# Bloody Games

The invasion of Afghanistan - an impoverished, mountainous land of fifteen million herders, traders, and peasants which is squashed up against Iran Russia, China, and Pakistan - is the largest, longest, and costliest Soviet military operation since the Second World War. The Soviet pacification campaign in Afghanistan has caused civilian casualties in the hundreds of thousands and left more than a third of the Afghan people refugees. And the United States, in support of the Afghan resistance, has been waging its most elaborate and expensive covert war since the Central Intelligence Agency's operations in Laos and Cambodia in the early nineteen-seventies. This is the first time that the United States has supported a guerrilla army firing on Soviet troops.

In the fiscal year 1987 alone, according to the Washington Post, clandestine American military aid to the Mujahideen, the holy warriors of the Afghan resistance, amounted to six hundred and sixty million dollars - more than the total of American aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. Unlike aid to the Contras, however, the covert aid to the Afghan resistance has not been a matter of congressional debate. Indeed, Congress has on several occasions appropriated more money than the Administration requested.

This is not the first time two world powers have clashed in combat over Afghanistan. From 1837 to 1907, the British and the Russians fought along the northwest frontier of British India - now part of Pakistan. British officers called these mountain struggles the Great Game, and the phrase was popularised by Rudyard Kipling in "Kim." Today, Afghanistan is still the playing field for great powers, but there are more players now, and the games are bloodier.

"Afghanistan is the calf in this buzkashi between Moscow and Washington," remarked Professor Sayd Bahaouddin Majrooh, a former dean at Kabul University and director of the Afghan Information Centre in Peshawar, just inside Pakistan. "Go see the game. We have brought it here to Pakistan. You will understand much about Afghanistan and about this war." With a group of Afghan friends, we joined a crowd of two thousand spectators scattered in the dusty outskirts of Peshawar below the Khyber Hills. To visualise the game, imagine American football, on horseback, with no protective gear, few rules, no limit on the number of players, and for the ball a headless calf weighing fifty to a hundred pounds. The objective is to get hold of the calf and carry it to a goal, which is usually a mile distant. It is a game that depends not on teamwork but on the skill of individual riders and their horses.

There were about a hundred horses - an unusually small number - being walked or exercised, but only a dozen or so looked well-bred and well-trained. As these horses and their riders passed the crowd, they drew soft exclamations of "Maasha Allah!" These were the chapandazan - master players. The rest were camp followers or novices, who would provide the necessary obstacles for the real players. As the horsemen were lining up at the starting point - the chapandazan at the front and the rest behind them - four turbaned men carried the carcass of a calf to the centre of the field, placed it there, and, withdrew. A rapid volley of rifle fire signalled the start. With a powerful cry of "Allah-u-Akbar" ("God is great"), the horsemen galloped off, a fast-moving mass of colour. Within seconds, some of them had moved to the sides, while others reached the centre quickly, and struggled to gain access to the dead animal; the mass of lurching, rearing horses and jostling, yelling, hissing riders was hidden by clouds of dust. The melee broke suddenly, allowing us a view of the action. In the contest among the master players, we could see that each one had the support of clusters of horsemen - multiple teams organised around individual players. When a rider approaches the calf, he lowers his head and shoulders toward the ground and then, the reins in one hand, the whip between his teeth, he reaches out with his free hand to grab the calf. (Hence the name

of the game - buzkashi, or "goat grabbing"; sometime in the nineteenth century, calves replaced goats.) He gets pushed, shoved, hit; his horse may collapse under the weight of other advancing or rearing horses; and hooves can mangle his hands. Only the nimblest of riders on the best-trained horses, working in perfect coördination, can capture the calf. In badly played contests, the calf gets torn to pieces, and judges have a hard time deciding the winner. In the game we saw, one player - galloping with the carcass cradled in one arm, his whip still between his teeth, and blood trickling down his face - finally eluded his rivals and rode out of sight, to the finish line. Minutes later, he returned, and as the crowd cheered he deposited the calf in another circle, close to the first one. Then all returned to the starting point and resumed the game. That evening, we discussed the analogy that had led us to the match. The game reflects a culture that places enormous value on physical courage and individual enterprise, allows untrammelled competition, and assumes that order will emerge from anarchy. "But there is more to it," one of our Afghan friends said. "It is not possible to play this game without sponsors. It involves great expense, prizes, payments to the chapandazan, horses - above all, good horses, which very few people have. It is a game that only the rich can afford to sponsor: no sponsor, no game. It is a game of dependency. That is how this war is. We are being torn to pieces by teams sponsored by outsiders."

Another man added, "The Communists and the fundamentalists are contesting Afghanistan as if it were a dead object. There are two sides, they say. That's wrong. There are twelve, maybe twenty, fifty political chapandazan on all sides. Each for himself. Our suffering is great." On February 11th of this year, Professor Majrooh was himself killed in Peshawar. He was associated with the moderate wing of the resistance, and had advocated a negotiated end to the conflict.

The story of the Afghan people has been written largely by their adversaries, who have often become grudging admirers. In 1924, the Earl of Ronaldshay, then president of Britain's Royal Geographical Society, wrote of the borderland between Pakistan and Afghanistan, "The life of a frontier officer is hard, and he treads it daily on the brink of eternity. Yet despite its obvious drawbacks the fact remains that these endless ranges…. do possess the power of inspiring in those whose lot is cast among them an extraordinary enthusiasm." Afghanistan owes its unique culture to its towering peaks and a cruel absence of water. The Hindu Kush, the western end of the Karakoram range, stretches across Afghanistan for six hundred miles, cutting off the country's north from its south. The Pamir Knot, part of the Himalayan system of more than a hundred peaks rising from twenty to twenty-five thousand feet, dominates the northern region, along China and Soviet Central Asia. To the south are vast deserts - most notably Dasht-i-Margo, "the wilderness of death." Afghanistan's climate veers between extremes. In summer, there is sweltering heat, and dust storms sweep across the deserts; winters are bitter cold, and the winds are fierce. So little grows in the rocky soil that only the hardiest animals survive. In 1937, Rene Dollot, the former French envoy to the Court of Kabul, wrote, "The lunar landscapes of the Hindu Kush, as if borrowed from prehistory, seem still to be waiting for the birth of the animal world, or perhaps to announce its end." But Afghanistan is also a land of surprises. The "assault on the spirit of stark ugliness and discomfort" is often relieved by "beauty indescribable in its clarity and contrast with the barren emptiness that went before," Sir Olaf Caroe, former British governor of the Northwest Frontier Province and the author of 'The Pathans', writes. "The weft and warp of this tapestry is woven into the souls and bodies of the men who move before it. Much is harsh, but all is drawn in strong tones that catch the breath, and at times bring tears, almost of pain."

A large majority of Afghanistan's village settlements are linked only by narrow mountain paths. In winter, these become impassable - a circumstance that assures the autonomy of villages and tribes. Since ancient times, Afghan society has been largely a collection of inward-looking settlements that have resisted integration into a national community. Each village and tribe displays strong family ties and group loyalty. The centre of politics

is one's immediate community. Authority rests with a khan - a tribal chief - or with a religious leader. Outside the village or the tribe, most Afghans view one another warily, as strangers. This means that the outsider may be considered deserving of help and hospitality or that he may be seen as an enemy to be feared or fought - or he may turn out to be a benefactor, to be protected and exploited.

Just as geography has forced social fragmentation, so the barren economy has generated fierce competition for resources. Throughout Afghan history, coöperation beyond the boundaries of community and tribe, when it occurred at all, took the form of a defence compact, and then only when the independence of all parties was threatened by an external enemy or an - intrusive government. Rebellions in Afghanistan have typically occurred, not against feudal lords or oppressive tribal chiefs but against foreign invaders and centralising, reformist governments. When the Soviets intervened militarily and lent their support to a centralised and reformist Communist government, they encouraged the two historic causes of rebellion in Afghanistan.

In the nineteenth century, Russia watched as the British pushed into the interior of the country and suffered their greatest imperial misadventure. "The Cambridge History of the British Empire" describes that invasion as "a terrible mistake." Others have been less polite. Lord Auckland, the Governor General of India, who ordered the expedition, was denounced by contemporaries as a "bumbling" weakling. Lord Auckland himself admitted that the first Anglo-Afghan war was a "horror and disaster of which history has few parallels." Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Minister at the time, who was accused by political rivals of being led into the expedition by his Russophobia, was haunted by the disastrous outcome for the rest of his life.

A Soviet historian, Naftula Khalfin, recounts the story of the British failure in his 1981 book 'British Plots Against Afghanistan'. In October of 1838, he writes, Lord Auckland announced that Britain's candidate to rule Afghanistan, Shah Shoja, would enter the country "supported against foreign interference and factious opposition by a British army." A British expeditionary force of more than fifty thousand, grandly named the Army of the Indus, marched into Kalat, a principality that is now part of Pakistan. In order to impress the local ruler, a British official bragged that his army had entered Kabul without firing a shot. The Khan of Kalat was silent.

"You make no answer. You seem lost in thought," the official said. "Yes, I am thinking. You people have entered this country, but how will you get out?"

The British official recalled that the Khan made his flesh creep with a prophecy: "Wait till sickness overtakes your troops - till they are exhausted with fatigue from long and harassing marches, and from the total want of supplies; wait till they have drunk of many waters; and wait, too, till they feel the sharpness of Afghan swords."

By December, 1840, the British had to all appearances won the Great Game. Dost Muhammad Khan, the Afghan ruler, whom the British had vowed to remove, had surrendered and been sent off to exile in British India. The British puppet, Shah Shoja, occupied the throne, and Lord Auckland told London that Sir William Hay Macnaghten, the envoy of the Crown, might be capable of "organising an honest and friendly government, and ... reconciling this wild and divided country." But while victory was being proclaimed in London, the British Army in Afghanistan was being destroyed.

In November and December of 1841, there was an uprising in Kabul; the British garrison there was besieged, and many senior British officers, including Macnaghten, were killed. British troops in Kabul finally broke the siege and started the retreat to India. Karl Marx, a correspondent for the New York Tribune at the time, re-created the scene for his readers:

On the walls of Jalalabad ... the sentries espied a man in a tattered English uniform on a miserable pony horse, and the man was desperately wounded; it was Dr. Brydon, the sole survivor of the 15,000 who had left Kabul three weeks before. He was dying of starvation.

A painting of the wounded doctor on the wretched pony was reproduced widely, and for a time people believed that Dr. Brydon was indeed the sole survivor of the Anglo-Afghan war. But when the British returned to wreak vengeance they found two thousand of their soldiers and camp followers begging in the streets of Kabul. After four years of death, hardship, and humiliation, the British left Afghanistan as they had found it, with Dost Muhammad Khan back on the throne.

The Great Game continued as British power expanded throughout India and into Iran and the Russians penetrated farther into Central Asia. From the first Anglo-Afghan war to the outbreak of the Second World War, the British carried out more than a hundred military operations against the Pushtun tribes on both sides of what is now the Afghan-Pakistani border. In November of 1878, Anglo Russian rivalry led to another British invasion and another disastrous defeat. In Victorian England, meanwhile, Afghanistan had come to symbolise the risks and hardships of carrying the white man's burden. Winston Churchill, who participated in an 1897 "frontier war" as a "subaltern of horse," defended the British massacres and village burnings against the Gladstone liberals, who "seemed to imagine that the tribesmen consisted of a regular army who fought, and a peaceful, law-abiding population who remained at their business." The reality, he wrote, was that "every inhabitant is a soldier from the first day he is old enough to hurl a stone, till the last day he has strength to pull a trigger." Finally, the British concluded that the Afghans did not make good clients - that, given their history of isolation and their insurrectionary culture, it was better to subsidise the tribal chiefs than to attempt to pacify them.

For centuries, the people of Afghanistan have scratched out a livelihood by travel, trade, and combat. As late as 1929, only two or three per cent of the land in Afghanistan was under cultivation; since the nineteen-sixties, various development projects have increased the figure to about fifteen per cent. But, having only ten inches of rainfall a year and four uncoöperative river systems, Afghanistan offers few opportunities for farming. Two centuries before Christ, the Great Silk Road - the network of caravan trails through the difficult terrain and hazardous weather of Afghanistan - linked the civilisation of China and India to those of Egypt, Greece, and Italy. (Around 1940, French excavators discovered in two subterranean rooms, presumably storerooms, rare Buddhist art, vases, and lacquerware from China's Han Dynasty, carved ivories of ancient India, Phoenician glassware, and a vase bearing a scene from the Iliad.) Nomads, who until 1978 were still a sixth of Afghanistan's population, had the knowledge and the skills to guide the caravans along the trails. Warrior bands protected the travellers and their merchandise - for a price - or, failing to find protégés or looking for better returns, raided them. Tribes that controlled sections of the route and the mountain passes collected levies both from private traders and from governments. Merchants in the cities provided food, water, and pack animals. Only in the small urban centres, at the junctions of trails or close to border areas - Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni, Mazar-i-Sharif, Peshawar - did the government exercise authority. Elsewhere along this most enduring trade route in human history, the warriors' code prevailed. For the nomadic warriors, the most feared enemy was a central government seeking dominion over them.

By the middle of the second millennium, this commercial network, under the control of Muslim rulers and merchants, had expanded greatly. Then the rise of Western capitalism and the opening of maritime routes to the East destroyed the ancient trading network. The Dutch, French, and British East India Companies began to control the flow of trade between East and West. The Afghans were put out of business. But they were spared

colonial occupation, and they remained largely outside the international capitalist economy. Only after the Second World War did Afghanistan begin a process of economic modernisation, with Soviet and American aid.

The Soviet invasion, despite the destruction it has caused, has revived the trading life of Afghanistan, for it has produced a thriving commerce in consumer goods and contraband, mostly through Pakistan. Early last year, the state bank of Pakistan estimated that goods worth eighty-two billion rupees, or four billion six hundred and seventy million dollars, were being smuggled in and out of Pakistan each year. That is an eighth of Pakistan's gross national product. Narcotics are the major commodity of this underground economy, followed by arms. The centre of the commercial activity is Peshawar. There Afghan peddlers sell Russian caviar, and in the markets are to be found canned fish, cheeses, jams, and jellies from the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries. The war has brought French, Norwegians, Americans, Englishmen, and Saudis to Peshawar, and they eagerly shop for East German cameras and binoculars, Russian scarves and woollen sweaters, Swiss watches, and Japanese calculators. A Pakistani customs official explained to us that West European and Japanese imports bound for Afghanistan from Karachi were trucked to the Khyber Pass, where the goods were inspected before crossing into Afghanistan. "But these days many trucks unload soon after the border crossing, and their cargoes are smuggled back into Pakistan," he said. "We can't control the border. There is so much traffic. It is nothing here in Peshawar. Go to Bara or Landi Kotal if you want to see."

Bara, a dusty patch of land divided by a broken, narrow road, is about fifteen miles north of Peshawar. Goods are sold in hundreds of shops made of corrugated metal and protected from the summer sun by cloth hangings. The traffic resembled that of any rural market in a small frontier town - carts, donkeys, goats, a couple of scrawny cows mingled with armed men in baggy clothes and turbans - except that there were Toyotas and Suzukis parked in clusters in front of the stalls. Middle-class families come here bargain hunting from as far away as Lahore, three hundred miles to the Southeast. Smuggled goods are cheap in Bara, but prices mount as one moves farther from the Afghan border. The black markets in the tribal areas along the border, where the Afghan refugees are concentrated, have become popular shopping centres for northern Pakistan. An astonishing variety of merchandise is on sale. There are clothes, cosmetics, and weapons, but the best sellers are the household appliances: Russian irons, air-conditioners, toasters, gas stoves, East German refrigerators, television sets, stereos. Young employees carry large boxes to the cars, and the customers scramble to make room.

Pakistan has replaced Lebanon as the world's largest open market in arms. A London television group was reported to have found a Blowpipe missile in the market at Bara - a British-made missile that the CIA supplies to the Mujahideen. Most of the weapons available in Bara are less advanced. We saw British Lee-Enfield .303s, of Second World War vintage, an American M-1, and many AK-47 assault rifles of Chinese manufacture. Prices for such weapons range from a thousand to fifteen hundred dollars. Local, Khyber-made Lee-Enfield rifles, which used to be the standard weapon of the frontier tribesmen, were selling at forty to fifty-five dollars - two hundred per cent below their pre-war price. There is now a nation-wide system of clandestine gun rentals; resourceful customers can find bigger weapons - occasionally even an anti-aircraft battery. The frontier posts: of Tor Khama, Miram Shah, Parachinar, and Chaman are bustling centres of travel and trade. Teahouses have sprung up along trails. The trade in mules and horses is brisk. Bus owners ferry the Mujahideen for a price. The Great Silk Road has in part been revived.

When Soviet troops crossed the Afghan frontier in force, in December of 1979, many observers in the United States concluded that the invasion was the first move in a grand strategic plan. It was the first time Soviet troops had entered a territory not occupied by

the Red Army at the end of the Second World War. President Carter quickly accepted the judgement of his national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, that the invasion was a threat to the rest of the region. Aides have recalled that Carter, disappointed by what he called the "misleading" response of the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to his demand for Soviet withdrawal, became "almost apoplectic." He said that the Soviet invasion was "the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War," and on January 23, 1980, he announced a policy that came to be known as the Carter Doctrine: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

In the weeks following the invasion, there was speculation about Soviet objectives in the region, most of it highly alarmed. Brezhnev, many experts concluded, had taken up Peter the Great's quest for a warm-water port. By traversing the uncongenial mountain passes through landlocked Afghanistan, the Soviet Union might eventually arrive at the Persian Gulf. This would require invading either Pakistan or Iran, of course.

The end of the Nixon-Brezhnev détente, already in its death throes, was hastened by the Soviet intervention, which seemed to provide corroboration for the world view of the hard-liners. Facing an election battle a few months hence in which softness on Russia and the neglect of America's defences would be likely issues and Ronald Reagan the likely candidate, Carter withdrew the SALT II treaty from consideration by the Senate, announced that the United States would boycott the Moscow Olympics, and prepared a major military build-up, which included a Rapid Deployment Force, intended primarily for the Persian Gulf. The Administration requested approval for a CIA covert operation in Afghanistan, and offered Pakistan four hundred million dollars in aid, which General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military ruler, dismissed as "peanuts." Suddenly, Afghanistan had become the focal point of American global strategy.

Though the Soviet leaders undoubtedly expected criticism from the United States after the invasion, the strength of the reaction from Washington must have surprised them. The United States had appeared content to consign Afghanistan to the Soviet sphere of influence. In the Truman Administration, as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul later wrote, "the State Department showed absolutely no interest in Afghanistan." Former Assistant Secretary of State George C. McGhee recalls that in 1951 Prince Naim, the Afghan Ambassador to Washington, suggested that he would have to talk to the Russians if the United States did not come up with a little military aid. "I picked up the phone and asked my secretary to get me the telephone number of the Russian Embassy," McGhee writes in his memoirs. "I wrote it on a piece of paper and handed it to the Prince, whereupon we both laughed." In the Eisenhower era, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles also turned aside Afghan requests for American arms. Pakistan was the centrepiece of his Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, and the tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan over a disputed border ran high.

By contrast, the Soviet Union has had a long-standing interest in Afghanistan. After Lenin came to power, the Afghans were the first recipients of Soviet military and economic aid. In the nineteen-twenties, Soviet engineers put telephone lines in the country and established an air route from Moscow to Kabul. The Afghans remained suspicious of Russian intentions, yet when Britain left the region, in 1947, after the withdrawal from India, and the United States showed no interest in becoming heavily involved, Afghanistan turned into the South Asian equivalent of Finland. At home, it was free to keep its traditional institutions; in foreign affairs, it had to accommodate Soviet interests. The level of Soviet aid to Afghanistan has fluctuated over the years, and appears to have been responsive to the American commitment to Pakistan. In 1955, shortly after Dulles concluded the mutual-security agreement with Pakistan, the Soviet leaders Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev visited Afghanistan, and thereafter the Soviets stepped up their aid, much of which was military. Soviet influence grew rapidly.

When the United States sharply reduced its aid to Pakistan in a show of displeasure over the India-Pakistan war of 1965, the Soviets cut aid to their client, too.

Between 1953 and 1963, Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan served as the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, and, with Soviet aid, he introduced reforms. For the first time, a university in Kabul began to train a few intellectuals, and in parts of the country a small start was made on public education. Daud's brother-in-law, Muhammad Zahir Shah, had been the King of Afghanistan since 1933. In 1963, he suddenly dismissed Daud. Ten years later, Daud staged a coup, returned to power, and abolished the monarchy. He dispatched his brother-in-law to Rome (where he still lives) and provided him with a pension. Daud's return to power was assisted by some Army officers who later joined the Afghan Communist Party, and by Babrak Karmal, a well-known and reasonably well-liked leftist politician from an upper-class family. (Six years later, when the Soviets invaded, they installed Karmal as President of Afghanistan) By all accounts, the Kremlin leadership was entirely satisfied with the state of affairs in the early years of Daud's rule. Soviet influence grew, and the Soviet Union became Afghanistan's leading trading partner as well as its leading arms supplier.

Afghanistan was an Islamic tribal society made up of four dominant nationalities and numerous smaller ones. With a small urban population, an annual per-capita income of less than two hundred dollars, a literacy rate of ten per cent, and a life expectancy of thirty-eight years, it was not a nation in the modern sense. It was an unlikely candidate for a socialist revolution. On this assessment, the containment strategists in Washington and the Party ideologues in Moscow were in agreement. By abolishing the monarchy, however, Daud had removed the one symbol of legitimacy that had held Afghanistan together since its founding as a state, in 1747. And by staging a military coup to seize power - an unprecedented tactic in Afghanistan - he had transformed the politics of the country. Two new players now appeared on the scene, and the country's fate was no longer entirely in the hands of the Soviet Union or the United States or the traditional ruling élite of Afghanistan.

In 1965, thirty men belonging to various Marxist study circles had formed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Nur Muhammad Taraki, who was the son of a Pushtun nomad and had served as press attaché in the Afghan Embassy in Washington, had been elected general secretary, and Babrak Karmal also held a position of leadership. The People's Democratic Party, Marxist in organisation and ideology and semi-clandestine, was neither democratic nor popular. Over the next decade, a few hundred people were attracted to it, all of them from the intelligentsia - teachers, bureaucrats, students, and, most important, military officers, many of whom had been to the Soviet Union for training. Since there were no peasants or workers in the Party, the Kremlin did not take it very seriously, but this disregard did not prevent Soviet leaders from trying to give it direction. As the parliamentary elections of September 1965, approached, Taraki and Karmal went to Moscow to get financial support to run eight candidates. Four of their party's candidates were elected, including Karmal. Both Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, his most devoted disciple, lost. The Afghan secret police concluded, according to a former Minister of the Interior, that the leaders of the P.D.P.A. were "controlled, subsidised, paid, and ordered directly by KGB elements of the Soviet Embassy." Technically, the secret-police report was correct, but it missed what was in fact taking place. From the first, controlling this most unorthodox Communist Party had presented a nearly impossible task, because its leadership was seriously divided, with Karmal challenging Taraki for power. In May of 1967, a little over two years after its formation, the P.D.P.A. split into two factions, each named after its newspaper. Taraki's faction, which was called Khalq ("masses"), was made up mostly of Pushtuns from rural areas, but it aspired to be a Leninist working-class party. Karmal's faction, called Parcham ("banner"), aroused more a Soviet interest, because it presented itself as a broad national democratic front ready to work within the system. (In 1982, a former major in the KGB who had defected to the West claimed that Karmal had been a KGB agent for

many years, and said, "He could be relied upon to accept our advice.") Hafizullah Amin, an instructor at the Teachers' Training School in Kabul, had just received an M.A. at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. Reporting on Amin shortly before the Soviet invasion, the American chargé d'affaires in Kabul described him as "all charm and friendliness," and noted that these qualities might make it hard to realise that he had been "directly responsible for the execution of probably 6000 political opponents." Babrak Karmal also had a devoted disciple - a former medical student named Najibullah. In each case, the disciple ousted his patron in order to assume the Presidency of Afghanistan; Najibullah is the current President.

After Daud's coup, Soviet agents had little success in uniting the Party's factions. The energies of the P.D.P.A. leaders were directed chiefly against their rivals within the Party rather than against the state they were committed to over-throwing. The disagreements were personal, not ideological; one major issue was the colour of the masthead for the Party newspaper.

Nevertheless, in 1978 they were able to collaborate sufficiently to take over the country. The improbable Afghan revolution would most likely not have happened without the entry of yet another major player, the Shah of Iran. Under Nixon and Carter, the United States welcomed Iran as a surrogate capable of serving American interests in the region without direct American involvement. Under this arrangement, the Shah was sold billions of dollars' worth of advanced military equipment, and was encouraged in his dreams of becoming a modern Xerxes. "It was the Shah of Iran, not Leonid Brezhnev, who triggered the chain of events culminating in the overthrow of the Muhammad Daud regime," Selig Harrison, a specialist on South Asia at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in the Washington Post in May of 1979. "Beginning in 1974 ... Iran, encouraged by the United States, made a determined effort to draw Kabul into a western-tilted, Tehran-centred regional, economic and security sphere embracing Pakistan, India and the Persian Gulf states." The Shah offered Kabul two billion dollars in aid over a ten-year period - more than Afghanistan had received in foreign aid since the end of the Second World War - and encouraged Daud to mend his relations with Pakistan and to lessen his dependence on Moscow by sending more military officers to Egypt and India for training. The Shah also advised Kabul to improve relations with the other countries of the region, including China. In August of 1976, Secretary of State Kissinger visited Daud in Kabul, and an upbeat communiqué was issued after their meeting. Plainly, Daud was looking for new friends, because in 1973 the Islamabad government had begun to train and arm the Mujahideen to harass the Afghan government.

At the same time, Daud moved to cut down the influence of the left in domestic politics. In 1977, he announced a new constitution, which provided for only one political party - his own - and he began purging suspected members of the P.D.P.A. from the Army and the bureaucracy. He appointed prominent anti-Communists as Minister of the Interior and Minister of Defence. The Party, its warring factions now uneasily reunited, began preparations, as Taraki's official biography puts it, "to wrest power through a shortcut," using the Army "to topple the ruling class." On April 19, 1978, the P.D.P.A. organised a funeral procession for one of its leaders who had been murdered, probably on Daud's orders. When fifteen thousand people marched through the streets of Kabul crying "Death to the U.S. imperialists!" Daud was shocked at this demonstration of leftist power. A week later, he arrested the three leaders - Taraki, Amin, and Karmal - on charges of treason and conspiracy. The next day, tanks converged on the Presidential palace while other units freed the P.D.P.A. leaders. President Daud died fighting; his family was killed in the palace.

At the time of the coup, at least a third of the Afghan Army's officer corps was Soviet-trained. Nevertheless, nobody in power, in Afghanistan or outside it, foresaw the coup. Taraki boasted that "the news of our revolution took both superpowers by complete

surprise." On the morning of April 27th, the Soviet Ambassador, unaware that the coup was in progress, was waiting at the office of the Foreign Minister to lodge a protest against the arrests of the P.D.P.A. leaders. (The next day, he delivered the protest to Taraki, who had become the new President, and - according to a report by the Pakistani journalist Raja Anwar, which was based on eyewitness accounts - "they both burst out laughing.") When Babrak Karmal was freed from prison by a rebel officer and put on a tank, he had no idea where he was being taken. The next day, he was Taraki's Deputy Prime Minister. The commander of the Presidential Guard was a member of Karmal's faction of the P.D.P.A.; he died at his post, defending the palace against his comrades. For three days after the P.D.P.A. takeover, Tass kept referring to it as a "military coup d'etat" rather than a popular revolution, which is what the Soviets would surely have called it if they had been behind it. But the Soviet Union quickly recognised the new government, and shortly afterward the American Embassy in Kabul cabled Washington, "The Russians have finally won the 'Great Game.' "

In the revolutionary government that took over in April of 1978, the two factions were equally represented in the Cabinet. Despite Soviet efforts to keep the rival factions united, however, a split began at once. Within three months, the Parcham leaders were purged. Karmal was sent abroad, as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, and other leaders of his faction were also posted abroad. Many were jailed and executed. Within Khalq, a bitter struggle for power developed between Amin and Taraki. Nevertheless, in December they went to Moscow together to sign a Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness, and Coöperation. One of its articles provided that Afghanistan could call upon the Soviet Union for military assistance.

Despite the cautionary advice of senior Soviet advisers in Afghanistan, the Afghan government pursued a course calculated to provoke resistance among the people. The traditional flag - of green, black, and red - was replaced with a red banner. Over zealous land reform carried out by inexperienced and imperious bureaucrats was resisted, and such innovations as coeducation and legal limitations on dowries aroused further opposition in the conservative rural population. It was almost as if the revolutionary leaders had decided, in the name of progress, to outrage every segment of Afghan society.

By the winter of 1978-79, there was armed resistance in virtually every province. In the fall of 1978, the Islamic-fundamentalist guerrilla groups that had operated against Daud between 1973 and 1976 re-entered Afghanistan with a force of about five thousand. There followed major armed rebellions, which the conscripts in the Afghan Army were unable to put down. Many of them, horrified at being asked to kill their own kin, joined the resistance, bringing their weapons with them. Units of the Afghan Army in the provincial capital of Asadabad defected en masse. In March of 1979, an uprising broke out in Herat, an ancient city near the Iranian border populated by Shiites, who were enthralled by the Khomeini revolution. These pro-Iranian rebels went from house to house looking for government collaborators and Soviet advisers. About a thousand people, including a number of Soviet advisers and their families, were killed; in reprisal, parts of the city were destroyed. In June of 1979, Tehran Radio broadcast the appeal of a senior ayatollah calling upon the people of Afghanistan to rise up against the Communists. The Shiite population of the Hazarajat region staged another uprising.

By then, the United States had concluded that the Soviets were "moving forward with plans to engineer replacement" of the leadership of the P.D.P.A. In mid-July, the American Embassy in Kabul reported that a high-level Soviet mission, headed by a special envoy, Vasily Safronchuk, had been charged with bringing about a "radical change," because "the regime has little public support and is losing control of the country." But Soviet efforts to regulate Afghan affairs succeeded only in exacerbating the discord within Khalq. The most complete account of the intrigue that led to the downfall of Taraki and Amin and to the Soviet invasion is in the forthcoming book "Revolution and

Betrayal in Afghanistan," by Raja Anwar, who interviewed many of the participants, including several Cabinet Ministers and the family of Amin. On September 4, 1979, Anwar reports, Taraki left for a visit to Havana, and in his absence one of his supporters, a man named Sarwari, drew up plans to assassinate Amin. However, Sarwari made the mistake of putting his nephew in charge of carrying out the plot, not knowing that the young man worked for the KGB. At that point, the Soviets had less drastic ideas for getting Amin out of the way, and he was informed of the plot. From that day, Amin's trust in Soviet goodwill was confirmed, and Taraki's fate was sealed.

Meanwhile, Taraki, stopping in Moscow to see the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, was advised to send Amin into exile and appoint Karmal as his deputy. But Amin, having foiled the assassination attempt, had no intention of leaving the country, and on the day Taraki returned to Kabul the two leaders quarrelled bitterly in the palace. Summoned three days later to a second meeting, at which the Soviet Ambassador was to mediate their differences, Amin arrived early, in the hope of seeing Taraki alone. When he climbed the stairs leading to Taraki's quarters, guards opened fire, but Amin rolled down the stairs and managed to escape. That evening, he ordered tanks into all key points in Kabul and had Taraki arrested and confined to his quarters. Three weeks later, the founder of Afghanistan's revolutionary party was murdered, on Amin's orders.

The Soviets were now becoming desperate. The Afghan leader whom Brezhnev had embraced was dead, and his rival, whom the Soviets had been trying to get rid of, was firmly in power. Though Amin moved quickly to placate the opposition, mostly by promising religious freedom, and though he was given increasing Soviet military help, he could neither put down the insurgency nor win wider political support. He turned to diplomacy to relieve the pressure, courting both Pakistan and the United States. Yet at the same time he kept asking for more Soviet military aid. By July, there were fifteen hundred Soviet military advisers assigned to the Afghan Army, and a Soviet light-airborne battalion was deployed near Kabul for their protection. In late November, Amin asked the Soviets to bring in ten thousand soldiers to protect Kabul, so that he could free Afghan forces to attack the rebels in the countryside. Between November 29th and December 5th, two additional Soviet battalions were flown into Afghanistan, and in mid-December one of them went into action to secure a key tunnel on the highway to the Soviet Union.

At this point, Amin approached Pakistan. He invited President Zia to Kabul to discuss settling the disputed frontier on Pakistan's terms in return for Zia's agreement to end his support of the Afghan resistance. He also went out of his way to be conciliatory in a private conversation with the American chargé d'affaires. In interviews with American journalists, he appealed for aid from the United States and promised that "no Soviet military bases will be allowed in Afghanistan." In mid-December, Zia replied to Amin's invitation by agreeing to send his Foreign Minister. Amin was ecstatic, and asked the Soviets to halt their troop movements into Afghanistan. Some American analysts have speculated that Amin was an Afghan Tito, or, at least, was thought to be by the Soviets. But suddenly, on December 22nd, the Pakistani Foreign Minister cancelled his trip. Amin thereupon offered arms to Pakistani dissidents fighting Zia, and to Baluchi rebels in Iran fighting Khomeini. All this suggested that Amin was pursuing a strategy of widening the war to save his regime. The possibility that the entire region would be destabilised must have alarmed the Soviets.

On December 27th, Soviet forces crossed the frontier in strength, and the Soviet pacification campaign began. That evening, a Soviet contingent arrived at a palace near the Defence Ministry to which Soviet advisers had induced Amin to move a few days earlier, for "security" reasons. Unlike his previous residence, it had no protective walls and was almost totally indefensible. The day before the move, Amin had survived another attempt to get rid of him - a sophisticated plot that had almost certainly been engineered by Lieutenant General Viktor Paputin, the Soviet First Deputy Minister for

Internal Affairs. Raja Anwar recounts how the plot went awry. The Soviet cooks at the Presidential residence (the Afghan resident evidently considered them more trustworthy than Afghans) laced Amin's lunch with drugs, and he lapsed into unconsciousness. Apparently, the plan was to take him into the custody of the Soviet Medical Corps, where, after a public declaration of gratitude for the Soviet troops, he would be given a choice of resigning or standing trial for Taraki's murder. But Amin, who ate only lightly, regained consciousness. "Don't worry, the Soviet Army should be coming to our rescue," he said to his wife just a few minutes before a Soviet unit made up of Tajiks arrived at the palace. Amin was later found at his desk, shot through the head. Lieutenant General Paputin, who had been charged with arranging a more discreet removal of the President, died shortly thereafter, probably by his own hand.

The overriding reason for the invasion was that the civil strife inside Afghanistan was viewed in the KremIin as "a seat of serious danger to the security of the Soviet state," as Leonid Brezhnev put it two weeks later. Afghanistan has a thousand-mile border with the Muslim Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, which are populated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens - peoples that also inhabit Afghanistan. In 1978, there had been a riot of Tajiks against the Russians in Dushanbe, a town on the Soviet side of the frontier. Toward the end of 1979, the Khomeini revolution in Iran was stirring up Islamic nationalism in the entire region, and the taking of American hostages at the American Embassy in Tehran on November 4th increased the possibility of American military action against Iran within a few hundred miles of the Soviet border.

The Soviets thus faced two disagreeable choices. One was to allow a country on their border which had been within their sphere of influence for more than thirty years to continue to unravel and possibly end up in the hands of an anti-Soviet Islamic-fundamentalist regime backed by conservative Arab nations, China, and the United States. The other was to invade. In short, the military operation was a desperate response to the failure of the KremIin's political strategy. In a conversation on June 25, 1979, with the senior American diplomat in Kabul, Safronchuk had agreed that a Soviet invasion, about which there was already considerable speculation, "would very much complicate, and harm Soviet-American relations." The East German Ambassador in Kabul had told the same diplomat that "the entire Afghan nation" would rise up against a Soviet invading force, just as it did against the British in the nineteenth century. The recognition by Soviet and Communist-bloc diplomats in Kabul of the risks of a Soviet military move suggests that the KremIin leaders did not lack expert advice. Rather, they chose to ignore it.

At the time of the invasion, much was made in the United States of the Brezhnev Doctrine - the policy enunciated after Soviet tanks ended the reformist experiment of Communist Party Secretary Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Now, by intervening in Afghanistan, the Russians appeared to be saying that they were prepared to "defend" with Soviet divisions, even socialist revolutions that occurred outside their sphere in Eastern Europe. The use of military force to keep socialist countries from backsliding appeared to have become standard Soviet practice, and it confirmed the world view of the hard-liners in both political parties in the United States that the Soviet Union was an openly expansionist power. Just as Munich stood for the follies of appeasement and Pearl Harbour for the ever-present danger of surprise attack, Afghanistan now became a metaphor for the Soviet Union's boundless appetite and unpredictable behaviour.

Eight years later, however, it seems clear that the Soviet goals in Afghanistan have always been limited. First, unlike the Chinese in Tibet, the Soviets have neither claimed sovereignty over Afghanistan nor been willing to commit enough resources to subdue it. They were obviously aware after a few months that without large scale reinforcements their Army could not hope to eliminate the resistance. Second, within weeks of the invasion Soviet leaders had agreed in principle to the withdrawal of Soviet forces - a

promise that they had never made with respect to Eastern Europe. Third, Soviet diplomacy over the last eight years has simply not embraced a strategy for the sort of regional expansion that aroused so much fear in the United States at the time of the invasion. True, military pressure on Pakistan has been stepped up, but the obvious motivation has been to discourage Pakistani support for the Mujahideen. Soviet policy toward Iran has been extremely cautious.

The Kremlin did expect the military phase of the "rescue" of Afghanistan to be over in short order. The Soviets may have really believed that it was Amin's personal style, rather than the offensive revolutionary policies of the Afghan ruling party, that had aroused so much hostility. Certainly, they thought that Karmal, being a smoother and more popular figure, would elicit much more public support. Just as President Kennedy was persuaded in 1963 that the removal of Ngo Dinh Diem, coupled with the increased presence of American military advisers, would resolve difficulties in Vietnam, so, the Soviets were deluded into thinking that Amin's removal and a Soviet military presence could stabilise the revolutionary regime. It was one of many Soviet miscalculations.

Despite great destruction and human suffering, the war in Afghanistan is, in comparison with, say, the Vietnam War or the Korean War, a limited operation. From the start, the Soviet Union has concentrated on four strategic objectives. The first is to control the northern plains and the mountainous areas along the road from the Soviet Union to Kabul, and to control Afghanistan's other major cities and the roads linking them to Kabul. There is a large Afghan Army base near the capital, and the entire area is actively patrolled by Soviet soldiers. The resistance has a significant presence in the northern region, but its strength is dissipated by rivalry between two Islamic organisations. The second objective is to guard the western frontier against Iran. The Soviets have maintained a large force along the border, but it is rarely deployed in offensive operations. Third, a consistent effort has been made to control access; to the cities near the Pakistani border and to interdict by aerial strikes and commando raids the supply lines of the Mujahideen. Fourth, the Soviets attach great importance to building and protecting the infrastructure of the state, and troops are deployed around government installations, warehouses, hospitals, and so on, which are often attacked. Together, the four war zones constitute no more than twenty per cent of the territory of Afghanistan, but about seventy- per cent of its food has been produced there. By and large, the rest of the country, though it feels the effects of the war, actually sees little of it. Most of Afghanistan continues to be under the control of local khans and maliks, as it has been for centuries. These local chieftains are opposed to the Soviet presence, but, though generally sympathetic to the resistance, they are independent of the Mujahideen.

Not until September of 1981, almost two years after the invasion, did the Soviet media report the death of a Soviet soldier in battle. And during the first five years of the war the Soviet press tried to minimise the military commitment in Afghanistan, and create the impression that Soviet troops were in Afghanistan for training. As was true of the Americans in Vietnam, the Soviets had originally believed that their troops would have to do little fighting - that the mere presence of their forces in Afghanistan would stiffen the resolve of the Afghan Army and raise its morale. But, with recruits defecting in droves, the Afghan Army melted away. It was so unreliable that the Soviets would disarm suspect units at night and return the rifles and machine guns only at daybreak. After five years of fighting, the Soviet force of more than a hundred and fifteen thousand, supported by thirty thousand additional soldiers just across the Soviet border, had achieved no more than uneasy control of the cities and about twenty per cent of the countryside. At night, entire neighbourhoods of even the larger cities were in rebel hands. Kabul itself was not secure from guerrilla rocket attacks. "There is no safe place to walk," Soviet soldiers complained on returning home.

Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers, most of them conscripts, have served time in Afghanistan. Over ten thousand have been killed in battle. The Soviets have limited their

military objectives and modified their tactics in the hope of keeping their casualties low, but Pentagon intelligence analysts believe that their dead, wounded, and non-battle casualties still number between four and five thousand a year, and that more are the result of dysentery, cholera, and bad medical care than of enemy fire. In the Pentagon and the CIA, a number of trained observers are watching Afghanistan, for the war provides the only view anyone has had of the Soviet Army in prolonged combat since the end of the Second World War. The Soviet military effort has become more efficient with experience, Pentagon intelligence analysts say, but they add that overall they are not impressed by the Soviet performance. The morale in the Russian fighting units in Afghanistan is low. Alcohol and drugs are a serious problem. Soviet tactics appear to be outmoded or inappropriate, and the forces are plagued by sloppiness and poor discipline. But some observers, such as the Defence Department intelligence specialist Elie Krakowski, have said that despite these problems and the rebels' access to more sophisticated weapons the Soviets have steadily "widened the gap in their favour." Another senior specialist in the Pentagon concludes that for the job the Soviets have set themselves in Afghanistan they have always been "seriously undermanned." He estimates that no more than thirty thousand fighting men can be sent into battle on any given day - not a great number in a country the size of Texas. The Soviets maintain about two million men under arms, and they could have put more troops into the war if they had chosen to.

When the Soviet forces intervened in Afghanistan, it was predicted in the West that the docile Soviet masses would be told nothing about the war except self-serving lies, and the KremIin would have a free hand to pacify Afghanistan: there would be no need to contend with either domestic opposition or the embarrassment of worldwide criticism. Things have not worked out quite that way. After eight years, the effects of the war are widely felt in Soviet society. In Armenia, Georgia, the Ukraine, and other Soviet republics, there have been public demonstrations against service in Afghanistan. Between four and five million Afghans are refugees, and the brutal character of the war is not lost on the Soviet soldiers who must fight it. Because returning soldiers bring home firsthand reports, Soviet citizens know enough of the war to raise some of the same moral questions that troubled many Americans during the Vietnam War. Even those Soviet citizens who accept the official explanation of the invasion - that it was provoked by Pakistani and American aggression - can see that the seemingly endless war is indeed a "bleeding wound," as Mikhail Gorbachev himself has called it, because it reinforces Soviet isolation and delays on internal reform. In each of the last eight years, the United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution condemning the Soviet Union for the invasion of Afghanistan - in language much tougher than any used against the United States during the Vietnam War - and the resolution has now been endorsed by a hundred and twenty-three nations. The invasion of Afghanistan has hurt the Soviet Union's relations not only with the United States but also with China and with Iran and other Islamic nations. Because of the decision of the Kremlin leadership to limit the number of troops in Afghanistan, the political costs are not as high as those which American political leaders incurred during the Vietnam War, but, over time, they have grown. Therefore, during a period of eight years, under four national leaders, the Soviet objectives have been scaled down, and the Soviet strategy has been modified.

In Brezhnev's time, the Soviet Army conducted large-scale search-and-destroy operations in the Afghan countryside. Villages suspected of harbouring guerrillas were bombed, and water supplies and food were deliberately destroyed to drive the guerrillas from their hiding places. In 1980, uprisings occurred in Kandahar, the second-largest city, and also in Herat and Jalalabad; some cities were under rebel control for as much as a week before Soviet sweeps were able to drive the rebels out. In 1982 and again in 1984, the Soviets launched major operations to destroy a centre of fierce resistance in the Panjshir Valley, forty-five miles north of Kabul, but did not succeed. In April of 1983, Soviet bombers carried out "carpet bombing" attacks on Herat, and many civilians died. At the same time, Soviet political advisers in Kabul were counselling reforms to make the

revolutionary government more acceptable to the people, for more than four million Afghans had left their homes, with three million ending up in camps in Pakistan, providing a vast pool of recruits for the resistance. Today, many of these refugees routinely go back and forth across the frontier, sometimes by hiding in trucks and vans that carry supplies to the guerrillas, but mostly by mule or camel. Occasionally, a family catches a bus to Kabul.

Belatedly, the Soviets began to realise that as their attacks on the civilian population became more savage their difficulties increased. Traditionally, Afghan warriors do not venture far from their home territory, for they must guard the women and children.

By driving so many dependants into refugee camps, the Soviets unwittingly liberated the Mujahideen from their family responsibilities and turned them into more mobile and formidable opponents. The Mujahideen themselves accelerated this process. Even before the Soviet invasion, they had declared a jihad, a holy war, against the Communist government, and, as custom prescribed, had moved their dependants to an "abode of peace" in Pakistan - some four hundred and seventy thousand of them. By the end of 1981, about two and a half million refugees were in Pakistan; the total increased by only four hundred thousand in the next seven years.

By the time of Yuri Andropov's accession as General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, in late 1982, the prospect of a quick Soviet victory had faded. Military operations and air strikes were therefore reduced, and the Soviets evolved the strategy they have been following, with some interruptions, ever since. Soviet advisers began to insist that the Afghan government take political reform seriously, repair its relations with the merchants of Kabul, and improve its enforcement techniques. The KGB reorganised and built up the Afghan secret police. There was a new emphasis on unconventional warfare - subversion, infiltration, bribery, assassination - in order to break the Afghan resistance. In many cases, the Soviets succeeded in establishing a modus vivendi with local commanders. There was much more accommodation between the two sides, and many more local truces, than the sporadic coverage of the war on the nightly news suggested. Under Andropov, there was also a new emphasis on political strategies to exploit tribal rivalries and battles for turf among competing groups of Mujahideen. And when cities were attacked or Soviet convoys were ambushed merciless punishment followed.

From time to time, accounts of Soviet atrocities appear in magazines and newspapers in the United States. A typical story appeared in Reader's Digest in November of 1985. It described how Narainjan, a ten-year-old shepherd boy, had picked up a doll-like object on a grassy hillside and had his hand blown off. Arthur Bonner, a sixty-five-year-old retired television journalist who made seven trips into Afghanistan in 1985 and 1986 as a correspondent for the Times, travelling thirty-five hundred miles throughout the country, remembers seeing a Soviet "toy bomb" in the shape of a vase. Others have reported seeing lethal devices shaped like tiny pistols or horseshoes. Most of these booby traps were dropped in the mountain passes in the early years of the war. Stories about them appear to be more widely distributed than the weapons themselves are today.

The Mujahideen spare nothing in their efforts to impute genocidal intentions to the Soviets. There are eyewitness reports that Soviet troops have committed war crimes by taking reprisals on unarmed villages following guerrilla attacks in the area. On one such occasion, on September 13, 1982 - an incident that J. Bruce Amstutz, the former United States chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan, considers "particularly well documented" - Soviet forces swept into a village thirty-five miles from Kabul, forced a hundred and five of the inhabitants, including women and children, into a tunnel, and massacred them. On another occasion, after a Soviet sweep, a Swedish official who was in a guerrilla-controlled area reported, "Russian soldiers shot at anything alive in six villages - people, hens, donkeys - and then they plundered what remained of value." But Pentagon officials

question the charges that the Soviets are deliberately destroying the country. "There is a Belgian Baby Syndrome at work here," one senior Pentagon official told us, referring to the British propaganda campaign to stir up feelings in the United States against the Germans in the First World War.

In the early nineteen-eighties, the State Department repeatedly charged the Soviets with using chemical weapons. In 1982 alone, according to one official United States report, there were "several dozen chemical attacks in Afghanistan resulting in over 300 agent-related deaths." Amstutz says that Western correspondents, a hospital director in Peshawar, and at least one Soviet deserter have offered eye-witness corroboration of specific uses of chemical warfare. The Soviets deny any use whatever. Volunteer doctors and nurses serving the Mujahideen inside Afghanistan whom we interviewed all reported seeing civilians and animals killed by mines and aerial attacks but not by gas attacks.

The Soviets accompanied their new military strategy under Andropov with stepped up diplomatic efforts to end the resistance. Diego Cordovez, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who is in charge of the peace negotiations, believes that in 1983 the Soviets made the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan but then Soviet diplomacy was stalled during Andropov's illness and through the brief interregnum of Konstantin Chernenko, his successor. Under Chernenko, Soviet military strategy appeared to be harsh but confused and ineffective. Mikhail Gorbachev, upon becoming General Secretary, resumed the Andropov strategy and took it farther. The Soviets made more use of special commando units, which they deployed to strike suspected centres of the resistance. Increasingly, they attacked, with devastating effect, suspected rebel positions and supply routes with light counter-guerrilla forces supported by helicopter gunships.

Since 1986, however, the Mujahideen have been receiving Blowpipe and Stinger ground-to-air missiles from Britain and the United States, and these make the use of the helicopters costly. The Mujahideen claim that the missiles have destroyed more than four hundred Soviet planes, or over a third of the Soviet Union's annual production. This figure may be exaggerated. Still, there is no doubt that the missiles have been a boost for the morale of the Mujahideen; moreover, they have forced the Soviets to shift their tactics once again. The use of aircraft has been curtailed, and as air support has become less certain Soviet and Afghan Army ground forces have become more vulnerable to ambush and less aggressive.

The Soviet invasion served to unite hundreds of scattered guerrilla groups into a national effort against the Communists, and within a little over a year the Mujahideen grew to eighty thousand full-time warriors, who have since demonstrated remarkable military prowess. Pentagon analysts say that the Mujahideen have "matured" into an effective fighting force. Still, it is not possible to describe the resistance as if it were an army; it is a mosaic of fifteen hundred separate "fronts" in which a hundred and fifty thousand guerrillas participate. The Mujahideen exhibit solidarity but also carry on intense competition within their ranks; and as many as a dozen guerrilla groups often coexist in a single area. Each group not only has its own tribal or ethnic membership but is further separated from other groups by its political affiliation with one of eleven Mujahideen organisations - seven in Pakistan and four in Iran. Groups may unite to repel attacks by Soviet forces, but only rarely to initiate combat. On the contrary, when the enemy is not pressing them their internal conflicts accelerate. The commanders say that while a group is transporting weapons from Pakistan to its base it is more likely to be attacked by a rival than by the enemy. Hizb, the Islamic Party, led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar, is the largest resistance organisation and the one most frequently accused of confiscating the supplies of other groups. There are other kinds of intra-Mujahideen violence, too. In 1984, Zabiullah, a legendary commander of Jamiat, the Islamic Society, based in the strategic northern area, was killed, reportedly by a rival organisation. Two years later, Muhammad Salim, a popular Hizb commander, was murdered - by members of his own

party, it is said - because he had responded positively to a call from the Jamiat commander Ahmed Shah Massoud for a unified command. Large-scale defections normally follow factional warfare; the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in London, reported in 1986 that after Zabiullah's death most of his people joined the government's militia.

The disunity and the absence of a common strategy cause most commanders to limit their military operations to defending their own territory. In his book "Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan," Olivier Roy, a French academic who has made six trips into Afghanistan, writes, "The resistance has not deployed its troops in line with strategic considerations. Soviet disposition of troops and strategy determines the military activity of the resistance, who become involved in fighting only when Soviet units appear inside their territory. When there are only government troops, a modus vivendi is soon established between the two sides."

Military observers have documented the shortage of technical skills and training among the Mujahideen. Though a number of well-trained former officers of the Afghan Army have joined the resistance, many more have offered their services but have found the doors closed. "The most active organisations are Islamic fundamentalists," said a Soviet-trained major who was a member of Afghanistan's Defence Planning Council in 1978 and is now a refugee in Pakistan. "They do not trust us." Another officer remarked, "There is a social gap between us and the commanders. They are interested in fighting, which to them is a question of honour and Islam. They have no use for our ideas of discipline, training, and organisation. To them, modern warfare means fighting with modern weapons. Nothing more." An artillery commander who had been trained in the United States agreed. "The resistance is extremely tribalised," he said. "The leaders do not understand the outlook of professional military men."

Like their Communist adversaries, the Mujahideen talk a great deal about the need for unity, but each effort to coöperate seems to leave them more bitterly divided. The foreign sponsors - the Saudis and the CIA - are reported to work hard at trying to unify the rival factions, much as the Soviet advisers did to unify the P.D.P.A. before the invasion, and with similar success. Senior American officials tell Congress - usually when the vote on covert aid approaches - that the Mujahideen commanders are now working together and coördinating their activities. The favourite example is Ahmed Shah Massoud, who in 1986 did make substantial progress toward building a unified command in four northern provinces. But in recent months, as the possibility of an imminent Soviet withdrawal has become more credible, fighting among the Mujahideen has intensified, as have politically motivated assassinations within the Afghan community in Pakistan.

The Mujahideen are too disunited to win the war, but they are too spread out to lose it. The Soviets face more than a thousand separate armies that depend not upon a central command, which could be wiped out, but upon the initiative of thousands of individual leaders and the bravery of tens of thousands more. Afghans fight because their code of honour instils the warrior spirit and their sense of religious obligation demands their participation in the holy war. The Koran exhorts all Muslims to take part in a rigorous effort to combat evil and promote good, not necessarily through war. Sufi philosophers have written that the personal struggle for enlightenment and the conquest of passion are forms of Jihad. The ayatollahs in contemporary Iran call the struggle for economic development a Jihad. Ever since the expansionist period of Islam, however, the word has usually connoted a just war against an evil enemy. Once the war has started, it becomes a religious duty to fight in it.

Until Gorbachev's February 1988 announcement of Moscow's intention' to withdraw Soviet troops before the formation of a coalition government, the Soviets had openly worried about a bloodbath if they abandoned the Afghan government. This concern is not a frivolous one. A decade of war has undermined the old Afghan ways of managing

and limiting violence. These traditional methods rested on a set of shared values and customs, which have been weakened by revolution, war, and exile. Furthermore, to the ancient ethnic and tribal divisions of Afghanistan have been added the conflict of ideologies and the irreconcilable ambitions of armed political organisations. In the Afghan code of honour, badal -the obligation to take revenge - has an important place. Kinsmen of someone who has been killed by an enemy must discharge the "debt" of retribution, which is handed down from one generation to the next. Neither time nor space limits the obligation. Unless a truce is made and compensation is paid, harm done in Peshawar or Kabul may be avenged years later in New York or Moscow.

Afghanistan's guerrilla war has spawned a significant network of private enterprise. Arthur Bonner describes life among the Mujahideen in his book 'Among the Afghans'. As in the olden days, he reports, Afghans are making money by controlling roads and mountain passes. Guerrilla commanders collect tolls from one another. "The route was divided into sections, each under the control of a single commander or an alliance of commanders," he writes. "For each section there was a fixed rate for passengers and freight although there seemed to be no relationship between the rates in different areas." Bonner relates moving instances of the Afghan people's commitment to the holy war - their keenness to join, their willingness to die. As a convoy is assembled for the war zone, clerks read out letters from families offering their sons: "We are a poor family and have little land. Please take our youngest son to fight the jihad!" A village mullah recommends another: "This man is Sadiq, son of Mustafa. He is honest and wishes to serve God." An individual who joins the Mujahideen is as likely to buy his personal weapon as to draw it from an armoury. We met families who had sold their jewellery to pay for a son's Soviet-made weapon.

Arms and heroin are the mainstays of what cynics in Pakistan call the jihad enterprises. The resentment among Pakistanis who are not involved in the illicit trade is understandable, for the jihad in Afghanistan has brought their country corruption, addiction, and crime. In 1986, according to the International Narcotics Matters Bureau of the State Department, Afghanistan produced as much as five hundred metric tons of opium - almost four times the amount produced two years before. In 1987, Afghanistan had a bumper crop of poppies, and some experts estimate that it may now be the biggest single source of heroin in the world. Among large landowners in Afghanistan, nearly all of whom are opponents of the regime, opium has superseded wheat, corn, and fruit as the principal crop. Recent refugees with whom we spoke reported widespread food shortages in the poppy growing areas - a condition contributing to migration to the cities. Nangarhar, the eastern province, adjacent to Pakistan, is the centre of poppy cultivation. But visitors to all parts of Afghanistan - Badakhshan, in the north: Hazrat, in the west; and Kandahar, in the south - have reported seeing the unmistakable blaze of white and purple flowers. Officials of the Pakistan Narcotics Control Board estimate that opium poppies are now grown as a primary crop in thirteen of Afghanistan's twenty-nine provinces.

In Kandahar Province, Bonner says, extensive opium fields belong to Ahmad Akbar, a commander affiliated with the National Islamic Front, which is one of the resistance groups in Peshawar. (The head of that organisation, Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani, a traditionalist and a moderate, also heads a major religious order.) The family of the commander Ali Ahmad, who belongs to the fundamentalist Jamiat, has several hundred acres that in 1986 were being used for opium production. Both commanders told Bonner they needed the money "for the jihad." Younis Khalis, then the chairman of the seven-party alliance of Islamic unity of Afghan Mujahideen, told us last November that, in accordance with Islamic law, he had prohibited opium growing and ordered military commanders to enforce the prohibition strictly. The leaders deny that opium is cultivated in Afghanistan on a significant scale. The United States Embassy in Islamabad supports their denial; in a 1985 report it stated that "there is no evidence indicating that the Afghan Mujahideen freedom fighters have been involved in narcotics activities as a

matter of policy to finance their operations." The statement is almost certainly true in a literal sense. There is no evidence showing that much, if any, of the proceeds from narcotics are used to finance guerrilla operations. Clearly, opium production does not help the Mujahideen's cause. By reducing Afghan food resources, it enhances dependence on the government, which imports food and controls the cities. Also, in the poppy-growing areas both growers and dealers seek stability and secure transportation; hence the Mujahideen come under pressure to reach an accommodation with the government.

Guerrilla commanders make frequent trips to Pakistan for weapons and supplies. We spoke about the drug business with four of them. Each acknowledged the existence of the trade in narcotics but denied any personal involvement in it. The growers' price for the harvested crop of opium, they said, ranges from forty-five to fifty-five dollars a pound. Virtually all the refining used to be done in Pakistan, but now, as the fighting has subsided and an undeclared truce exists in many areas, opium is increasingly refined in Afghanistan itself. It is transported out of the country by the Mujahideen, who cross freely into Pakistan and less freely into Iran. Once opium shipments reach Pakistan, they disappear into a complex of businessmen, smugglers, and government officials. Recently, members of élite Pakistani families, including graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, have been arrested at airports on charges of smuggling narcotics. In June 1987, General Zia-ul-Haq told a Norwegian journalist that he favoured the death sentence for offenders in "the holy war against drugs," and the joke went around the country that the President was preparing to liquidate the General Staff. The suspicion is widespread in Pakistan that the money to be made from the war is no small obstacle to its settlement.

With funding from Saudi Arabia and the United States, Afghanistan's resistance movement is one of the best financed such movements in history. Yet a majority of the guerrillas inside Afghanistan lack arms, food, and medical supplies. The Mujahideen accept their hardships with astonishing stoicism. According to Aaron Karp, writing in the September 1987 issue of Armed Forces Journal International, eleven hundred and fifty Stinger and Blowpipe ground-to-air missiles were sent to Pakistan for the use of the resistance between September of 1986 and August of 1987. Of these, eight hundred and sixty-three actually reached commanders inside Afghanistan. At least sixty were captured. The first shipment went exclusively to the fundamentalist wing of the resistance; that is, the three groups headed by Hekmatyar, Khalis, and Dr. Sayed Burhanuddin Rabbani. Reports indicate that the fundamentalists continue to be favoured over the more traditionalist (and moderate) wing of the Mujahideen. One of the most successful commanders belonging to the traditionalist National Islamic Front told us that he had never seen a Stinger.

Some time ago, a top Pakistani intelligence official confided his concern to us that once Americans got to know their Afghan clients better they would become less enthusiastic about supporting the war. Leading figures in the seven resistance groups in Peshawar, which receive more than half a billion dollars a year in covert American support, have not disguised their feelings about America. Gulbadin Hekmatyar, Whose Mujahideen organisation is a major recipient of CIA aid, is well known for his outspoken contempt for the United States. But he is not alone. A poster outside the office of Dr. Rabbani was noted by an American reporter in 1982. It carried the message "In point of us conquerist America and blood thirsty USSR are both enemy of the great revolution of Iran and Afghanistan," and it was signed "Rabbani." Younis Khalis was in Washington last November as the chairman of the alliance of resistance groups. He is a theologian and a warrior of considerable repute. We asked him what was the most important thing that Americans should know about the war in Afghanistan, and without hesitation he said, "You are a materialistic country, and your leader should take you in hand and give you spiritual direction."

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, and religion pervades rural life. Traditionally, Islam has coexisted with Afghan tribal customs, which are pre-Islamic and secular, although the two frequently conflict. For example, custom forbids women to inherit property, while Islamic law requires that women receive a share; and custom states that blood feuds are a matter of honour, while religious law forbids them. Traditionally, Islam in Afghanistan has been compatible with secular rule under tribal chiefs, the khans; and the maliks, and tribal assemblies, the jirgas. The Islamic traditionalists wish to live like their grandfathers. The most powerful among them are large landowners, who have no interest in disturbing existing social arrangements.

Islamic fundamentalism, on the other hand, is heavily influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, a twentieth-century phenomenon, and by the Khomeini movement in Iran. Not unlike some strains of Christian fundamentalism in the United States, it searches the scriptures for authority to support radical change in the social order. It uses an imagined golden age of scriptural times to support a modern ideology at odds with Afghanistan's past. Theocracy is the heart of the fundamentalist ideology, but it goes against the Afghan grain. The country has never had a theocratic government or a centralised state. The fundamentalists appear to be intent on introducing both.

The basic split in Afghan society is not between capitalism and Communism but between traditionalism and modernism. The fundamentalists are much like the Communists, and neither can govern Afghanistan, for much the same reasons. While some of the leaders of the movement are religious teachers, many of them are products of secular education and, by profession, are doctors, technocrats, engineers, and entrepreneurs. Gulbadin Hekmatyar, whose fundamentalist group is the most politically extreme, studied to be an engineer. Like the Communists, the fundamentalists are mostly from rural families and were converted by coming into contact with the modern world at the university in Kabul. The radical right and the radical left each sees itself as the saviour of Afghanistan from the other. At the same time, each sees its own ideology as the instrument for challenging entrenched power and for moving a beloved, backward country into the modern era.

From the day the Soviets invaded, American diplomatic strategy was to mobilise world opinion against the Soviets and at the same time minimise the appearance of American involvement. "We are interested in Afghanistan only because the Soviets are there," a senior State Department official told us last November. It was all part of the game of nations for the Soviets to "exercise paramountcy" over Afghanistan, in the discreet imperial phrase of nineteenth-century British diplomats, but sending an army across an international frontier into territory previously unoccupied by Soviet forces was breaking the rules. What aroused American concern was not the particular victim but the act of aggression itself and what it portended for the future. The day the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Afghanistan became a domino.

It might be thought curious that such a militantly anti-Communist Administration as Ronald Reagan's has focused so much more attention on the role the "evil empire" has played in Central America, where the Soviets are giving limited military aid, than on Afghanistan, where the Soviets are fighting a war against the people. The President has never given a television speech devoted to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As a State Department official explained to us, American leaders had no need to say much about the invasion once they had expressed their outrage, because the invasion spoke for itself. The Soviet Union, which had claimed to be the champion of the nonaligned nations, was making war on a poor, nonaligned, Muslim country. The more visible the American interest in the future of Afghanistan became, the more the Soviets might be able to divert attention from their own aggression. It was not to the advantage of the United States to do anything to convert this North-South struggle into an East-West confrontation. The support for the Afghan resistance by the United States and Saudi Arabia is public knowledge, but it is technically clandestine, on the theory that Pakistan's

involvement will be less of a provocation to the Soviets if it is not officially proclaimed. The whole purpose of keeping "secret" something that was reported in major newspapers around the world was to preserve 'plausible deniability'. For this reason, in the early years of the war the CIA went to great expense to procure non-American arms, even manufacturing simulated Soviet weapons in a secret factory. Thus, if the Soviets should publicly protest the American involvement the President could say, "Prove it." The same considerations prompted this country to minimise its role in the peace negotiations as well.

Pakistan has played a key part in encouraging the American commitment to the Afghan resistance. The resistance began six years before the Soviet invasion, as an expression of a long-standing border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 1973, when Daud, a Pushtun, took over the government in Kabul for the second time, he renewed encouragement to the Pushtuns of Pakistan to secede and join their blood brothers under the Afghan flag. At that point, the government of Pakistan fought back by organising the Pushtuns into a guerrilla movement to harass the Afghan government. Younis Khalis told us that he went to Pakistan in 1973 to organise resistance forces to fight Daud, whom he considered a dangerous modernist, even a Communist. For fifteen years, two very different Pakistani governments - the civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq - have used the Afghan resistance first as a way of exerting pressure on Kabul, then as a means to strengthen the often wavering American commitment to Pakistan. The more the United States involved itself in the Afghan cause, the more Pakistan would emerge as the indispensable staging area for the fight against Communism, and the more secure the flow of American aid to Pakistan would be.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, whose size and influence are believed to have vastly increased in recent years, has been in charge of distributing the weapons; that is, the government of General Zia has had the most to say about what sorts of arms should be sent to which resistance organisations and in what amounts. Zia, who when he seized power, in 1979, was supported only by the Jamaat-i-Islami, Pakistan's right-wing fundamentalist party, has used the weapons flow to build up the Islamic elements of the Afghan resistance - at the expense of the more moderate and secular elements. But as shipments of arms from the United States have increased and become more visible over the past two years, American intelligence officials have assumed greater responsibility for weapons distribution, and, according to a journalist in Pakistan, are "more closely involved in the day-to-day running of the war than ever before."

The United States covert-military aid programme has been pushed in several different directions, because high officials have clashed over its objectives. From the start, leading American officials have believed that the Soviet invasion was a blunder, and that it has served American interests. An early end to the war seemed implausible from the outset, and, moreover, Washington did not make ending the war a priority. In the Carter Administration, Brzezinski was the leading advocate of the "make the Russians bleed" school, and in the Reagan Administration the most forceful exponent of this view was William Casey, the late director of the CIA. But within the CIA there have been important disagreements. John McMahon, the former deputy director of the CIA, considered it both bad form and dangerous to supply American weapons in a covert operation. Was the program meant to serve as an inducement to negotiate, it or was it designed primarily to punish the Soviets? The size of the covert-aid operation, the character of the weapons, and the choice of recipients would differ depending upon the answer.

Congress has seen the guerrilla war in Afghanistan as a struggle for freedom with none of the moral ambiguities that surround the Contras in Nicaragua, and a number of members who have opposed the covert American war in Nicaragua have embraced Afghan aid to demonstrate their commitment to fighting Communism. In 1983, Senator Malcolm Wallop, of Wyoming, led a fight to throw off the restraints on the Afghan policy.

"It's so damn obscure what the policy is," the Senator said. Other congressional supporters of the Afghan resistance, claiming that the United States was supplying "just enough aid for Afghans to fight and die but not enough to win," introduced a joint resolution calling for "material assistance, as the United States considers appropriate, to help the Afghan people to fight effectively for their freedom." In an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, CIA and State Department witnesses repeated their warnings that increased American involvement would endanger Pakistan, and for almost a year Senator Charles Mathias, of Maryland, led a fight to kill the resolution, which he considered an open-ended license to intervene, in the tradition of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In 1984, when President Reagan was trying to persuade Congress to give twenty-four million dollars in aid to the Contras, the CIA had no trouble getting an appropriation of thirty million dollars for the Afghan resistance. Shortly thereafter, a Texas representative, Charles Wilson, who had made frequent trips to Pakistan and had once crossed into Afghanistan in the company of the Mujahideen, decided that this was too little. "There were fifty-eight thousand dead in Vietnam and we owe the Russians one," he noted, and his single-minded efforts resulted in the addition of forty million dollars to the Pentagon budget for the well-advertised secret war in Afghanistan. In October of 1984, the resolution on Afghanistan passed. The following April, President Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 166, which called for American efforts to drive Soviet forces from Afghanistan "by all means available." After secret debates in the congressional Intelligence Committees, appropriations for the increased commitment to the war in Afghanistan were approved. The prohibition against supplying sophisticated weapons to the Mujahideen was overcome.

Until recently, the "bleeders," as those who advocate this policy is known around Washington, usually carried the day. The more ideological foreign-policy officials, such as former Assistant Secretary of Defence Richard Perle, have regarded Afghanistan not as the locale of a harsh and dangerous conflict to be ended but as a place to teach the Russians a lesson. The Soviets had an ideological explanation for why they could not lose in Afghanistan - history was on their side, because Communist rule was by definition "progressive" - and the "bleeders", driven by their own ideology, came to the same conclusion by a different route. The Soviets were too evil to withdraw. They had never pulled their troops out of any place they had pronounced to be "socialist" and under the rule of a Communist Party. It followed that the Russians could never be induced to negotiate a settlement. The most the United States could accomplish in Afghanistan was to make sure that the resistance would be kept alive and substantial numbers of Soviets would be killed. Thus, the more modern the weapons supplied to the Mujahideen, the better. As the war dragged on, it would reveal to the world not only Soviet brutality but also Soviet impotence - and American resolve.

Support for the Mujahideen was the cornerstone of what soon came to be known as the Reagan Doctrine - a global package of widely publicised covert aid for anti-Communist guerrillas fighting the established governments in Nicaragua, Angola, Kampuchea (Cambodia), and Afghanistan. In most cases, the United States continued to recognise the target government while paying for its overthrow. (A shell of an American Embassy still operates in Kabul.) The Reagan Doctrine was an ideological statement of a global war against Communism, and its aim was to establish the United States as a player in the global game of guerrilla politics. What the Soviets had done in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, when they were encouraging wars of national liberation and providing at least moral support in successful leftist revolutions, the United States would do by sponsoring right-wing guerrilla movements in the eighties. For the President's right-wing supporters, the symmetry and the poetic justice of the Reagan Doctrine were irresistible. But a number of specialists in the foreign-policy establishment and some veterans of counter-insurgency wars were sceptical, for they understood how deceptive the symmetry was. In none of the four countries selected for major American military aid did the freedom fighters have any chance of winning. The real question was whether the benefits of harassing the Soviets and "showing the flag" were worth the costs and the

risks of further involvement. A week after the inter-agency meeting at which the decision was made to send Stinger missiles with American markings to guerrilla forces fighting the leftist government in Angola and to the Mujahideen, John McMahon resigned from the CIA

The decision to send Stingers was popular in Congress, because it almost certainly prevented the Soviets from crippling the resistance - and after Soviet sweeps in 1984 and 1985 it had begun to look as if the resistance might collapse. But the more sophisticated the weapons flowing through the Pakistani pipeline to the resistance, the greater the likelihood that the weapons would end up in some other war and the money in some unauthorised pocket. In October of 1987, fragments of American-made Stinger missiles were found in the wreckage of two Iranian gunboats: the missiles had supposedly been captured by the Iranians in a border clash with the Afghan rebels but almost certainly had been sold to them. Unknown but significant quantities of other weapons supplied to the Afghans have found their way onto the world arms market. One reasons the CIA's covert operation in Afghanistan has been so expensive is that the weapons, mostly of Soviet origin, are bought from former Soviet-aid recipients, such as Egypt, or from arms traders. As in the Iran-Contra affair, millions of dollars can disappear in exorbitant markups, middleman fees, and sloppy accounting.

Some members of Congress feel that one important declared foreign-policy objective of the United States has been a casualty of the Afghan war: for most of the past eight years, the United States has suspended the operation of Section 669 of the Foreign Assistance Act, which is aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation, and has continued to aid Pakistan despite widespread suspicion that it is secretly building a nuclear bomb. Under legislation passed last December, the Pakistani government - apprehensive that when the war ends it will come under intense American pressure to curb its nuclear program - is assured that for at least two years the nuclear issue will not be used by Congress to disturb the flow of United States aid. The Administration had urged that this assurance be given, presumably to insure Pakistan's coöperation in the covert war.

Diego Cordovez is a professional peacemaker. He is an Ecuadorian lawyer who has spent most of his career as an international civil servant. For six years, he has been travelling back and forth among Geneva, Moscow, Kabul, Islamabad, and Washington, seeking to define issues and narrow differences among the four principal parties involved - the governments of the United States, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Only Pakistan and Afghanistan are formal participants in the Geneva negotiations, but Moscow and Washington have been regularly consulted. The Mujahideen have officially denounced the negotiations, and Iran has kept aloof. In Geneva, Cordovez shuttles between two nearby conference rooms in the old League of Nations Palace, taking messages back and forth between the Afghan and Pakistani officials, who will not sit in the same room. The areas of agreement are embodied in carefully phrased, lawyerly prose in four draft instruments bound in a handsome leather folder. Cordovez is a resourceful, elegant draftsman, with a gift for finding the useful ambiguities that propel agreement. He is an incurable optimist - optimism being a temperamental requirement for this line of work - and is known affectionately among sceptical diplomats in Pakistan as the Sênor of the Tunnel at the End of the Light.

The United States formally endorsed the United Nations mediation, but for the first three years it showed little enthusiasm for the negotiations to end the war in Afghanistan. After the 1985 Geneva summit, Washington began to change its public position. On December 13th that year, Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead declared that the United States would agree to be a guarantor of a settlement. The hope that the hard-liners had nourished - that the United States would recognise the alliance of Mujahideen groups as a government in exile - collapsed after a widely publicised meeting between a prominent resistance leader and President Reagan, at which the idea was firmly rejected.

Three of the four instruments on which the peace is to be erected were virtually completed more than three years ago. (A fifth, which provides for the monitoring of the agreement by the United Nations, was agreed upon in 1986.) The first of the documents includes a mutual pledge of non-interference. The second provides for international guarantees of the settlement. The third is an agreement for the voluntary return of the refugees in safety. In 1985, these three agreements were accepted by the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and Iran ended its public denunciation of the peace talks. The fourth instrument which specifies the timing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, had been the sticking point, but in February of this year the Soviet Union suggested completing its withdrawal in a ten month period, and set May 15th as the date when the process would begin. Acceding to the insistence of the United States, Gorbachev agreed to remove half the Soviet troops within ninety days, and to complete the withdrawal by March 15, 1989. The Soviet Union has made its withdrawal conditional on the cessation of outside aid to the resistance, and that principle is embodied in the draft agreements.

For six years, the Soviet Union had sought to engage the United States and Pakistan in a negotiation for a coalition government for Afghanistan as a precondition for the withdrawal of its troops. From the first, American officials had made it clear to Cordovez that the United States would not be drawn into such a negotiation. A senior official told us after Gorbachev's visit to Washington last December that the superpowers should not be in the business of inventing a government for Afghanistan. As far as the United States was concerned, there was only one issue: Soviet withdrawal. For six years, the Pakistani government had adopted the same posture, which it called a principled position of non-interference, a way of saying, "Let Afghans settle their own affairs." It had also been widely regarded in Washington and Islamabad as a non-negotiable position, for it seemed inconceivable that the Soviet Union would walk away from Afghanistan without some assurance of a friendly government in Kabul. But in February the Soviets announced that they no longer insisted on making their withdrawal conditional upon the establishment of an acceptable government.

The switch in the Soviet position provoked an immediate switch in the position of Pakistan. Like the "bleeders" in Washington, Pakistani military and intelligence officials had far more invested in fighting the war than in ending it. The Soviet capitulation to the American and Pakistani position that Soviet troops simply withdraw without a political settlement struck Zia as a betrayal of Pakistan. He spoke bitterly to newspaper editors in Islamabad. "America and Russia have reached an understanding," he said. "By brokering in coal, we have blackened our face." In the absence of a coalition government including the Mujahideen, refugees, and the ruling P.D.P.A., he said, "Soviet withdrawal would only lead the country into chaos, bloodshed, anarchy, and civil war." In such a situation, millions of refugees in Pakistan would resist being returned to their homes.

Zia's concerns are understandable. Unless there is a broad political settlement inside Afghanistan, supported by the superpowers, there will be no peace in the region. And Pakistan, though it may continue to receive enormous revenues from the war, will also feel its devastating effects - crime, addiction, and violence caused by the drug trade, the refugees, and the bombings in every major city. Nevertheless, Zia is reported to have dropped his insistence that a transitional coalition government be established in Kabul before the withdrawal agreement is signed, provided that Cordovez continues "private" efforts to arrange one after the Soviets leave.

But there is one remaining serious obstacle to a negotiated end to the Afghan war. As the talks in Geneva moved toward what appears to be their final phase, a coalition of supporters of the Mujahideen in Congress, right-wing activists, and sceptical columnists mounted an attack on the settlement. The two strongest supporters of the Mujahideen in Congress, Representative Charles Wilson, of Texas, and Senator Gordon Humphrey, of New Hampshire, condemned the Geneva agreements as a sellout of the Afghan "freedom fighters," because the accords called for a cessation of aid to the Mujahideen without

committing the Soviets to stop giving aid to the Kabul government. Humphrey characterised the Geneva agreements as "indecent" "scandalous," and "dangerous." Wilson suggested that it was not necessary to sign the agreements, for the Soviets were "defeated" and would have to withdraw militarily in any event.

Seventy-seven senators, led by Majority Leader Robert Byrd, went on record in opposition to the agreements, and President Reagan claimed that he was personally unaware of the commitment - although it had been announced in 1985 - that the United States would be a guarantor of the agreements. He wrote Byrd that a cessation of United States aid "must be matched by a cessation of similar aid to the regime in Kabul." The Soviets have rejected the principle of reciprocity on much the same ground used by the United States in the past. (Aiding recognised governments is an established prerogative of sovereign governments; supplying armed guerrillas fighting the government is normally regarded as subversion.) At no time during almost seven years of negotiations had the United States ever brought up the matter of government-to-government aid to Afghanistan. As hopes faded for an early agreement in Geneva, the Soviet Union, as some of the "bleeders" in Washington had predicted and hoped, announced that it would withdraw its troops from Afghanistan even without an agreement, but in its own time and in its own way.

A unilateral Soviet withdrawal would not mean an end to the war; it would mean a new kind of war. Even with a political agreement on a coalition government, which is still possible, Afghanistan faces continued fighting - wars of retribution between the Mujahideen and those who have collaborated with the Russians, and fights among the different factions within the resistance movement. Gulbadin Hekmatyar, who was recently elected chairman of the alliance of resistance groups in Peshawar, vows that he will not stop fighting until he has established a fundamentalist order in Afghanistan, and he has promised to continue the fight from Iran if Pakistan closes its doors. (He has also boasted to interviewers that he plans to liberate the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union.) But without a political settlement subscribed to by the United States and the Soviet Union, the war in Afghanistan will be bloodier. It will become a two-sided proxy war between the superpowers. Covert aid will continue to the Mujahideen, and the Soviets will continue to supply aid, advice, and military hardware to the Kabul regime. It is widely believed in Washington that the Communist regime cannot survive the departure of the Soviet troops. That is probably true, although the Mujahideen are politically weaker and the government is stronger than is generally assumed in Washington.

The Afghan government has sought to establish its legitimacy. It has stepped up its efforts to woo guerrilla leaders by ceasefires, amnesties, promises, and bribes. A few local commanders, some nominally loyal to Hekmatyar, the most extreme fundamentalist leader, have shown an interest in coöperating. A new constitution provides for local elections, a popularly elected parliament, and considerable autonomy for local tribal leaders, whose coöperation has been further encouraged with liberal payoffs. More than a thousand mosques have been constructed or rebuilt. Religious leaders have been given the power to review textbooks. Land owned by religious institutions is exempt from taxation. The markets in Communist Kabul are as free as those anywhere. According to Selig Harrison, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who visited Kabul most recently in 1984, there is a hard core of Communist activists, about forty-five thousand strong, who still believe that despite its unhappy history the Party is the only vehicle for modernising their country. That is not an insignificant force in a country as divided as Afghanistan and in a society in which a politically committed individual can count on the loyalty of many family and tribal members. Moreover, many people in the middle class, though they are strongly anti-Communist, fear the fundamentalists almost as much as they loathe the Russians.

In the United States, the war in Afghanistan has been seen across the political spectrum as the good fight against Communism. Few Americans are aware that the most strongly supported elements of the "freedom fighters" bear a remarkable resemblance to the fundamentalists of Iran, who, of course, have a quite different reputation in the United States. Nor are most Americans aware that the United States is committed, under a 1959 mutual-security agreement, to take "appropriate action, including the use of armed forces," in the event of an attack on Pakistan. Such an attack, inspired and organised by the Soviet Union, has been underway for almost two years. In January of 1986, a bomb exploded in the Pakistan International Airlines office in Peshawar, killing several people, and since then there have been terrorist bombings in all the major cities, which are assumed to e he work of the Soviet-controlled Afghan secret police. Soviet planes regularly conduct air attacks along the frontier. The message seems clear. Pakistan is a fragile nation, and the Soviets are in a position to inflict even greater punishment.

Regrettably, the establishment of a stable peace in South Asia has not been a high priority of the Reagan Administration. The prime objective has been to humble the Soviet Union and force it to withdraw its troops. The withdrawal is almost certain to take place; without the establishment of a government in Kabul more acceptable to the Afghan people than one dominated by either the Communists or the fundamentalists, though, the war will enter a new stage when the Soviets leave. How costly and brutal the war will continue to be will depend on the outside powers. The Geneva agreements provide the essential framework for Soviet-American collaboration in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and the creation of a stable peace in the region. At a critical moment in United States-Soviet relations, they offer an unprecedented opportunity to test the possibilities of positive common action. The alternative is another round of bloody games. As the Soviets pull back, the spectre of Lebanon - another once peaceful country caught up in other people's struggles - hangs over Afghanistan.

**EQBAL AHMAD AND RICHARD J. BARNET** [The New Yorker: 11th April, 1988]