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PERSPECTIVE

PAKISTAN: SOVIET POLICY OPTIONS

[REDACTED]

Moscow is aware that the aid going through Pakistan for the Afghan resistance is an important factor sustaining the Afghan insurgency. To diminish Pakistani support, the Soviets at the moment have only limited military options against Pakistan. These are unlikely, by themselves, to change Islamabad's Afghan policy or reduce insurgent activity. More substantial and effective military pressure--such as larger scale ground attacks--would require a significant augmentation of Soviet forces and accompanying logistics preparations.

Subversion

The Soviets could increase aid to a variety of ethnic and political groups opposed to Zia. They reportedly have longstanding ties to the Pakistan People's Party, which participates in the coalition Movement for the Restoration of Democracy, and opposes military rule in Pakistan. Soviet covert activity and propaganda may work within the MRD to incite disaffected students, lawyers, civil servants, and military officers against Zia. Aid to pro-Soviet Pakistani Communists could also be stopped up, but they are too weak to act alone. Past Soviet efforts along these lines have not paid off, and we doubt that more Soviet help would greatly increase the capabilities of these groups.

Another option that has also been tried without much impact is fanning tensions between the Afghan refugees and Pakistani tribal groups over the issues of land, water, and employment. The Soviet and Afghan intelligence services have also long maintained links to Pakistani Pushtun and Baluch separatist groups, but their appeal for Pakistan's minorities has declined substantially since the Soviet invasion. These groups are too weak at present to threaten Zia's grip on power, but their potential for subversion deeply worries Islamabad.

[REDACTED]

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Sporadic or Sustained Strikes, Raids

The infrequency of air or artillery attacks on insurgent camps in Pakistan, on Pakistani villages, or on Pakistani border posts minimizes chances for a direct confrontation between Soviet or Afghan forces and Pakistani forces. Brief airstrikes near the border have enabled the Soviets to avoid an international outcry but have neither deterred Pakistan nor significantly damaged the insurgents. Artillery strikes would be limited by the range of the weapons, the need for resupply over difficult terrain, and the need to control and adjust firing across mountain areas. [REDACTED]

A major punitive strike, such as the bombing of Peshawar, or sustained raids would risk a major escalation of fighting. Raids by small air-assault teams, supported by helicopters and fighter-bombers, would risk strong opposition from Afghan insurgents and Pakistani paramilitary forces and have more damaging international repercussions because they would be harder to deny. [REDACTED]

Limited Strikes Against Pakistani Regular Forces

A raid on Pakistani regular forces would bring an international outcry and higher levels of support from the United States and China. The Soviets would also have to consider at least the risk of confrontation with the United States. The Pakistanis would react with both air and air defense forces, and the international political costs would be high. [REDACTED]

Occupation of Pakistani Territory

The limited military advantages likely to result from such raids might convince Soviet military planners that larger operations were necessary, perhaps to seize key tactical positions along major lines of communication east of the main operation to block Pakistani assistance to the insurgents. In preparation for such a campaign, Moscow would have to significantly augment its forces in Afghanistan. Cross-border attacks would be costly and difficult for the Soviets to sustain.

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Rugged terrain would neutralize much of the Soviet advantage in mobility and firepower. The movement of Soviet forces and supplies would be largely confined to narrow mountain roads, where they would be vulnerable to attack by insurgent forces or small defending Pakistani units. A large increase in troops or aircraft without an accompanying expansion of support facilities would only aggravate the logistics problems the Soviets currently have in Afghanistan. [REDACTED]

Major Invasion

The military effort required for a major invasion of Pakistan would far exceed the effort needed for significant expansion of operations inside Afghanistan. An invasion would have very high political and military costs and would involve a substantial risk of Soviet-US military confrontation. [REDACTED]

Weighing the Options

The severity of Moscow's recent threats and evidence of Soviet concern about losses and a general lack of progress suggest that the chances of cross-border strikes are greater now than at any time since the invasion. The Soviets might calculate that greater military pressure on the Afghan refugee camps or on Pakistani targets would at least make it more difficult for the insurgents to use Pakistan as a safehaven, cause Islamabad to ponder the level of assistance to the insurgents, and strengthen Pakistani elements skeptical of the wisdom of confronting Soviet might. [REDACTED]

However, a number of purely military considerations--limited forces, logistic infrastructure, and unfavorable terrain--tend to constrain Soviet adoption of the more dramatic options such as large ground force raids against insurgent camps or attacks on Pakistani forces. Military bureaucratic constraints also probably exist. The Soviet military's approach to the war has been characterized by an attempt to do the minimum necessary, to adjust at the margins when required, and to keep the costs of the operation as low as possible. [REDACTED]

The Soviets also risk that Pakistan would oppose new incursions with greater force and in retaliation provide even more aid to the Afghan insurgents. The United States, China, Saudi Arabia, and other nations might also increase economic and military assistance to Pakistan and the

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Afghan insurgents. Greater Soviet military pressure could also have important international political repercussions, including a worsening of regional and Western fears about Soviet intentions, further erosion of Soviet standing in the Muslim world, and deterioration of Moscow's relationship with New Delhi. Moreover, given the resilience that insurgents have shown following Soviet sweeps inside Afghanistan, Soviet pressure on Pakistan would disrupt Afghan insurgent activity only temporarily. [REDACTED]

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