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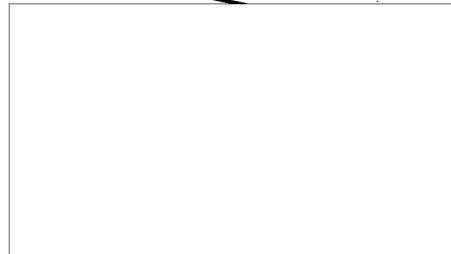


Directorate of Intelligence

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Afghanistan Situation Report



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1 May 1984

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1 May 1984

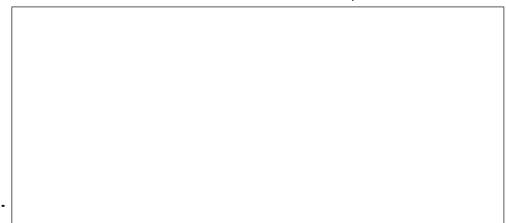
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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

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Afghanistan's roads are vital to the Soviets and Afghan regime and highly vulnerable to insurgent interdiction and ambush. 

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and the Office of Soviet Analysis. 

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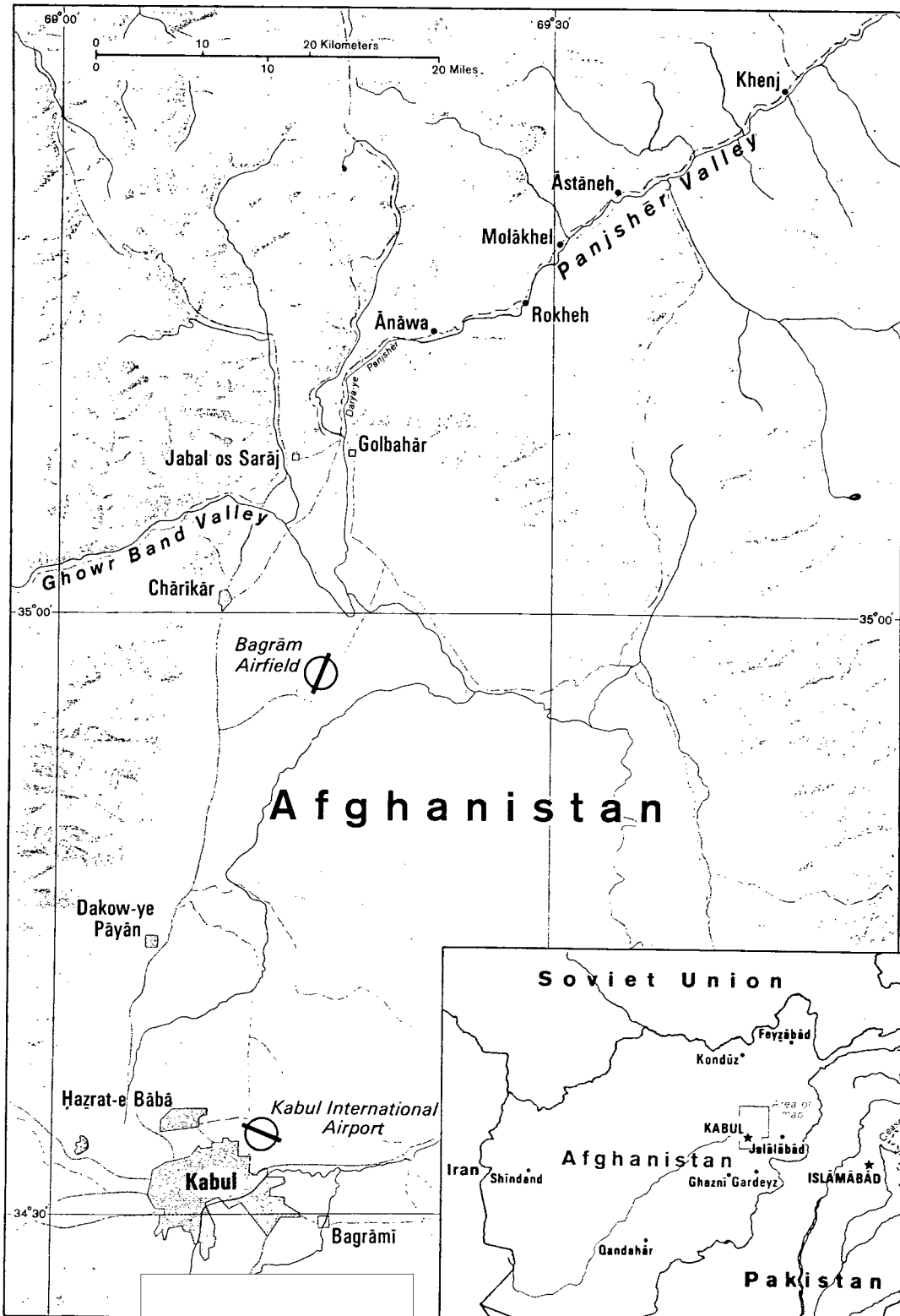
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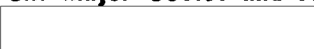
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IMPORTANCE OF THE PANJSHER VALLEY



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The Panjsher Valley has been a key insurgent stronghold since the Soviet invasion in December 1979, and international media coverage has helped Panjsher insurgent commander Masood become a key resistance leader. The valley's importance derives from its strategic location and from the effectiveness of the insurgents who have controlled it despite six major Soviet and Afghan offensives since spring 1980.



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The valley's location has been a great advantage to the insurgents. Situated just south of the Hindu Kush range, the high valley overlooks the main highway between the USSR and Kabul. The location has permitted the insurgents to ambush Soviet and Afghan convoys delivering vital supplies of food, fuel, and materiel to the capital and to major Afghan and Soviet garrisons in the Kabul area.



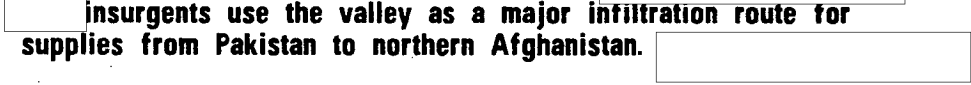
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Panjsher guerrillas have repeatedly attacked the Soviet fuel pipeline that runs from Termez to Bagram.



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insurgents use the valley as a major infiltration route for supplies from Pakistan to northern Afghanistan.



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The continued existence of a strong Panjsher insurgent organization poses a long-term threat to Soviet control of the area. Masood has used the year-long cease-fire with the Soviets to fortify his position within the valley and to expand his influence through development of additional strongholds and alliances with other commanders in northern, northeastern, and central Afghanistan.



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STATUS OF GENEVA TALKS 

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UN Special Representative Cordovez expects the Babrak government to reply this week to proposals he made during his recent trip to the region. Cordovez left Kabul abruptly after waiting three days for Afghan Foreign Minister Dost to get a reply from "them," presumably the Soviets, about whether a Soviet troop withdrawal could be included in UN negotiations. 


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If Kabul's reply is satisfactory and if the UN Secretary General obtains some favorable sign during his upcoming trip to Moscow, the UN will call for another round of talks at Geneva. 

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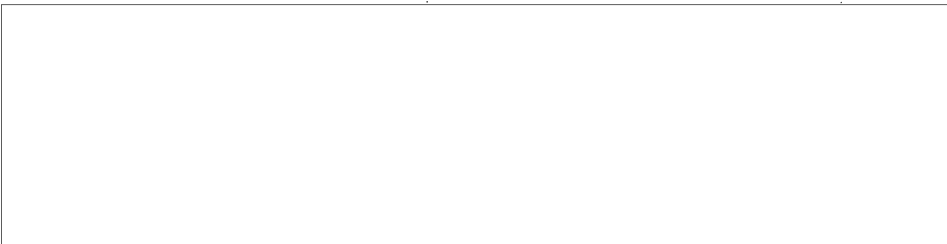
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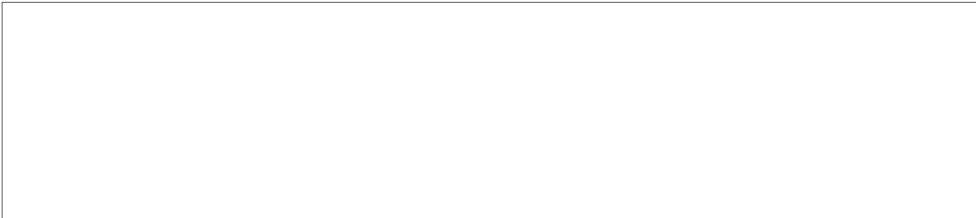
None of the parties appears to expect any progress at Geneva, but all--probably including Cordovez--believe that talks will help their images. Cordovez' only accomplishment during the trip that ended 14 April was to secure Pakistani agreement to hold indirect talks in separate rooms of the same building instead of in separate buildings. He is likely to regard an equally trivial concession from Moscow or Kabul as sufficient to justify another round of talks in Geneva. 

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-- TASS on 25 April said Pakistan is strengthening forces opposite Afghanistan and is cooperating with the US in coordinating Afghan insurgent activities. The statement is probably intended to intimidate Islamabad or to justify future cross-border incidents. It is unlikely to affect Pakistani policy. 

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-- Harakat representatives have in custody a low-ranking Soviet soldier whom they would like to send to the West, according to the US Consulate in Peshawar. 

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--Because of heavy airstrikes around Qandahar, as many as 4,000 refugees have crossed into Pakistan, according to Afghan resistance sources. 

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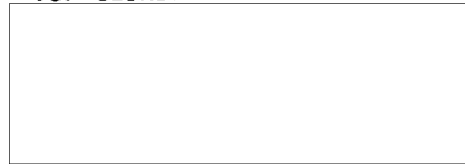
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PERSPECTIVE

THE BATTLE FOR AFGHAN HIGHWAYS



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Afghanistan's roads are vital to the Soviets and Afghan regime and highly vulnerable to insurgent interdiction and ambush. Insurgents continue to ambush military and commercial convoys, killing soldiers, destroying vehicles, disrupting deliveries of supplies, and capturing goods and weapons for their own use. Insurgents consider retaliatory strikes against villages on highways near ambush sites to be the regime's most effective countermeasure, but they have done little to reduce the number of guerrilla attacks.



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The Importance of Afghan Highways

Afghanistan's highways carry most of the cargo to support military operations, Soviet personnel, and the Afghan populace. Fuel convoys move from the Soviet Union, source of all refined petroleum products, into Afghanistan. Basic foodstuffs and building materials are also trucked in from the Soviet border. Industrial imports arrive mainly by road from Pakistan, and most exports are sent to the USSR and Pakistan. Afghan and Soviet troops are far more dependent on the highways than the insurgents are. Observers report, however, that insurgents travel extensively on secondary roads and trails.



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The Highway Network

The main highway within the country forms a large 1500-kilometer loop from Sheberghan, in the northeast, through the Salang Tunnel in the rugged Hindu Kush, to Kabul, Qandahar, and Herat. Built with Soviet and Western aid, it is a two-lane, all-weather, hard-surface route with high cargo-carrying capacity. Important all-weather roads radiate from this route leading to the USSR, Pakistan, and Iran. The most important of these leads to Jeyretan, site of the only highway bridge to cross the Amu Darya River on the Soviet-Afghan border. Jeyretan is the busiest road and rail transshipment center in Afghanistan. Another key route links Kabul and Peshawar.



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The weather disrupts traffic from December through April. Heavy snows, high winds, and dense fogs slow or halt traffic in many areas of the country and often close passes in the Hindu Kush for several days. Highway surfaces have greatly deteriorated in recent years from lack of maintenance, heavy military traffic, mining, and wreckage from attacks on convoys, according to US Embassy reports. [REDACTED]

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Insurgent Attacks

The guerrillas have adopted a variety of tactics to disrupt traffic along the nation's highways. In ambushes against military convoys, insurgents use antitank mines, small arms, mortars, and rockets. Ambushes are effective because they can be carried out by a few men, enjoy the element of surprise, and can be staged from protected positions. If successful, insurgents capture weapons, ammunition, and supplies, in addition to killing or intimidating their foes and destroying or commandeering equipment. [REDACTED]

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Insurgents sometimes disrupt civilian traffic as well. [REDACTED] insurgents sell safe conduct passes and periodically collect tolls along some major trade routes. [REDACTED] one incident along the Towr Kham-Jalalabad highway netted the insurgents 925,000 Afghanis (US \$9000). Insurgents also stop buses to search for regime supporters. [REDACTED] such incidents as major problems for commercial and government transporters. [REDACTED]

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Insurgents also halt traffic by destroying bridges and causing avalanches. Attacks focus on the main highway north from Kabul across the mountains (the 200-kilometer-long segment to Dowshi has 41 bridges) and the Kabul-Towr Kham highway (14 bridges). [REDACTED] during March and April 1984 at least four bridges were destroyed on these routes, apparently in an effort to hamper the Soviet offensive in the Panjsher. [REDACTED] guerrillas have also used explosives to start avalanches to cover sections of the Kabul-Jalalabad highway. Insurgents in the Konar Valley destroyed elements of a Soviet convoy by detonating charges placed on the sides of cliffs as vehicles passed below [REDACTED]

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The Soviet and Regime Response

The Soviets and the Afghan regime have unsuccessfully tried a variety of tactics to prevent insurgent ambushes, protect convoys en route, and retaliate for ambushes. To prevent attacks, the Soviets and the regime spread antipersonnel mines at suspected insurgent ambush points and establish outposts along routes. These outposts range from small units to several hundred troops with bunkered artillery, armored personnel carriers, and tank positions. [redacted]

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troops are stationed every two kilometers along the main road to the USSR through the Shomali region north of Kabul. Outpost personnel include Afghan and Soviet troops specially trained for road security, but [redacted] they perform their duties poorly in most areas. [redacted]

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Security is especially tight at strategic points, such as the 3,363-meter-high Salang Tunnel through the Hindu Kush on the main road. [redacted]

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[redacted] contingents of soldiers (most of them Soviet) and armored vehicles guard the two entrances. All vehicles are searched at security checkpoints located within five kilometers of both ends of the 2,700-meter-long tunnel. Traffic is restricted to military combat vehicles during specified times. [redacted]

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Other tactics have been adopted to protect convoys. [redacted]

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[redacted] military convoys are frequently led by minesweeping vehicles or pickets and are escorted by armored vehicles, fighter planes, and helicopters. The aircraft fire on the perimeters of roadways to deter insurgents from lying in wait to ambush the convoy and attack insurgent positions during an ambush. Recently, private vehicles transporting civilians have been intermingled with military convoys to deter guerrilla attacks. In the western Afghan desert, military vehicles avoid the roadway and cross overland. To reduce risks, the Soviets have had to limit transport to daylight hours. [redacted]

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The regime's most effective response, [redacted]

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[redacted] is to use airstrikes against villages near the ambush site.

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The airstrikes sometimes last for several days and result in the deaths of villagers and destruction of homes, livestock, irrigation networks, and cropland. Soviet responses to attacks on Soviet convoys are particularly harsh. [redacted] in July 1983 Soviet troops killed 90 old men, women, and children in villages near a successful insurgent ambush site. The retaliatory tactics have caused the guerrillas to select ambush points carefully to reduce damage to their supporters. [redacted]

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Outlook

The insurgents will continue to attack Soviet and Afghan military convoys and hijack goods from civilian carriers. Ambush booty is an important source of ammunition, supplies, and money and buoys insurgent morale. These activities will nettle the regime but will not significantly alter the present situation. Punitive actions against civilians will remain a major deterrent to increasing the number and range of guerrilla attacks. In our view, the Soviets and the regime would need to commit substantially larger forces to secure the roads and improve their security practices to protect convoys. The insurgents will continue to prevail at night, and Soviet and regime countermeasures, in any case, will not prevent all attacks. [redacted]

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