



National Foreign Assessment Center

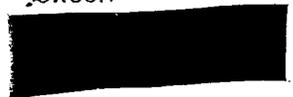
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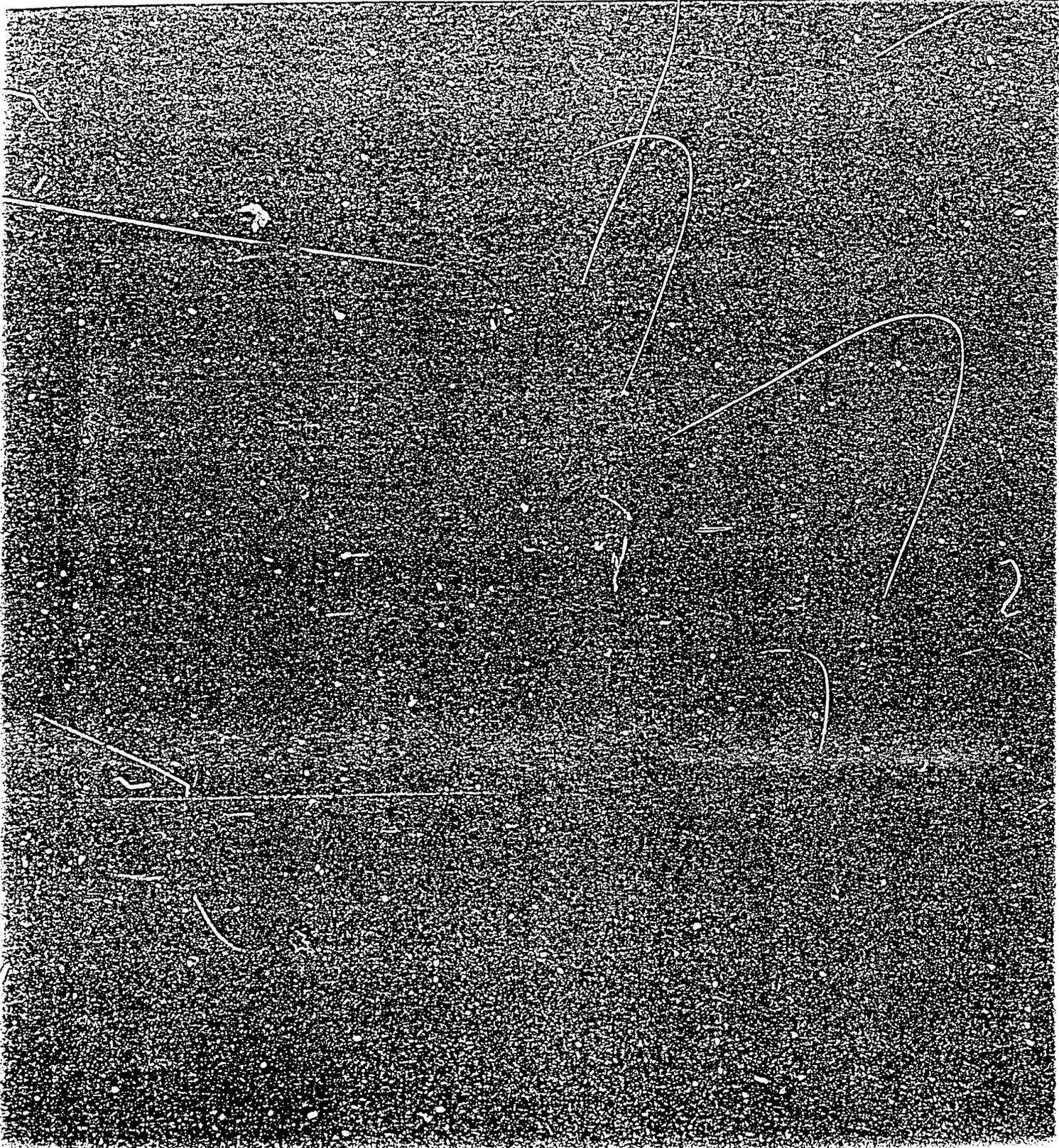
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**Iran: Views on
Afghanistan**

Summary

The Soviet-supported coup in Afghanistan has further damaged the already badly strained relations between Tehran and Kabul. After a two-month hiatus, Iran has resumed its propaganda attacks on the Kabul government, which it sees as a puppet of the Soviets and an anti-Islamic force in the region. Soviet efforts to allay Iranian concern about the coup apparently have failed; the Iranians have formally condemned the Soviet military intervention.

Iran's pro-Soviet Communist Tudeh Party, on the other hand, is pleased by the changes in Kabul and hopes that the Soviets and Afghans will give greater support to the Tudeh.

The secular leadership of the Iranian Government is unlikely in the near term to shift from its policy of not supporting the Afghan insurgents. Over time, however, it will be pressed to give more support to the insurgents by Iran's religious leadership. The religious leadership is already providing some training and arms support for the rebels, and this is likely to increase.

The Soviet-inspired coup and the Soviet military intervention will increase Iran's concern about Soviet activities and intentions in Iran. Tehran will avoid a serious strain in relations, however, because it needs Soviet support in the UN.

It is unlikely that the recent events in Afghanistan will encourage Iran to be more forthcoming with the United States on the hostage issue. Although some of Ayatollah Khomeini's advisers may be inclined to find a face-saving way out of the crisis because of the Soviet action, Khomeini views both superpowers as anti-Islamic, expansionist forces and will probably see little reason why the coup in Afghanistan should require him to be less hostile to the United States.

Iran: Views on
Afghanistan [REDACTED]

Background

The Soviet military intervention in Kabul has led to a further deterioration in Iran's already strained relations with Afghanistan and with the USSR as well. The coup and the Soviet role in Afghanistan have reinforced the view among most Iranian political and religious leaders that the Afghan Government is a puppet of the USSR and that Moscow is following an aggressively anti-Muslim and expansionist policy in southwest Asia. [REDACTED]

Iran's relations with Afghanistan have been strained since the April 1978 coup that brought a Marxist government to power in Kabul, a move that the Shah's government interpreted as Soviet inspired. The assumption of power by Ayatollah Khomeini's militantly Islamic government in February 1979 led to a further deterioration in relations. Khomeini's Islamic Republic was quick to denounce the regime in Kabul as an anti-Islamic, atheistic government. [REDACTED]

Since early 1979, both governments have accused each other of interfering in the internal affairs of the other. Tehran radio has often broadcast allegations of Afghan subversive activities in Iran—for example, on 13 October the Iranians accused the Afghan Government of trying to assassinate Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, a persistent critic of the Afghan regime. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] For its part, Kabul has accused Tehran of fomenting unrest, most notably during the uprising in Herat last March. [REDACTED]

Iranian criticism of the Afghan regime declined significantly—although not entirely—after the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran on 4 November. There is no good evidence to substantiate claims that this decline represented an explicit deal between Moscow and Tehran in which Moscow offered to back Iran against the United States in exchange for a reduction in anti-Afghan propaganda. Rather, the decline probably reflected both Iran's preoccupation with other issues and its desire to secure worldwide backing for its struggle with the United States. [REDACTED]

Impact of the
December Coup

Immediately following the coup in Kabul the Soviets tried to allay Iranian concerns about the changes in Afghanistan. On 29 December, Soviet Ambassador to Iran Vinogradov made his first visit to Ayatollah Khomeini's residence in Qom since the start of the hostage crisis, apparently to present the Soviet case. The Soviet-controlled clandestine National Voice of Iran radio, based in Baku, broadcast a commentary on 28 December urging Iranian leaders to improve ties with Afghanistan.

[REDACTED]

Tehran radio also ended its hiatus in reporting on Afghanistan and broadcast several scathing attacks on the Soviet role in the coup, comparing it to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and warning Moscow that it risked alienating the entire Muslim world. Tehran also broadcast communiques from Afghan insurgents vowing to continue the civil war. Several commentaries suggested that the United States had approved of the Soviet move in advance in return for Soviet support against Iran

[REDACTED]

This suggestion of US-Soviet collusion is consistent with Khomeini's longstanding belief that both superpowers are enemies of Islam. In his eyes neither superpower can be trusted and both desire to subjugate Iran. The government's reaction is widely shared in Iran. The group occupying the US Embassy condemned the Soviet intervention as the equivalent of US "aggressions" against Iran. Iranians participated in an attack on the Soviet Embassy in Tehran on 1 January by Afghan students.

Iran's pro-Soviet Communist party, the Tudeh, has praised the coup as "a triumph of revolution over counterrevolution." Tudeh leaders are reportedly pleased with the change in regimes in Kabul and the Soviet intervention. A Tudeh official in Western Europe commented that the Tudeh long had contact with President Babrak Karmal during his exile in Eastern Europe and said that the Tudeh hopes the new Afghan regime will be able to assist the Tudeh in its efforts to gain greater influence in Iran.

The Tudeh's position reflects its policy of publicly supporting Khomeini's government while privately working to develop a strong enough base to overthrow him. The Tudeh has been the only leftist party to support Khomeini's Islamic constitution and has said it will support his candidate for president. The Tudeh has long and close ties to Afghan Marxists, however, and doubtless hopes that both Kabul and Moscow will step up their support for the party. [REDACTED]

Iranian Support for Afghan Insurgents

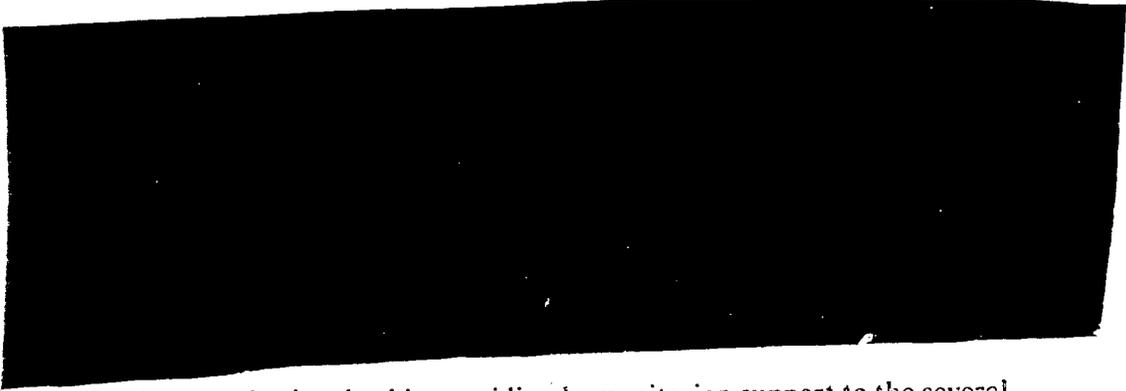
The Iranian Government has criticized the Soviets for their involvement in the December coup, but has shown no sign of changing its policy of not giving any official support to the Afghan insurgent movement. Iranian Government leaders have repeatedly said that Iran will not interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Former Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi met with Afghan officials during the Havana Nonaligned Summit in September and later publicly confirmed that he told the Afghans that Iran would not interfere. [REDACTED]

Yazdi also pointed out, however, that the Iranian Government would not and could not stop Iranian religious leaders from voicing their support for the insurgency. Yazdi's remarks seem to imply that, although the government has not supported the Afghan dissidents, the Iranian Shia Muslim clergy (the ulema) has [REDACTED]

Numerous Iranian religious leaders have publicly backed the rebels. Ayatollah Khomeini in August called upon the Afghan people to "take a lesson from Iran" and "kick out" its Communist rulers. Afghan insurgent leaders have been frequent participants at Iranian political rallies, and several of the various Afghan rebel groups have offices in Tehran and in Iran's two holy cities, Qom and Mashhad. [REDACTED]

Moreover, substantial evidence suggests that the religious leadership has provided some limited training and weapons support for the Afghans:

[REDACTED]



The ulema is also involved in providing humanitarian support to the several thousand Afghan refugees in camps along Iran's eastern border (reports on the number of refugees vary from 5,000 to 35,000). According to one Afghan source, some of these refugees are former Afghan military personnel who are training insurgents. [REDACTED]

Outlook

The December coup in Afghanistan is likely to increase the Iranian leadership's concern about Soviet intentions in the area. The Iranians will probably continue to monitor events in Afghanistan closely from their Embassy in Kabul and Consulate in Herat. Foreign Minister Ghotbzadeh has already hinted that the events in Afghanistan will encourage Iran to improve its ties with Pakistan. [REDACTED]

The Iranians will be particularly nervous about any indication that the Soviets are using their strengthened position in Afghanistan as a base for subverting Iran. Tehran has been concerned for some time that the Afghan Government may support Baluchi tribal unrest. Serious rioting by the Sunni Muslim Baluchis in early December illustrated the potential for unrest in the area, and the Iranian authorities are well aware of Kabul's traditional ties to the tribes. [REDACTED]

Tehran will also be concerned that the Afghans and Soviets will step up their aid to Iranian leftists, especially to the Tudeh. Nonetheless, Khomeini may continue to tolerate the Tudeh's activities in Iran if the party maintains its policy of backing him on key issues. [REDACTED]

Iranian religious leaders may decide to step up their support for the Afghan rebels. In view of the central government's weaknesses, the religious leaders will probably have little difficulty in training rebels. It is less likely that the Iranian Government itself will openly back the insurgency in the near term. Such a move would risk military retaliation along Iran's weakly defended northeastern border. [REDACTED]

The religious leadership may urge the government to take a more active role over the long run. The ulama's pressure will grow more intense if the Soviets appear to be defeating the insurgents. [REDACTED]

It is unlikely that the recent events in Afghanistan will encourage Iran to be more forthcoming with the United States in the hostage crisis. Although some of Khomeini's advisers may be inclined to find a face-saving way out of the crisis because of the Soviet action, Khomeini is not likely to see the Soviet intervention as requiring him to abandon the struggle against "satanic" America. In his eyes both superpowers are equally evil, and both must be resisted. [REDACTED]

The Iranians will probably seek to prevent their relationship with Moscow from deteriorating too sharply because of events in Afghanistan. Tehran still hopes that the USSR will use its veto in the United Nations' Security Council debate on economic sanctions. For example, a spokesman for the Revolutionary Council said in late December that aside from Afghanistan, Iran has no serious differences with Moscow. This desire to avoid too significant a strain in ties with Moscow may also explain why Khomeini has not spoken out publicly as yet on the Afghan issue. [REDACTED]

The Soviets continue to court the Iranians as well. Ambassador Vinogradov paid a second visit to Khomeini in Qom on 3 January. They doubtless discussed both the Afghan and hostage issues. [REDACTED]