the event of a global war. Ships from Vladivostok must pass through three narrow straits controlled by Japan to gain access to the high sea. The only existing Soviet base on the open sea, Petropavlovsk, not only suffers from ice and fog, but lacks a rail connection with the hinterland. All Soviet mainland bases are located in shallow coastal waters, rendering them highly vulnerable to mining. This applies to the naval complexes in the Kola inlet, as well as to the three major bases in the Pacific. The Northern and Pacific Fleets, which comprise the bulk of the Soviet Navy, are also subjected to the vicissitudes of climate, especially ice and fog. [REDACTED]

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A second major problem of Soviet naval strategy concerns the survival of the Far Eastern force in the event of a Sino-Soviet war. Because of the possible interdiction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the USSR needs a substantial capability to ship supplies from metropolitan Russia by sea via the Indian Ocean. In peacetime the most convenient starting points for the southern sea lanes of communications are the Black Sea ports, over 10,000 nautical miles from Vladivostok. Soviet convoys would also have to negotiate the Turkish Straits and Suez, which are in hostile hands. Meanwhile, the Soviet Navy is expanding its new facilities at Cam Ranh Bay to gain control over the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. Without these facilities, the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron would need about three weeks to reach its normal operating area in the Gulf of Aden. [REDACTED]

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Were the starting point for the southern sea lanes of communications established on the northern shores of the Indian Ocean, anywhere between Bandar Abbas and Karachi, the distance to Vladivostok would be reduced

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and the two Mediterranean choke points would be bypassed. It is only the Indo-Persian corridor, with Afghanistan at its center, that can provide Moscow with access to a year-round naval base, which could be eventually connected with the heartland by rail. From such a naval base, Soviet nuclear submarines and surface vessels could be kept in optimal combat readiness and responsive to alert throughout the year, without the hindrance of geographical limitations or adverse climate. But to be of substantial utility, such a base would need to be connected with the Soviet rail system. [redacted]

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The Soviet Union today does not manifest any compulsion to seize a naval strongpoint on the northern shore of the Indian Ocean. As yet, there is no evidence that the invasion of Afghanistan belies a Soviet blueprint for further territorial expansion, and there is insufficient evidence to suggest from the development of military operations inside Afghanistan that Iran, Pakistan, or Persian Gulf oil were the ultimate ends, and Afghanistan simply a means thereto. An overt Soviet airborne invasion or an air strike against Gulf oil installations still seems highly unlikely. [redacted]

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At the same time, the Soviet position in Afghanistan offers wide opportunity for Soviet-sponsored subversion, combined with a low keyed but systematic penetration of the strategic infrastructure in the region. Such penetration had been pursued in Afghanistan years before the invasion. The exploitation of separatist movements in the region could make Soviet involvement almost irresistible. The coup de theater could come in the form of an invitation to Soviet experts and advisers, not necessarily troops, to assist in the construction of perhaps a new "People's Republic of Baluchistan" (with parallel developments possible in "Pashtunistan," Iranian Azerbaijan and Kurdistan). [redacted]

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#### The Central Asian Alternative

Russia's so-called drive to warm water ports and the systematic buildup of the transportation infrastructure south of the heartland have gone hand in hand for many

[redacted]

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years. A modern transport infrastructure is being expanded from the Soviet Union into Afghanistan, the country which until recently was the last hiatus between the railway systems in Central Asia and Iran and the vast network in India. Thanks to modern technology, hitherto impassable mountains, such as the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram, are no longer insuperable obstacles. [REDACTED]

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It is not known whether the present Soviet rail spurs being extended south from Kushka, and from Termez across the new Amu Darya bridge, will eventually link up with the yet incomplete Iranian and Pakistani rail systems, both of which operate on a different gauge. When the answer to this becomes clear, it could be an event of major geostrategic importance. [REDACTED]

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There are three options for reaching the warm waters of the Indian Ocean which the Soviet Union might exploit.

--The most convenient overland access, because it is already available, is from Azerbaijan along the old Julfa-Tabriz railway, connected since 1958 with Tehran and electrified in 1982 with Soviet assistance. In Tehran it joins the Trans-Iranian Railway, which connects the Caspian port of Bandar Shah with Bandar Shahpur (now Bandar Khomeini) at the head of the Persian Gulf. During World War II it served as a major lend-lease supply route for the Red Army; almost 8 million tons of supplies were ferried through between 1942 and 1945. A major strategic drawback of this option, however, is that a future Soviet naval base would be located at the head of the Persian Gulf, far from the open sea.

--Another means would be to control the Gulf's bottleneck, the Strait of Hormuz, from Bandar Abbas and Chah Bahar in Baluchistan. These ports are less than 800 kilometers away from the nearest Soviet air base in Afghanistan. Neither harbor, however, has good communications with the hinterland, and it would take years before a modern highway or

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railway could reach them from the USSR. Even if the Soviets decide to proceed via sparsely populated Khorasan and Seistan, the distance and terrain are forbidding; it is almost 1300 kilometers by road from Ashkhabad to Bandar Abbas and 1450 kilometers from Kushka to Chah Bahar. [redacted]

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--Finally, if the Soviets are serious about expanding railways in Afghanistan--assuming they can subdue the resistance--they could establish within ten years a main line from north to south (as they did across Mongolia) linking Kushka-Herat-Qandahar-Chaman. This would allow heavy trains to pass via the Pakistani broad-gauge network through Quetta, the Bolan Pass, down to Karachi on the Indian Ocean. [redacted]

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All of these possible routes, of course, involve political as much as geographical obstacles. The first would require Iranian agreement to open its rail lines to Soviet military shipments and to allow the construction of Soviet naval facilities at the Bandar Shahpur terminus. This is not presently obtainable and, if it became so owing to a radical change in Iranian policy, it would still remain vulnerable to further vicissitudes in Iranian politics. The second and third require the ratification by Afghanistan and action against Pakistan. Nevertheless, in the long view--which Moscow habitually takes--none can be considered beyond the USSR's reach. Should the Soviets ever acquire direct access to a second Port Arthur in the Indian Ocean, situated at the end of a railway line connected with its Eurasian heartland, Moscow will have overcome a major geostrategic disadvantage and put the West in a grave position. The possible gains may well contribute significantly to Soviet determination to prevail in Afghanistan. [redacted]

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