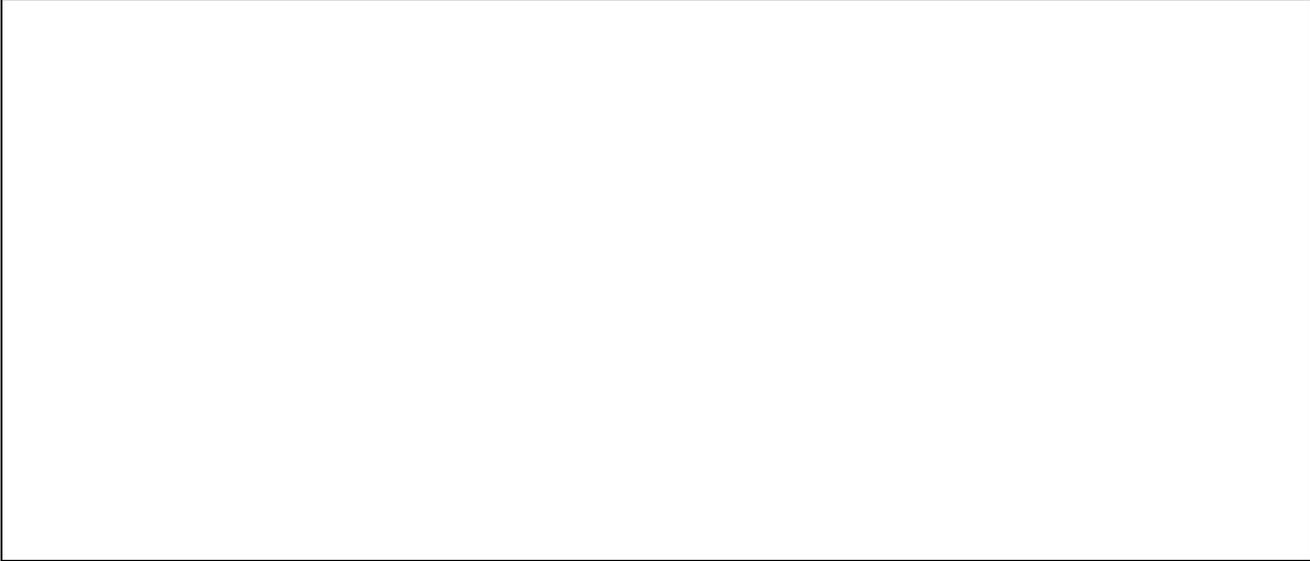


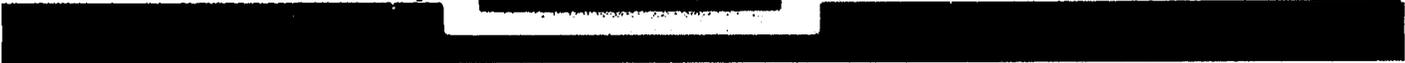
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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

15 October 1987

Soviet Strategy on Afghanistan: Playing for Time

Summary

Moscow's decision to have Kabul offer only a minimal reduction in a Soviet troop withdrawal timetable at last month's UN-mediated talks with Pakistan and its presumed approval of Afghan Party Secretary Najib's assumption of the presidency suggest that its primary concern at the moment is the stability of the regime in Kabul. These moves are likely to undermine the Kremlin's concurrent effort to shift the diplomatic focus from the withdrawal timetable to the issue of the composition of a future government.

The apparent purpose of this shift is to buy further time for the regime to consolidate and get its "national reconciliation" policy off the ground. The Soviets undoubtedly hope that their new diplomatic tactic will convince the international audience of Kabul's conciliatory intentions and stimulate divisions within the resistance and between the resistance and Islamabad. Moscow may also calculate that, if it can get the United Nations or Pakistan to initiate talks on the future Afghan government, it will be able to probe--without committing itself--the terms of a possible face-saving arrangement should it decide down the road to accept less than a coalition dominated by its clients.

The Soviets are unlikely in the near future to alter fundamentally their present conditions for a negotiated settlement. They will probably stick with their current strategy until the outcome of certain events--including the UN vote on the

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annual Afghanistan resolution, the Afghan party conference, a visit by First Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov to Islamabad, a US-Soviet summit, and the US-Pakistani nuclear controversy--has become apparent. [redacted]

Recent Diplomatic Developments

For most of this year, Moscow's diplomatic policy on Afghanistan has featured an international public relations campaign touting Kabul's national reconciliation initiatives and forthcoming Geneva posture. This diplomatic effort has been designed to augment the Soviet-Afghan campaign of terrorist bombings inside Pakistan to pressure Islamabad into accommodating Soviet interests. At the same time, however, the Soviets evaded efforts by Pakistani, UN, and US officials to engage them in detailed, formal discussion of a possible coalition. Moreover, the outline of the coalition proposed by Kabul would leave the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in control, indicating that the Soviets are not yet prepared to accept less than a government dominated by their clients as the price for extricating themselves. [redacted]

Last month's hastily convened round of UN-mediated talks in Geneva, called at Kabul's request, was almost certainly intended by Moscow as part of its campaign to court international opinion and undermine Pakistan's resolve. The Soviets have portrayed the session's minute narrowing of differences on the withdrawal timetable--Kabul's offer dropped two months to 16 and Islamabad moved up by one month to eight--as significant progress in the negotiations and as proof of Soviet and Afghan sincerity and flexibility. Moscow's Geneva gambit fell flat, however, because the Soviets themselves had encouraged widespread expectation in the weeks leading up to the meeting that a substantial reduction in the timetable--to about 12 months--would be offered. [redacted]

A timetable of a year would have been a bold diplomatic move, shifting the onus for lack of progress onto Islamabad while leaving the Soviets uncommitted on the date and conditions of its implementation. The Kremlin may simply have miscalculated the international reaction to its meager offer. It is also possible that Moscow intended to have Kabul make this proposal but became convinced after the Geneva session was scheduled that the Afghan regime was too weak to sustain even a commitment in principle to such a timeframe [redacted]

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Moscow has apparently altered its strategy on the UN resolution as well, probably in recognition of the negligible gains that it now would be likely to register in next month's vote on the resolution as it stands. The Soviets are lobbying to water it down with an amendment calling for an end to foreign interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, language that would reflect their accusations of Pakistani and US responsibility for the conflict. They are also seeking to introduce an amendment that acknowledges the necessity of national reconciliation measures, a change that might be interpreted as international pressure on Pakistan to get the resistance to the negotiating table with the PDPA.

#### The Situation in Afghanistan

At the same time, the Soviets have allowed Afghan Party Secretary Najib to have himself chosen head of state,

The office has been a figurehead post held by a non-party acting president and mentioned by Kabul as a possible role for a resistance or exile participant in a "government of national unity." Under the new constitution about to be adopted, however, the president will hold strong powers. By allowing Najib to position himself to assume them, Moscow runs the risk that the move will be seen as evidence that the Soviets and their clients have no interest in a genuine coalition or have given up on the national reconciliation policy. It could therefore undermine Soviet efforts to promote direct talks on the future government.

Moscow may have judged that, despite this danger, the situation in Kabul required such a move. Endemic feuding among the factions of the ruling party has been intensified by the opposition of some elements to Najib and his Soviet-mandated national reconciliation initiatives and by recriminations over its poor success domestically. The Soviets may hope that Najib's elevation to the presidency will strengthen his position and underline their determination to pursue the policy with which he is identified, while at the same time reassuring PDPA cadre that their "leading role" will be preserved in any coalition that is negotiated. The Soviets may have aimed in particular to put Najib firmly in the driver's seat for the upcoming PDPA conference, which they undoubtedly hope will provide a show of party unity behind Najib and the national reconciliation policy.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Soviets are also concerned that the United States will supply increasingly sophisticated weaponry to the resistance, intensifying the problems with which Soviet troops will have to deal. They probably realize that to maintain the stalemate they will have to carry even more of the burden of fighting, devise better tactics to counter insurgent air defenses, and increase their efforts to interdict insurgent logistics. But there is no indication that Moscow has concluded that the war has taken a decisive turn for the worse requiring fundamental revision of their goals. [REDACTED]

What Does Moscow Seek?

The Soviets have apparently determined that because of Kabul's disarray a dramatic move on the withdrawal timetable cannot be risked. Moscow probably has turned to encouraging discussion of possible talks on a future government between the Afghan regime and the opposition for a number of purposes:

- o To provide the appearance of movement while the regime gets its internal house in order and produces some concrete results in the national reconciliation campaign.
- o To turn attention from the timetable question.
- o To offer evidence to the international audience that Moscow and Kabul are sincere and flexible in seeking a negotiated solution and to sustain pressure on the other side to demonstrate equivalent "good will."
- o To stimulate disunity within the resistance and between the resistance and Pakistan by forcing them to grapple with the possibility of compromises and the necessity to come up with a common negotiating position. Moscow might even hope that a split will occur, leaving the moderate resistance parties, supported by Pakistan, prepared to accommodate Soviet interests. [REDACTED]

At the same time, Moscow may be trying to prompt Pakistan and the United Nations to begin a process in which it can probe--without committing itself--how far the other side might be ready to bend to provide the Kremlin with a face-saving arrangement. There are a few indications that the Soviets may be thinking about other avenues to pursue should circumstances eventually dictate a lowering of their minimum requirement of a coalition government in which the PDPA is the dominant participant:

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- o Recent discussion in Soviet domestic media of the excesses of the original revolution in Afghanistan, the pre-socialist stage of its development, and the necessity for compromises may be designed to prepare the ground for such a settlement.



The Soviets have continued to insist that the regime cannot be shunted aside or by-passed and that the resistance will have to negotiate with it. Najib's elevation to head of state and the apparent last-minute abandonment by the Soviets of their plan to offer a 12-month timetable at Geneva, instead of contradicting their professed interest in exploring a negotiated solution, could be interpreted as efforts to shore up the regime for the purpose of serious negotiations. [REDACTED]

It is noteworthy that in shifting the diplomatic focus to discussion of a new government, Moscow is neither offering concrete suggestions on its composition nor itself making proposals to set up talks among the various parties. Instead, the Soviets are angling to have Pakistan, [REDACTED] propose arrangements in Kabul and initiate formal negotiations. Moscow may calculate that this posture will leave it more room to maneuver and might do less to fan Kabul's fears of a sell-out. The Soviets may also hope by maximizing the UN role in the settlement process to reduce the damage to Soviet prestige that a compromise might entail. [REDACTED]

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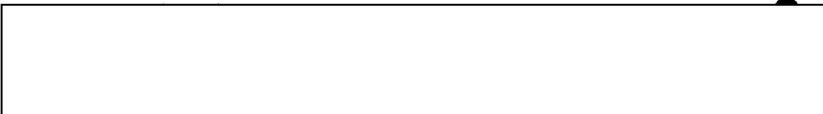
Outlook

Moscow is likely to stick with its current strategy at least through the next few months, which will see:

- The Afghan party conference.
- Next month's UN General Assembly vote on Pakistan's annual Afghan resolution.
- A probable visit to Islamabad by Vorontsov.
- The US-Soviet summit.
- A possible US-Pakistani showdown over the nuclear controversy.

The Soviets may hope that favorable developments will enable them--without danger that the regime in Kabul will be seriously destabilized--to come down to a 12-month withdrawal timetable at Geneva, an offer that we believe Islamabad would be hard put to refuse. Once it is able to assess the results of present trends, Moscow will determine whether it has to change course, possibly even adjusting downward its goals in Afghanistan. [redacted]

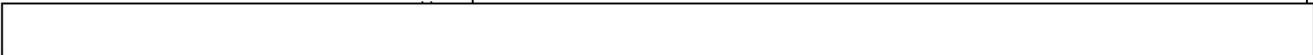
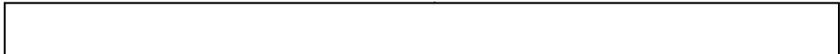
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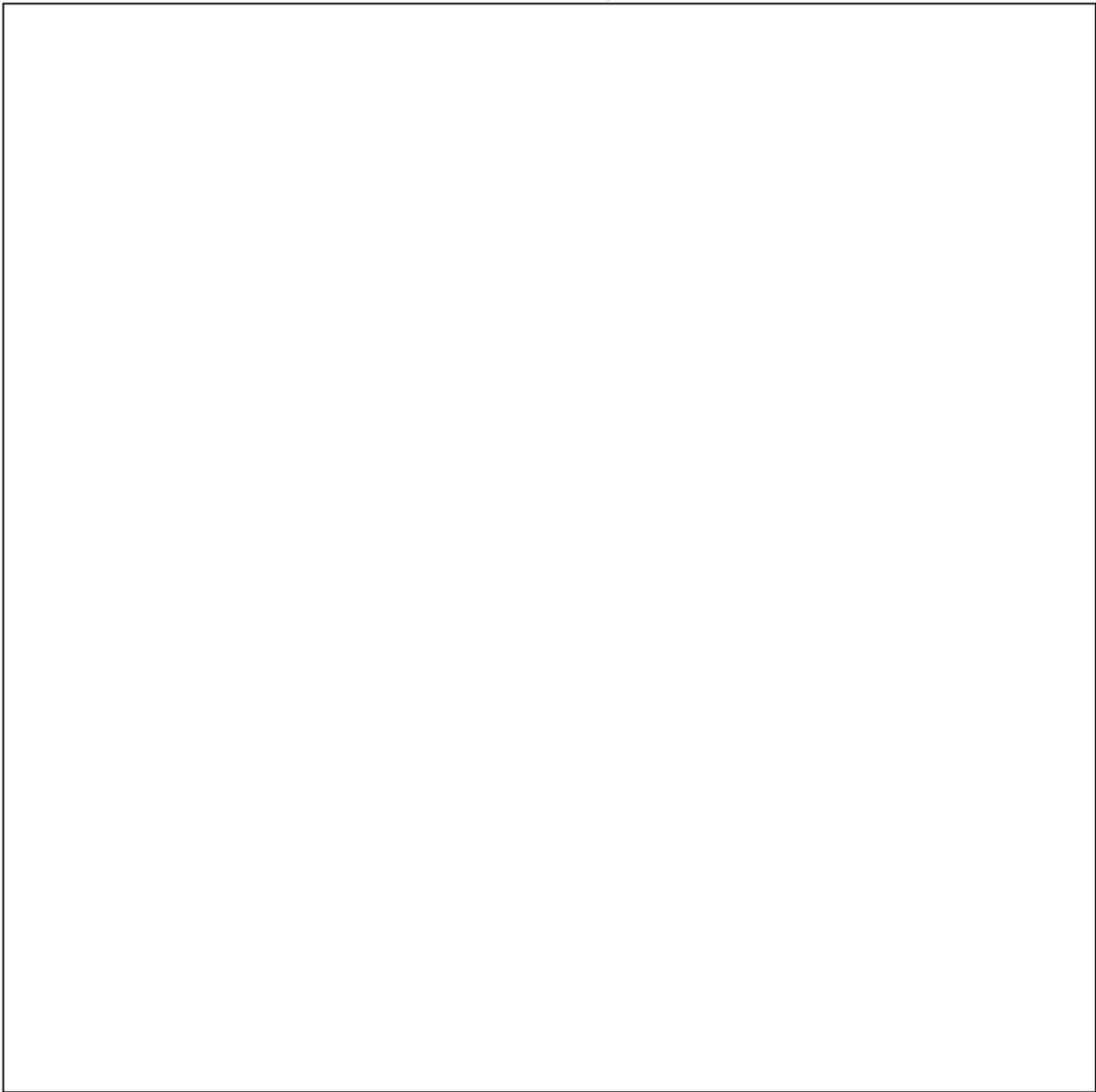


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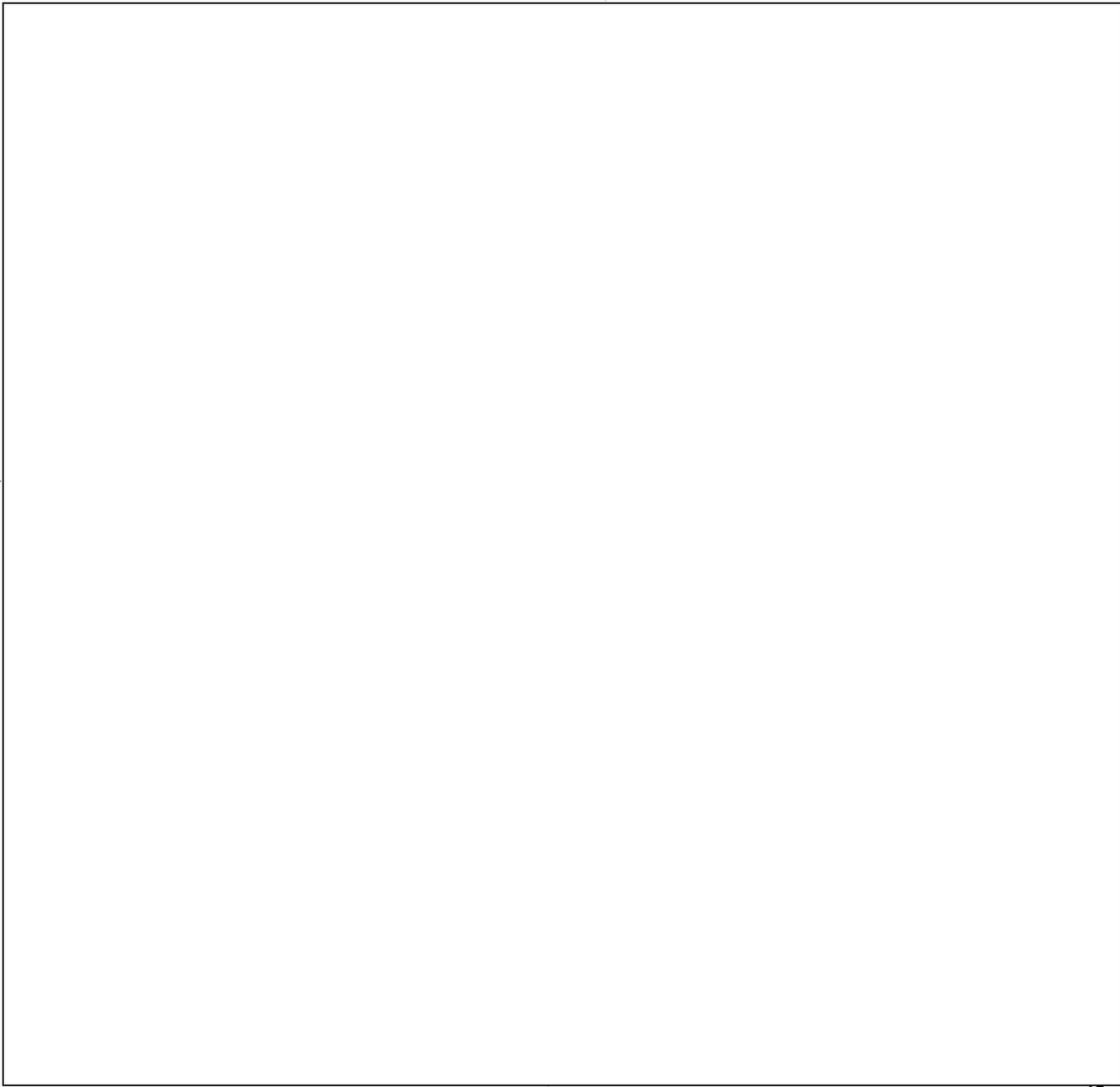
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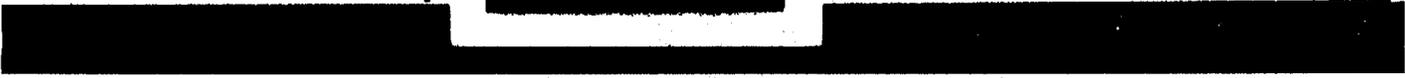
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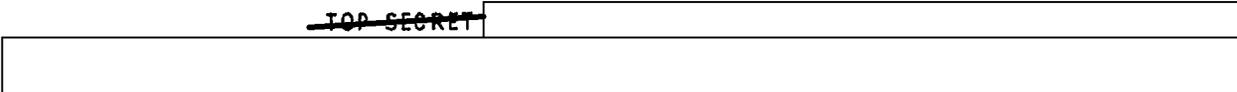
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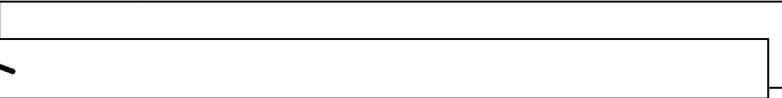
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