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Afghanistan Situation Report

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3 February 1987

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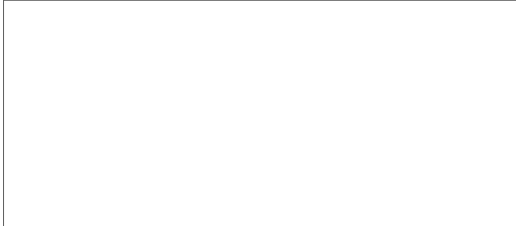
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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT



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Iranian

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policy regarding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has been somewhat equivocal, reflecting the lower priority the Afghan issue has for Iranian policymakers.



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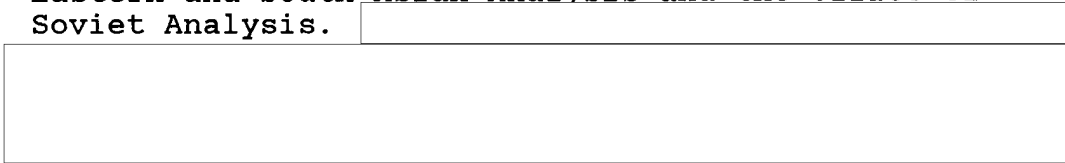
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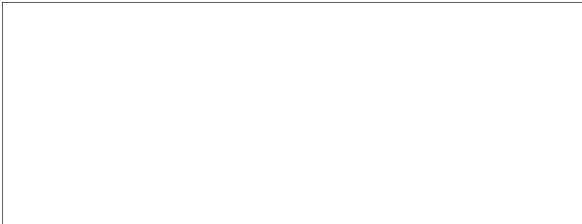


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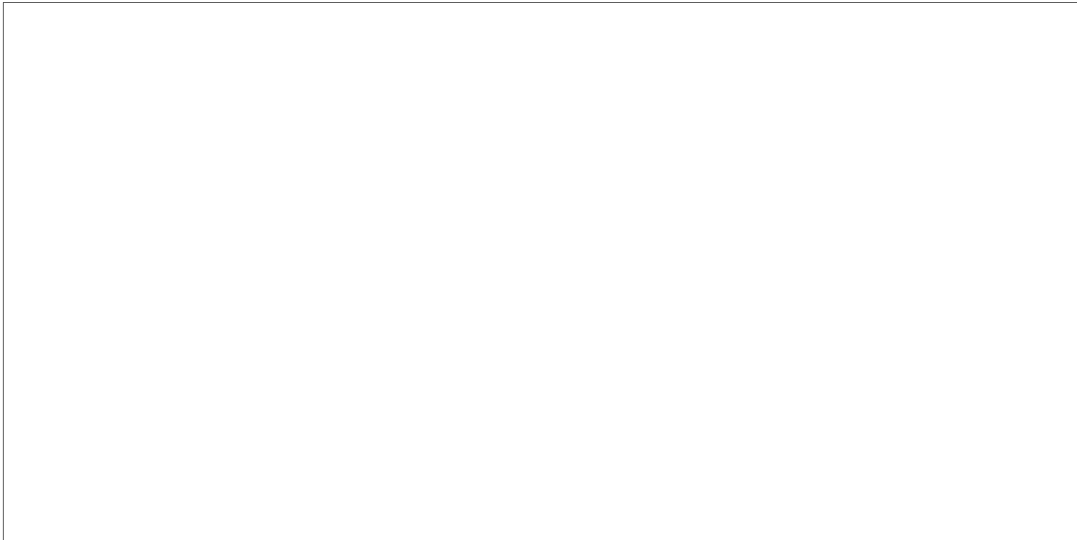
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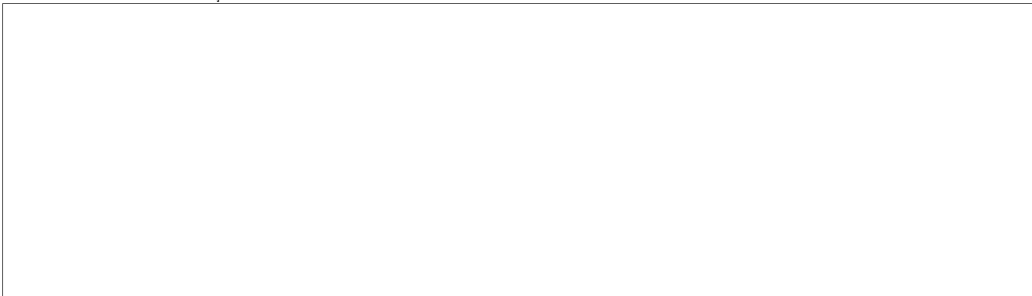
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-- In a rare public admission, a Soviet official told Western journalists on 18 January that two Soviet helicopters had recently been lost to anti-aircraft missiles in the Kabul area. Last November a Soviet official told his lecture audience that a Soviet TV correspondent had been killed during the limited troop withdrawal when his helicopter was downed by insurgents. 

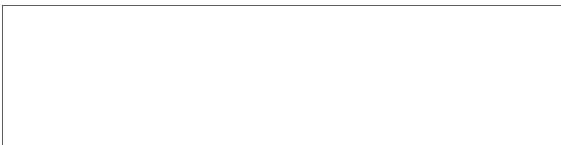
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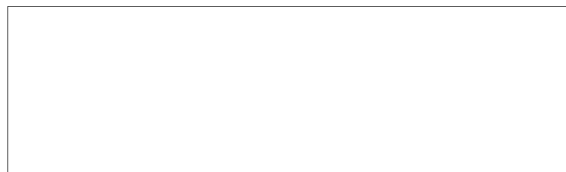


-- The Soviets are strengthening physical security in the Kabul area, according to the US Embassy in Kabul. They have dug ditches and erected extensive dirt barriers adjacent to the Kabul airport, and they lowered the

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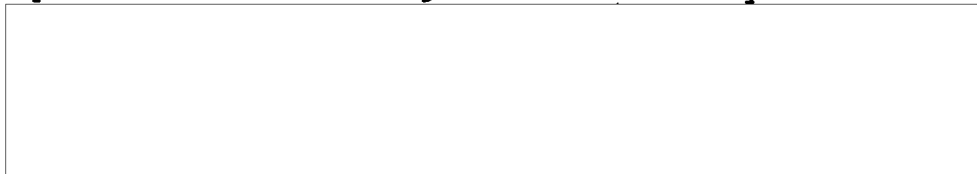


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elevation of a bridge on the Salang road that provided a commanding view of the city.



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-- The Afghan regime has finally agreed to allow the presence of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Kabul. The ICRC will establish medical clinics and visit regime-held prisoners, according to the US Mission in Geneva. Negotiations for the opening of an ICRC office in Kabul--which was tentatively agreed to last April--had been bogged down by the regime's reluctance to grant ICRC representatives access to prisoners. Kabul's new flexibility on prisoner visits--scheduled to begin in mid-February--is almost certainly designed to bolster its international image and give credibility to its recent national reconciliation initiative.



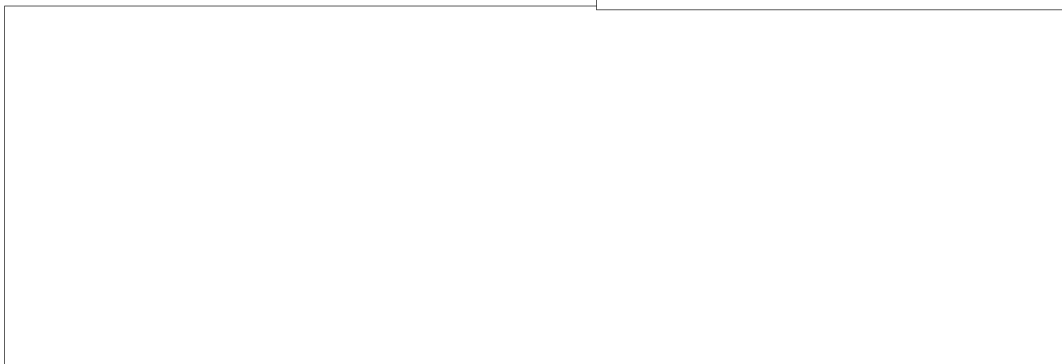
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-- On 30 January the Afghan regime signed an agreement of cooperation with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), according to Soviet press reports. Kabul had been given observer status at the 42nd regular session of CMEA in November. The regime already has economic ties with CMEA countries and probably sought the accord largely to enhance its legitimacy.



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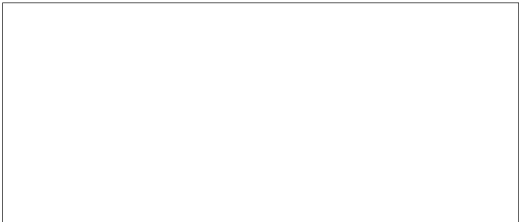
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PERSPECTIVE

IRAN'S RESPONSE TO THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN



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Iran has equivocated in its policies and been very selective in its responses to the Soviet invasion and the military destruction of Afghanistan. Although the invasion has generally been greeted with private horror and outrage in Iran, the public posture of Ayatollah Khomeini and his regime has been muted. Iran has provided only limited aid to the guerrillas, at levels more commensurate with its public posture than its private outrage. Matters of internal security and the war with Iraq have taken precedence with the Khomeini regime, leaving only limited bureaucratic capacity to deal with the question of the Soviet invasion and the Afghan guerrillas.



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The Ayatollah's Attitudes

Ayatollah Khomeini has been remarkably consistent in his speeches concerning Afghanistan.

- There are relatively few references to Afghanistan or the Soviet invasion in any of them.
- The references to the Soviets tend to be illustrative of larger points that the Ayatollah is trying to establish for his audience. The invasion is never portrayed as a threat in any way to Iran.
- The Soviet Union, unlike the US, is rarely portrayed as an enemy of the Islamic Republic or Muslim peoples of the world. Despite the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan, the Ayatollah believes that the US represents the greater threat to Islamic Iran.



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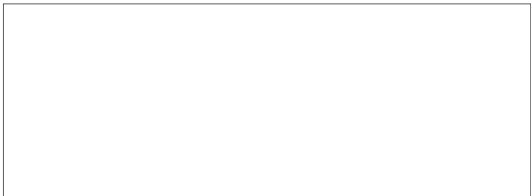
The Ayatollah's public position on Afghanistan has rarely wavered, irrespective of the course of the war with Iraq, the release of the US diplomats, or internal




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violence in Iran. The following comment to a group of Iranians about to leave in 1983 for the haj in Saudi Arabia is characteristic of the formula which the Ayatollah uses for addressing the subject of Afghanistan. 


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"You are going on a haj (pilgrimage) at a time when the big powers are busy corrupting the region. On the one hand, the Soviet Union is committing an act of aggression against Afghanistan and against any other place they (sic) can. It is crushing the people of Afghanistan. Praise be to God, the Afghan nation is manfully resisting that great power.

On the other hand, America, which heads the criminals, is committing aggression against and interfering in all oppressed countries, particularly Muslim countries. It has made countries wishing to remain independent the priority target for its oppression." 

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Sympathy and Concern

Other Iranian officials have issued biting criticisms of the Soviet invasion. Ayatollah Montazeri, for example, likened the relation between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan to that of the United States and Israel--an extremely sharp attack. Hojjat ol-Eslam Hashemi Rafsanjani, speaker of Iran's parliament, said; "We consider the aggression in Afghanistan an invasion of Iran and the struggle of the Iranian nation." Much of the force of these declarations is meant for domestic consumption. By having such harsh statements made by Iranian officials who do not speak for the Islamic Republic, the regime is able to take political stands without committing itself to any strident policies. 

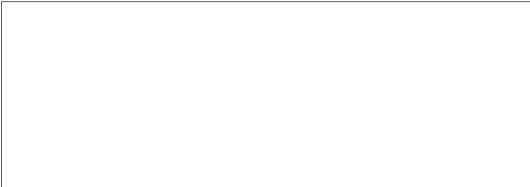
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The public caution of the Ayatollah has been reflected in Iran's policies toward the Afghan refugees in Iran and the guerrillas seeking financial and military support. The Islamic Republic has exercised tight control over the approximately 1.5 million refugees who



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have fled to Iran. Iran also has steadfastly refused to give military assistance to the main Afghan guerrilla groups.



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The influx of refugees has been a great problem. Reports from Iran, both published and from personal interviews, indicate that Afghans are responsible for many crimes, including theft, rape, buying and selling narcotics, and smuggling various goods to sell on the black market. Afghans have been associated with criminal activity since they began coming to Iran looking for work during Iran's oil boom of the mid-1970s.



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The presence of large numbers of Afghan refugees is viewed as a potential internal threat to the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, a high priority of the regime has been to create mechanisms whereby the Afghans can be controlled. They have succeeded to a remarkable extent. In March 1983 the government began issuing identity cards to Afghans and threatened to punish or deport any Afghan who did not register. Guidelines for the employment of Afghans were drawn up by the Ministry of Labor and Soviet Social Affairs. Afghans were also prohibited from traveling within Iran without express permission.



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Afghan political activity was sharply curbed; only those groups that the Iranian leaders supported could maintain offices or engage in open political activities. As the deputy Minister of the Interior, Abbas Akhundi, put it, "Once they realize and understand that they are not dependent on the Eastern or Western superpowers, they can continue their political activities within the framework of the Islamic Republic." Many Afghans who did not follow the procedures or were suspected of crimes were arrested. Thousands of refugees who violated Iranian regulations designed to control the Afghan refugees have reportedly been deported, primarily to Pakistan. Some allegedly have been forced back into Afghanistan.



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While instituting rigorous procedures to control the behavior of the refugees, the regime in Iran has been careful to attribute the difficulties which Iran has



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had with the refugees to only marginal troublemakers.



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A Useful Tool

Iran has used Afghans to advance the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic. The Iranian Government reportedly has used Afghan volunteers in the war against Iraq; some Iranian dissident groups report that many of the Afghans are forcibly taken to the front. These dissident groups say that the Iranian Government is also training many Afghans to become members of the Revolutionary Guards. The dissident groups argue that the Afghans would serve as particularly brutal defenders of the regime since they would feel only slight qualms about oppressing the Iranian people.



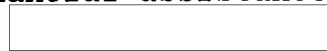
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The Afghans refugees are also used to advance Iran's ultimate foreign policy goal, the establishment of additional Islamic Republics. The only Afghan political groups allowed to maintain a presence in Iran are Shiite groups that adhere to Khomeini's political doctrine. Iran's influence is growing in some Afghan regions, especially the Hazarehjat, populated largely by Afghan Shiites. An arms flow, albeit slight, has also started. When Afghans spend time in Iran, they are indoctrinated by the Revolutionary Guards, who are also responsible for providing military training to the Afghans. Not only have the people of the Hazarehjat been armed with ideology, but they have developed an impressive political hierarchy and infrastructure.



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The Islamic Republic has independently pursued its own goals--to thwart a consolidation of Soviet power in Afghanistan. Iran has refrained from any massive aid to the guerrilla fighters and, unlike Pakistan, has refused to serve as a conduit for the transshipment of aid from China, Egypt, Israel, or the US. Similarly, Iran has similarly, refused financial assistance from Saudi Arabia for the refugees.



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No Negotiations

Iran has refused to participate in the indirect negotiations sponsored by the United Nations and has




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roundly condemned the process. When mention of negotiations was first made, President Khamene'i emphasized Iran's refusal to sit as a conference table with representatives of an "imposed government." Iran continues to reiterate that the first step to any negotiation is the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Iran believes that the talks are "not only illegitimate due to the absence of the mujahideen, who are the real representatives of Afghanistan, but would produce no results except to save the interests of the superpowers in the long run." 

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Iran's only manifest contribution to the peace process has been the publication of its own peace plan in November 1981. This plan called for:

--the unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops and the creation of an Islamic Republic modeled on that of Iran;

--the replacement of Soviet troops by an Islamic peacekeeping force; and

--an international meeting of Muslim clergymen, who would organize the mechanisms for the establishment of a provisional government. 

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The Iranian peace plan was not taken as a serious document and has played no role in international talks. 

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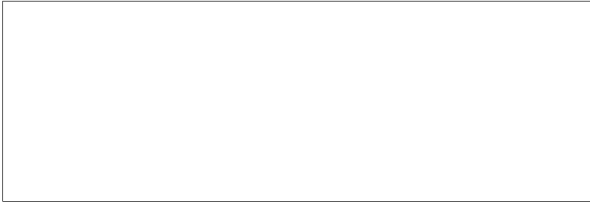
A Change of Course

In the event of a winding down of the war with Iraq, Iran probably would commit major foreign policy resources to the struggle in Afghanistan. Its failure to have done so is a reflection not so much of its ideological propensities or strategic sensibilities as much as a quite hard-headed judgment about the most efficient use of its limited resources. Stretched thin by its commitment to maintain control over the Iranian people in the face of formidable domestic political challenges and by its commitment to expel the Iraqi invaders and maintain the war until victory, Iran

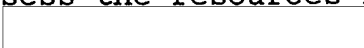


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simply does not possess the resources for another major policy initiative. 

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Another possibility exists that would lead to a forceful Iranian response. At present, there are at least two dissident groups in Iran--the Tudeh party and the Feday'in--which the Islamic Republic has virtually succeeded in eliminating. If the Kabul government should begin to supply major resources to these enemies of the Islamic Republic, Tehran can be expected to take the threat on its eastern border far more seriously than it has to date. 

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Khomeini's Pronouncements

Ayatollah Khomeini's first public mention of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not come until 30 March 1980. On that day, Ayatollah Khomeini received the late Dr. Mohammad Beheshti, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, along with more than 60 judges. The 52 American diplomats were still being held in Tehran, and the country was still struggling with the effects of the US embargo and seizure of Iran's assets. Ayatollah Khomeini was discussing the effects of American efforts to win the release of its citizens. He then said:



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"...The people got together, shouted 'God is great' and removed all obstacles in front of them. The situation is such that now no power is able to do anything. It is not possible to impose something on a nation."

...No power can impose its will, neither America nor the USSR. Neither can impose its will."



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The Ayatollah then went on to issue his first formal statements on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

"The day the Soviet Ambassador came to me and told me that the Afghan Government had asked the USSR to send troops there, I told him it would be a mistake on the part of the USSR. Obviously, the Soviet Government is capable of taking over Afghanistan, but it cannot remain there. If you think you may be able to occupy Afghanistan and keep it quiet, this is a vain idea. The Afghan people are Muslims who stand up to the Afghan Government. If you or any other government go (sic) there, you might be able to occupy it but you cannot keep it quiet. I adhere to the same idea even now."



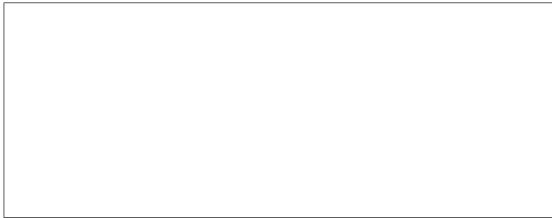
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Given his vituperative anti-US statements, the Ayatollah's treatment of the Soviet Union was mild. Clearly, the Ayatollah saw the US as a far greater and more immediate threat to the revolution than the invasion of a neighboring country by the other superpower. He did not mention Afghanistan again until July 1980, when he received "a group of clergymen and inhabitants of Tehran" to discuss with them the recently aborted Air Force coup against the Islamic Republic. The Ayatollah knew the coup was to be executed by Air Force personnel from the airbase in Hamadan in support of ex-Prime Minister Bakhtiar. He believed that its real sponsor, however, was the US. Nonetheless, in the course of lambasting the coup plotters, he mentioned that the Soviet Union, "despite all its might, despite all its equipment and modern weapons, had its snout rubbed in the dirt in Afghanistan. This is due to their (sic) stupidity."



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Aside from passing comment in a later speech, the Ayatollah did not directly address the Afghan situation until August 1980. Then, the Government sponsored an international conference of representatives of world liberation movements. The conference heard first from Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad Montazeri about Tehran's plans to celebrate world Jerusalem Day, a holiday declared by Ayatollah Khomeini to focus the attention of Muslims all over the world on the liberation of Jerusalem from its Zionist "oppression."



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When Ayatollah Khomeini addressed the delegates, he said the first challenge confronting the Muslim peoples was Afghanistan. The major point of his speech was that Islamic nations are capable of great and decisive events. But they have been prevented from realizing that potential by the governments of the Islamic states. "If a nation really wants something," the Ayatollah assured his audience, "it cannot be stopped. However, nations must be awakened so that they will demand things. Our nation was once asleep." The Ayatollah then suggested that the aroused people of Afghanistan could achieve their goal of throwing off




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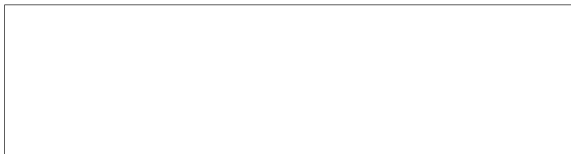
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the occupation of "...this great satanic power, the USSR, which is exerting all its power to suffocate Afghanistan." 

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The speech was noteworthy in that it was the first time that the Ayatollah had elevated the Soviet Union to the status of the USA. Previously, only the US had been referred to as the "great satan." Now the USSR had been elevated to that pantheon of enemies of the Islamic Republic. 

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