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# The Insurgent Supply Network in Afghanistan: Building an Effective System

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An Intelligence Assessment

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# **The Insurgent Supply Network in Afghanistan: Building an Effective System**



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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This paper was prepared by  Office of  
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was



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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, South Asia Division, NESA,



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**The Insurgent Supply Network  
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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 17 July 1985  
was used in this report.*

Increases in military supplies delivered via Pakistan and Iran to insurgent groups fighting in Afghanistan have gradually improved the resistance's ability to attack Soviet targets. Despite numerous problems, the guerrillas are establishing a fairly effective system of resupplying their forces, and they appear better armed than at any time since the Soviet invasion in 1979.

In addition to the danger of attacks by Soviet and Afghan troops, insurgents must overcome many other obstacles in trying to supply their forces:

- Transportation problems will continue to be a major hindrance to resupply efforts.
- The cost of transporting goods rises substantially with the distance and difficulty of the route, and insurgent groups in remote locations are poorly armed compared to their counterparts in the border provinces.
- Confrontations between rival guerrilla groups sometimes cause delays and supply losses.
- Corruption and theft prevent a small quantity of weapons and ammunition from reaching the insurgent groups for which they were intended.

Concern about losses to Soviet and Afghan forces has prompted many resistance groups to take extensive precautions to ensure the safety of their supply lines. Soviet efforts to reduce insurgent infiltration—enhanced by tactical changes, equipment improvements, and small force augmentations—are making insurgent movement more dangerous but are unlikely to prevent the resistance from resupplying their forces in Afghanistan. The guerrillas most likely will be able to adjust their tactics to counter the recent improvements in Soviet capabilities in the border areas, and Moscow's reluctance to increase its forces sufficiently to seal the border will continue to limit Soviet success.

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## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Key Judgments	iii
Arms Supplies	1
Transporting the Supplies	2
Resupply Problems	4
Corruption and Theft	7
Soviet Efforts To Reduce Insurgent Infiltration	8
Countermeasures to Soviet Interdiction Efforts	9
Prospects	10

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### The Insurgent Supply Network in Afghanistan: Building an Effective System



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We estimate that the number of armed Afghan insurgents has risen dramatically from 50,000 to 100,000 at the time of the Soviet invasion to at least 150,000 full- or part-time fighters.<sup>1</sup> An improving resistance logistic system has abetted the growth of insurgent arms holdings



### Alliance of Afghan Resistance Parties Based in Pakistan

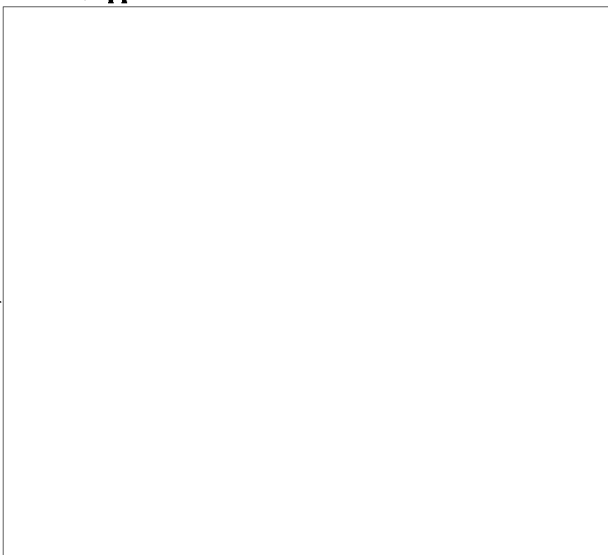
Group	Leader	Ethnic Composition
<b>Islamic Fundamentalist</b>		
Hizbi Islami (Islamic Party) (Gulbuddin)	Gulbuddin Hekmatyar	Pushtun
Hizbi Islami (Islamic Party) (Khalis)	Mohammad Yunus Khalis	Pushtun
Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan	Abdul Rasul Sayyaf	Pushtun
Jamiat-i-Islami (Islamic Society)	Burhanuddin Rabbani	Tajik
<b>Moderate Islamic</b>		
Harakat-Inqilab-i-Islami (Islamic Revolutionary Movement)	Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi	Pushtun
Jabna-i-Najat-i-Milli Afghanistan (Afghanistan National Liberation Front)	Sibghatullah Mojadedi	Pushtun
Mahaz-i-Milli-Islami (National Islamic Front)	Sayed Ahmad Gailani	Pushtun



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### Arms Supplies



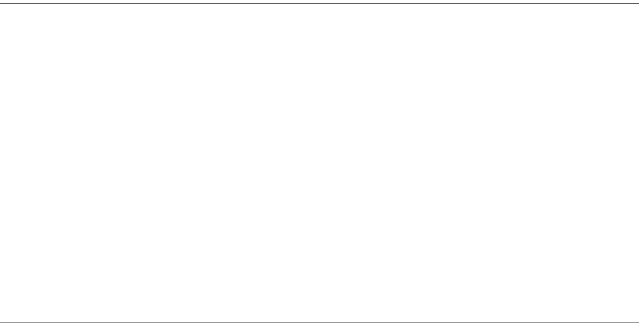
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Insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan obtain their arms in several ways. Most insurgents are supplied by the Peshawar-based resistance organizations; some capture them from Soviet and Afghan forces; others steal arms from rival groups; and some guerrillas purchase their supplies directly from arms bazaars in Pakistan and sources inside Afghanistan.



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Some insurgent groups in Afghanistan apparently bypass the Peshawar resistance organizations and receive their supplies directly from



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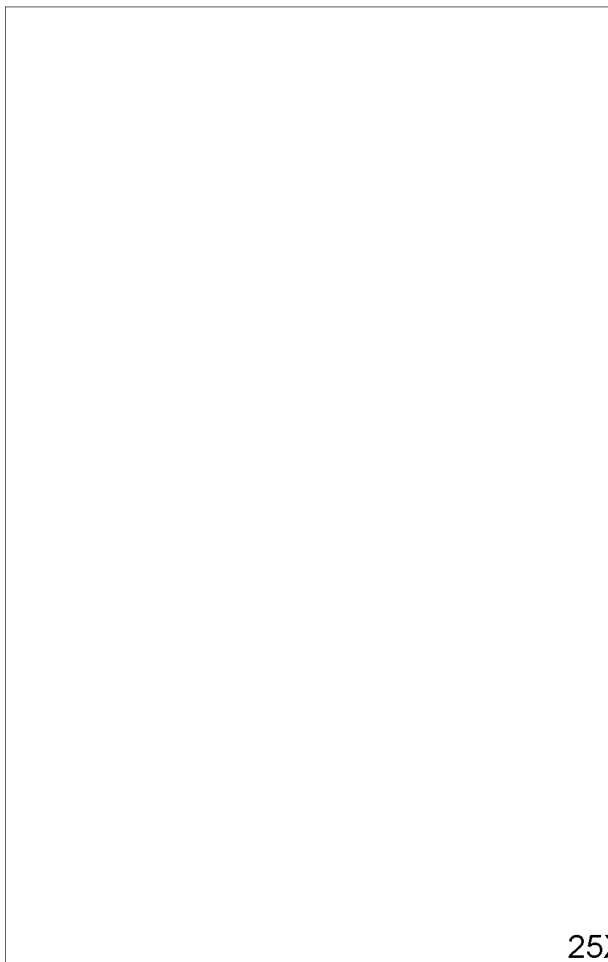
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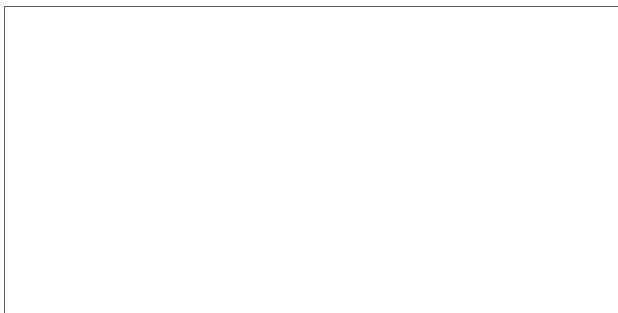
**Criteria for Supply Distribution**

*General criteria used by Pakistan-based resistance parties for determining the distribution of supplies to commanders in Afghanistan:*

- *Strategic importance of the group's area of operations.*
- *Size of the insurgent group.*
- *Political and military influence of the commander and his personal contacts in Pakistan.*
- *Extent of losses suffered by group in operations.*
- *Level of activity of the group.*
- *Nature of the group's mission or missions.*
- *Amount of supplies available to the Pakistan-based party*



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**Transporting the Supplies**

The insurgent commander to whom the supplies are issued in Peshawar is responsible for arranging for their transportation from the border storage areas to his group in Afghanistan.

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most supply caravans consist of insurgents' and privately owned trucks and animals. We believe the mode of transport depends mainly on the funds available to the insurgent group, transportation costs, and the route the insurgents will use to reach their destination. In the eastern provinces, most supplies are transported on mules, horses, or half-ton trucks. Insurgents resupplying their forces in southwestern and western Afghanistan tend to use mostly trucks and camels.

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most weapons and ammunition are hidden in buses and trucks and moved in by road from Pakistan rather than through remote regions on the backs of animals

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The generally rugged geography of Afghanistan's borders is a major advantage for the resistance. Over the past five years, the insurgents have used hundreds of routes from Pakistan and Iran to deliver military goods to their groups fighting in Afghanistan.

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Soviets believe that the insurgents can use approximately 300 mountain passes between Pakistan and Afghanistan to move arms and other equipment, but we believe that the number is higher. If the Soviets succeeded in closing all of the main passes to Pakistan, guerrilla forces probably would switch to alternative—albeit less convenient and more time-consuming—routes. Resistance movements across the long Iranian frontier

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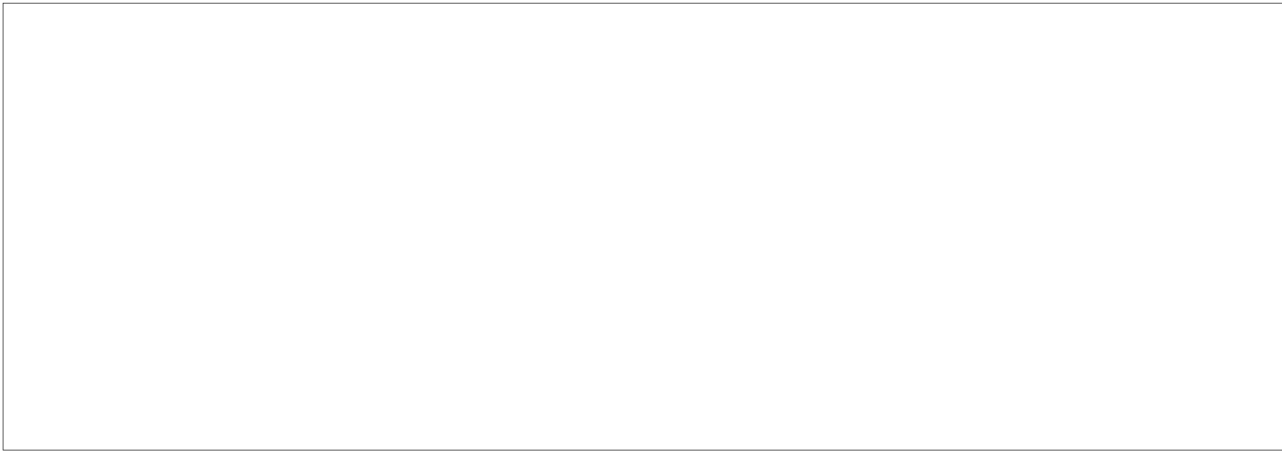
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**Figure 1**  
**Areas of Afghanistan Unsuitable to Cross-Country Movement by Wheeled and Tracked Vehicles**

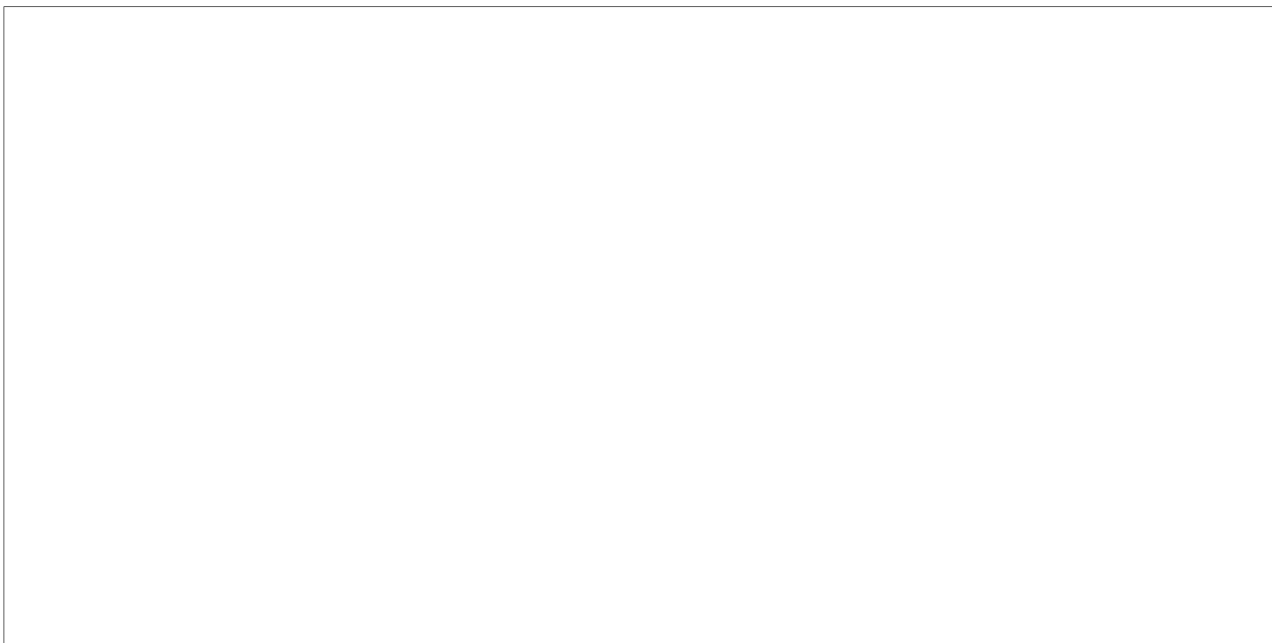


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**Corruption and Theft**

We believe a small quantity of the insurgents' military supplies is lost through corruption and theft. Most field commanders for large guerrilla groups in Afghanistan report few significant problems with corruption, and some, like Panjsher Valley commander Masood, authorize harsh punishment for insurgents involved in arms thefts. Nonetheless, arms smuggling and black-market dealing are traditional in Afghanistan, and there are some insurgent leaders who hoard the arms and ammunition they receive from Pakistan, trade them for other weapons, or sell them for private gain. We question the claims of some insurgent sources, most of whom have ties to groups that receive few arms from resistance organizations in Pakistan, that as much as 60 percent of the military supplies provided to the insurgents are diverted. Based on reporting from fairly reliable sources, we believe that the amount lost because of corruption or theft is probably only 10 to 30 percent of supplies [redacted]

in late 1983 and early 1984 sold for personal profit all of the arms and ammunition consigned to him for routing to western Afghanistan. [redacted] some arms caravans heading into Afghanistan turn around at the border and bring the arms to secret caches from which they are sold on the open or black market. [redacted] some arms and ammunition that were authorized for distribution to the resistance were sold to Pakistani dissidents or smuggled into India. Some Afghans are also selling Pakistani-supplied weapons in Iran to the Tudeh (Communist) Party [redacted]

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Some insurgent groups in Afghanistan—mainly those with no or only poor connections to the seven major Peshawar resistance groups—steal arms and ammunition from other groups, probably because they are disgruntled with the supply network and their inability to obtain sufficient arms in Pakistan [redacted]

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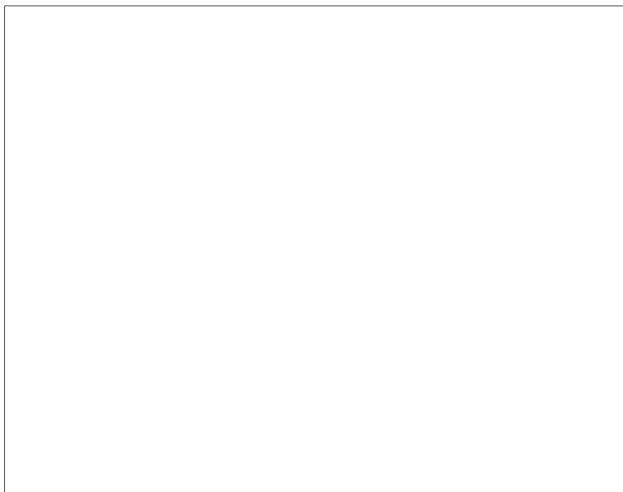
[redacted] insurgent commander from the small Fedayed-i-Islami organization, has waylaid caravans entering Qandahar Province near Spin Buldak and stolen their weapons because he is not receiving weapons from the

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Desire for personal profit or political gain motivates some insurgents to divert arms intended for groups in Afghanistan. [redacted] a few insurgent staff members in Pakistan who are responsible for distributing arms sell them to noninsurgent buyers or to groups other than those to which the supplies are authorized. At least one arms distributor

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**Pakistani Corruption**



especially Sayed Ahmad Gailani—whose groups receive fewer arms from Pakistan than the rival fundamentalist organizations. Gailani probably receives smaller quantities of weapons than other groups because his insurgents are neither very active nor effective. [redacted] Islamabad decided in January 1980 to provide arms mostly to groups that would use them effectively. We believe that the accusations by Gailani are aimed at discrediting the fundamentalists and the Pakistani Government [redacted]

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Accusations of Pakistani diversion in the media [redacted] are based on rumors and contacts with insurgent leaders like Gailani. These reports are not, in our view, reliable evidence against Pakistan [redacted]

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Most of the allegations against Islamabad are by leaders of the moderate resistance organizations—

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Pakistanis. He recently defected to the Kabul government. Small groups like Ismatullah's are strong candidates for recruitment by the regime because they tend to switch loyalties often to obtain military supplies, other goods, or money [redacted]

[redacted] the Soviets began using mobile ambush teams in southwestern Afghanistan in late 1983. Helicopter-supplied teams of some 30 troops operate for two to 20 days to monitor insurgent movements and conduct ambushes in a given area.

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**Soviet Efforts To Reduce Insurgent Infiltration**

The Soviets and Afghans are implementing tactical changes to try to stem infiltration in the border regions. They continue to rely mainly on large block-and-sweep operations, which they are conducting frequently. The Soviets also are increasing their use of small-unit tactics and heliborne assaults to trap insurgent caravans:

• [redacted] the Soviets have increased their air patrols of passes from Pakistan into the eastern provinces and are trying to respond more quickly to aerial reconnaissance confirmation of caravan movements.

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• Unlike in the past when Soviet and Afghan attacks dropped sharply in the winter, fighting in border areas has continued with little interruption since last summer. The Soviets launched one of their largest operations of the war in the Konar Valley in late May, concentrating on blocking resistance infiltration and escape routes and sweeping the area.

• Late last year Afghan regime units renewed their efforts to halt guerrilla traffic on roads into Afghanistan by garrisoning a series of posts and temporary camps in the eastern provinces. [redacted]

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• [redacted] Soviet heliborne assaults and ambushes of insurgent caravans have increased over the past year.

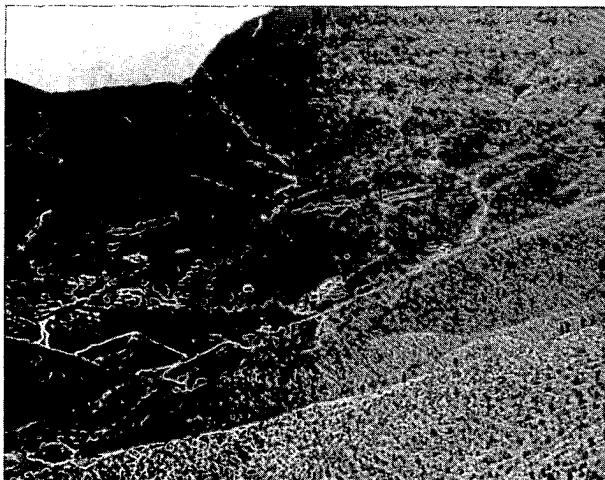
Recent increases in Soviet manpower in the border provinces are improving their capabilities against insurgent infiltration, but their numbers are still far too few to seal the border. [redacted] over the past 18 months the Soviets

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*In some areas of Afghanistan terrain offers few places for concealment and leaves the insurgents open to "pop-up" attacks by Soviet or Afghan helicopters*



*Rough terrain often complicates insurgent resupply efforts, making vehicular traffic impossible and straining humans and animals. It also conceals convoy movements and reduces their vulnerability to attack.*

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more than doubled the number of special-purpose forces—Spetsnaz—in the country and sent an additional motorized rifle regiment from the USSR to Herat. The regiment will enhance pipeline security and probably conduct sweep operations close to the Iranian border.

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The Soviets probably hope new equipment will also improve their capabilities. The use of BM-27 multiple rocket launchers, which reliable sources report are now in Afghanistan, in addition to helicopters will greatly enhance their ability to quickly sow antipersonnel mines in areas of suspected insurgent infiltration from long range. The Soviets, however, will be unable to mine all insurgent trails, and the guerrillas as in the past most likely will devise tactics to avoid or defuse the mines.

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Besides increasing air and ground reconnaissance and continuing to rely heavily on informants, the Soviets apparently are trying other methods to improve their abilities to detect supply efforts. Insurgents from Lowgar Province found a small device—probably a tracking and locating transmitter—hidden between blankets on a camel in a convoy from Pakistan.

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**Countermeasures to Soviet Interdiction Efforts**

Many insurgent groups take extensive precautions while traveling to ensure the safety of their supply lines. Guerrilla groups usually split their caravans into units of no more than 10 animals to avoid detection by Soviet and Afghan forces; trucks resupply some insurgent groups in Afghanistan, but they rarely travel in convoys. When a caravan is attacked by Soviet or Afghan troops, the guerrillas usually scatter, take defensive positions, and hold their fire to avoid counterfire. The caravan then reforms at a predetermined location where its greater strength will protect it against attacks by rival groups. In regions where terrain provides little natural cover, guerrillas travel at night so their movement will not be detected by aircraft. Travel during the day is usually restricted to rough terrain, away from main roads, where the groups run less risk of being spotted.

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The insurgent information network often allows caravans to alter their routes to avoid Soviet and Afghan operations or patrols. Villagers, contacts in the Afghan military, and other resistance groups provide

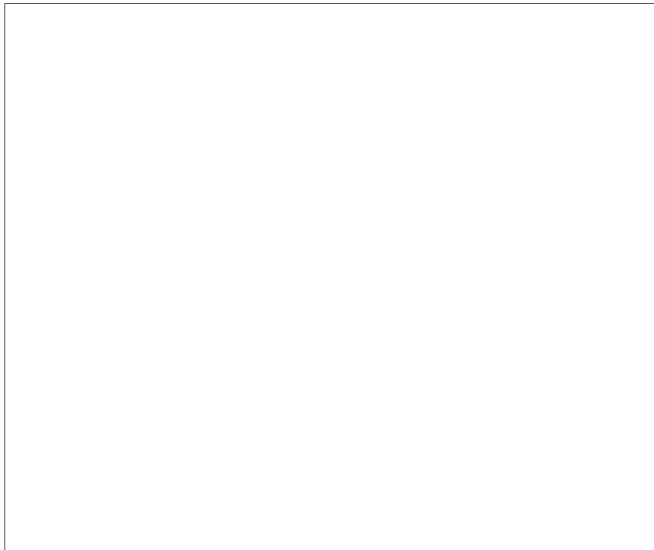
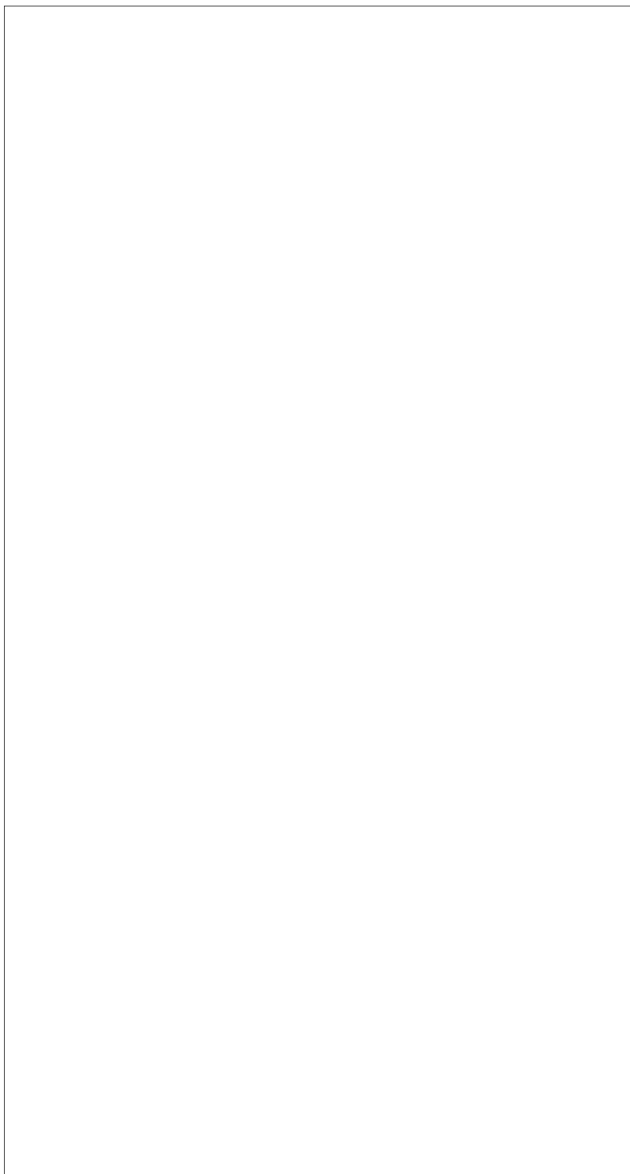
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Because Moscow realizes that resistance activity inside Afghanistan depends on arms flows across the borders, it is likely to continue intensifying political and military pressure on Pakistan and Iran to stop their support to the insurgents [redacted]

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Soviet political and military efforts to stop the flow of arms to the resistance, however, are unlikely to prevent the insurgents from resupplying their forces. The number of insurgent counterambushes of Soviet and Afghan heliborne assault teams is likely to increase over the coming months. According to a fairly reliable source, insurgent leaders in Qandahar Province have instructed their forces to aggressively patrol areas known or suspected to be landing zones for Soviet heliborne forces attempting to ambush resistance supply columns. Panjsher Valley guerrillas already have practiced counterambush tactics during several Soviet and Afghan regime campaigns into the valley and could use them to protect their supply lines.

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**Prospects**

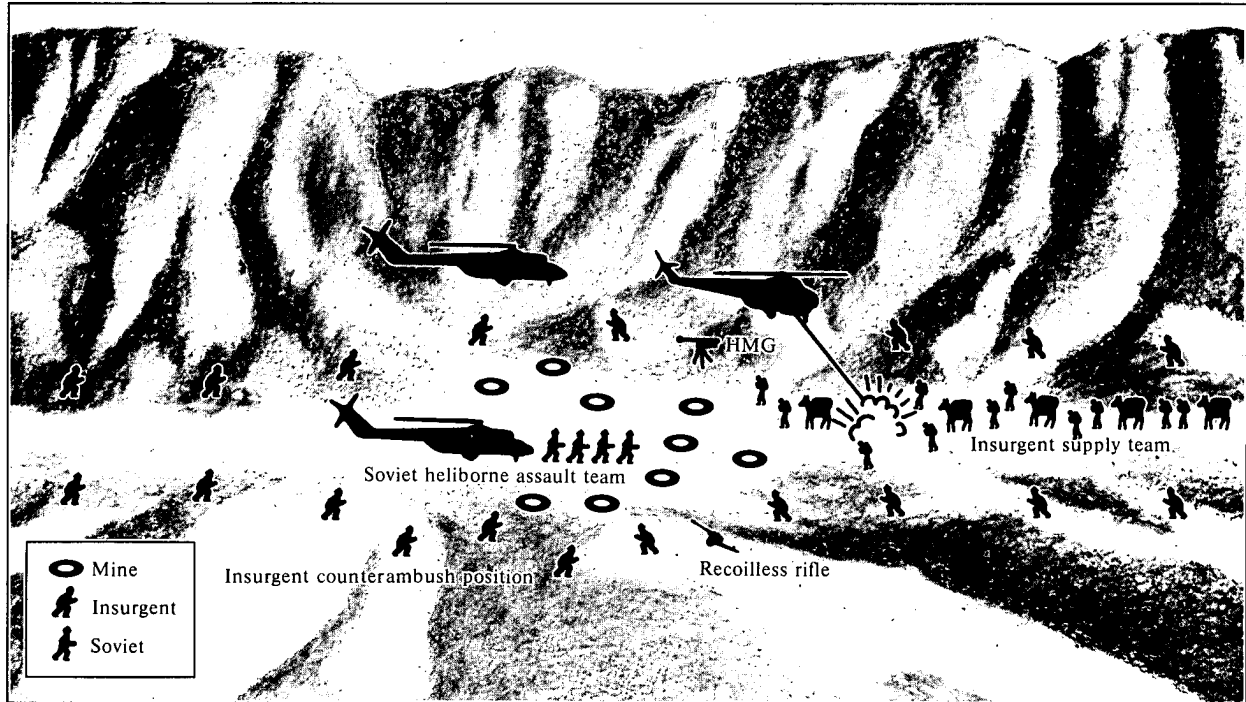
The Afghan insurgents will have to overcome numerous problems if they are to maintain their resupply routes. The availability and high cost of transportation will continue to be significant hindrances. Resistance forces also are likely to find travel more hazardous and lose more military supplies over the coming months as Soviet forces conduct large and more frequent operations near the borders and become more adept at locating supply routes and confiscating weapons. [redacted]

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**Figure 2**  
**Insurgent Counterambush of a Soviet**  
**Heliborne Assault Team**



1. Insurgent caravan moves along scheduled route.
2. Local insurgent group patrols sections of the caravan route and sets up counterambush teams ahead of the caravan.
3. Soviet ambush team (heliborne assault force) attempts to ambush caravan.
4. Pre-positioned insurgents open fire on Soviet ambush team, warning caravan in the process.
5. Caravan scatters and regroups at predetermined point.

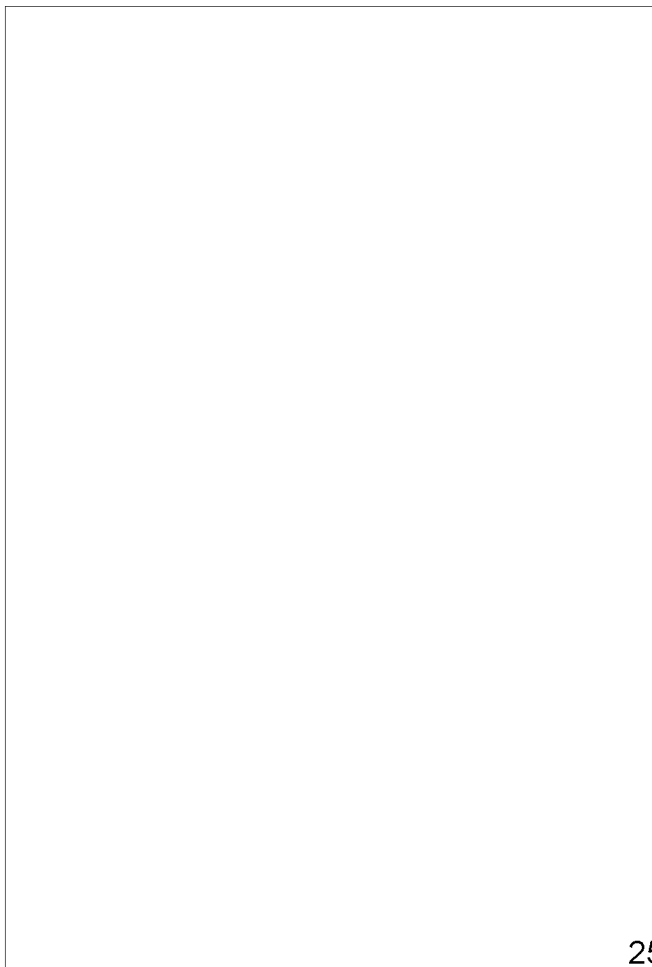
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Moreover, the guerrillas quickly adapt to Soviet and Afghan regime tactical changes, and they probably will try to offset their losses by bringing in larger quantities of military goods and switching to less convenient routes. Moscow's reluctance to increase its forces sufficiently to seal the border also will continue to limit Soviet success in reducing the flow of insurgent supplies into Afghanistan.

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