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A MOUNTING SOVIET THREAT TO THE NORTHERN TIER

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Tier, thrust into the geopolitical limelight in 1979 by the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, is likely to remain a volatile source of tension between the superpowers for years to come. This strategic swath of territory in West Asia--comprising Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan--is the chief barrier shielding the vital oilfields of the Persian Gulf from direct Soviet pressure. For several centuries it served as a buffer zone between the Russian and British empires in Asia. During the Cold War, it became an integral part of America's containment policy--a cordon sanitaire blocking Soviet expansion to the south for over three decades. Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, alarmed by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin's territorial demands after World War II, sought American support to deter Soviet aggression. In 1955 the three states, together with Iraq and the United Kingdom, formed the Baghdad Pact, an alliance that was renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1959 after the Iraqi revolution led Baghdad to withdraw.

Unable to prevent the formation of the Northern Tier alliance through intimidation, Moscow persistently attempted to undermine it. Harsh propaganda attacks on the local regimes were replaced by peaceful overtures; military threats gave way to economic blandishments. Soviet influence was greatly enhanced by chronic friction in America's bilateral relations with Turkey and Pakistan. Both powers resented what they perceived to be Washington's insensitivity and unreliability in responding to regional crises involving their interests in Cyprus and Kashmir. By 1979, when the Iranian revolution sounded the death knell for CENTO, American relations with Turkey and Pakistan had deteriorated to an alarming degree.

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Although Washington has worked hard in recent years to repair its ties to these strategic nations, the prevailing geopolitical trends in the region remain disquieting. Iran, once a pro-Western bulwark restraining Soviet and radical Arab adventurism, has become a virulently anti-Western revolutionary state bent on exporting its explosive Islamic ideology--and hence instability--to its Gulf neighbors.[1] Turkey, beset by crippling economic problems, narrowly averted a civil war in 1980 and faces the delicate task of transferring power from military to civilian hands this fall. Pakistan, once America's "most allied ally" in Asia, has drifted into nonalignment, mistrusts the U.S., and is seeking to cope with the threat of Soviet troops installed on its doorstep in Afghanistan without relying excessively on the United States.[2] The one formerly nonaligned Southwest Asian nation--Afghanistan--fell under Soviet influence in April 1978 and under Soviet military occupation in December 1979. The Soviet seizure of Afghanistan is a pivotal geopolitical event that threatens the internal and external security of both Pakistan and Iran.[3]

Moscow could harvest an enormous geopolitical bounty in the Northern Tier. Soviet goals are to erode Western influence; dissolve security ties with the U.S. and replace them with a Pax Sovietica; detach Northern Tier countries from the Western camp and draw them into the Soviet satellite empire; encircle China; develop a land-bridge to the Persian Gulf; gain assured access to Persian Gulf oil for its oil-thirsty satellites, if not for itself; and position itself to become the arbiter of Persian Gulf oilflows. By transforming the Northern Tier into a pro-Soviet "Southern Tier," Moscow would also consolidate its control over Afghanistan and insulate its fast-growing Muslim population from anti-communist Islamic ideology.

The West has a vital strategic stake in maintaining the independence and stability of the Northern Tier countries. Soviet domination of the Northern Tier, particularly Iran, would be tantamount to Soviet domination of the Persian Gulf--the center of gravity of world oil production. Once astride the Gulf, the Soviets would be able to deny oil to the West by means short of war. This would give Moscow the leverage to weaken the Western alliance by prying energy-poor European and Far Eastern allies away from the United States. In the long run, the collapse of CENTO could prove to be the first step leading to the dissolution of NATO.

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1 See James Phillips, "The Iranian Revolution: Long Term Implications," The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 89, June 15, 1979.

2 See James Phillips, "Pakistan: The Rising Soviet Threat and Declining U.S. Credibility," The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 122, June 4, 1980.

3 See James Phillips, "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 108, January 9, 1980.

THE RUSSIAN DRIVE TO THE SOUTH

Long before the Bolshevik revolution or the discovery of oil in the Middle East, Russia was pushing its frontiers southward. For several centuries, successive Tsars persistently expanded the Russian empire at the expense of the crumbling Persian and Ottoman empires. Russia seized Georgia, parts of Armenia and of Azerbaijan from its weak southern neighbors in the early part of the 19th century. It gained hegemony over northern Iran by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 and attempted to make further inroads in the Ottoman Empire before it was thwarted by an Anglo-French army in the Crimean War (1853-1860). Rebuffed in Turkey, Russia turned its attention to Central Asia, mounted a series of military expeditions, and annexed territories. Prince Alexander Gorchakov, Tsar Alexander II's minister of foreign affairs from the late 1850s to the late 1870s, argued that the need for secure frontiers dictated further southern expansion and warned that "the greatest difficulty is knowing when to stop."[4] Russia absorbed the Central Asian Muslim Khanates of Khiva, Bokhara, and Samarkand, advancing to the borders of Iran and Afghanistan by the 1880s.

The Bolshevik revolution added ideological fervor to the Soviet drive south. Communist doctrine held that the capitalist world could be decisively defeated by depriving it of its "reserves"--Europe's colonial empires. Leon Trotsky wrote that "The road to Paris and London leads through the towns of Afghanistan, the Punjab and Bengal."[5] Communist theoreticians speculated that a revolution in Persia might become "the key to revolution in the whole East."[6] In 1920, the Red Army invaded Iran's Caspian Sea coast. A Soviet Republic of Gilan was set up under the protection of the Red Army. Soviet troops were withdrawn in late 1921, only when the Kremlin extracted the one-sided "Treaty of Friendship" from Iran. Article VI of the 1921 treaty gives Moscow the right to intervene if Iran is occupied by a third party or if Iranian territory is used as a base for "anti-Soviet aggression." Although a subsequent exchange of letters specified that Article VI referred only to anti-Bolshevik Russian forces, the Soviets have constantly tried to widen the interpretation of the treaty to give themselves a pretext for intervention as well as to restrict the military activities of any foreign power in Iran.[7] Teheran has unilaterally abrogated the treaty, but Moscow insists that it remains in force.

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4 Quoted in Arthur Swinton, Northwest Frontier: People and Events, 1839-1947 (London: Hutchinson, 1967), p. 142.

5 Jan Mayer, ed., The Trotsky Papers 1912-1922, Vol. 1 (London, 1964), p. 625.

6 A. Yodfat and M. Abir, In the Direction of the Persian Gulf. The Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf (London: Frank Cass, 1977), p. 29.

7 Alvin Rubinstein, Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 61.

In 1921, Moscow also signed treaties of friendship with Turkey and Afghanistan, which ushered in a "period of armed truce" along the Soviet Union's southern borders.[8] Moscow was preoccupied with consolidating the gains of the revolution and later with countering the growing threat of Nazi Germany. Then, during the period of Soviet-Nazi cooperation, marked by the nonaggression pact, Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov signed a secret 1940 protocol pledging that "The area south of Batum and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf is...the center of the aspirations of the Soviet Union...."[9]

In August 1941, Moscow invoked the 1921 Treaty of Friendship with Iran to justify occupying the northern half of the country, while the British occupied the southern half. The joint intervention was aimed at keeping German influence out of Iran and maintaining a warm-water supply line for the transport of sorely needed military hardware from the Western powers to the Soviet Union. Both powers pledged to evacuate their forces from Iran six months after the end of the war. The Soviet Union, however, failed to honor its obligations and installed pro-Soviet regimes in territories under its control. In December 1945, the Tudeh (Iranian Communist Party) established the "Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan," and in January 1946, the pro-Soviet Democratic Party of Kurdistan proclaimed Kurdish autonomy. Stalin was trying to take advantage of postwar British weakness by establishing domination over Iran. He backed off only when confronted by strong American diplomatic resistance.

THE SOVIET THREAT TO TURKEY

Turks have fought Russians in fourteen wars over the last four centuries, a rate of almost one war per generation. At the height of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish rule extended into Southern Russia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. In the 18th century, the tide turned against the Turks, and the Russians began their relentless southern expansion. In the 19th century, the so-called Eastern Question, the problem of how the territories of the enfeebled Ottoman Empire would be carved up by rival empires, became a major issue in European politics. The British, determined to prevent Russia's securing a Mediterranean naval base and threatening their communications to India, fought a century-long holding action against Russian encroachments.

The Bolshevik revolution initially eased Russian pressures on Turkey. The Soviets and the Turks shared a common desire to

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8 George Lenczowski, Soviet Advances in the Middle East (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1972), p. 25.

9 Raymond Sontag and James Beddie, Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941: Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1948), p. 259.

revise the status quo established at the Treaty of Versailles, a common suspicion of the Western powers, and a common interest in dismantling the newly proclaimed Republic of Armenia. The 1921 Treaty of Friendship between the two revolutionary regimes was the first major international treaty for each. The Soviets, eager to wipe the slate clean and cultivate Ataturk's regime, returned the provinces of Kars and Ardahan, which Russia had annexed in 1878.

Emboldened by its new position of strength after World War II, Moscow in 1945 demanded the return of Kars and Ardahan, the establishment of Soviet bases on the Bosporous, the revision in its favor of the 1936 Montreux Straits Convention, which regulated the passage of warships through the Dardanelles, and the revision of the Thracian boundary in Bulgaria's favor. When Turkey refused, Stalin unleased a vitriolic propaganda campaign against the Turks and massed troops on the border.[10] As it had in the 19th century, Turkey turned to the West for protection against Russia. The United States responded by dispatching a naval force to the eastern Mediterranean in support of the Turks, and in March 1947 President Truman asked Congress for the means to safeguard Turkey and Greece as well as other states threatened by international Communism. This "Truman Doctrine" signaled that the United States was assuming Britain's historical role of opposing Russian expansion in the Northern Tier.

Turkish-Soviet relations remained frigid throughout the 1950s. Turkey sent troops to Korea to oppose communist aggression, joined NATO in 1951, joined the Baghdad Pact in 1955, and signed a mutual security agreement with the U.S. in 1959. Turkish-Soviet relations improved gradually in the 1960s and 1970s because "Moscow had learned that it could be more effective with a smile rather than a snarl."[11] The Soviets wooed Turkey with steadily increasing amounts of economic aid and tried to exploit tensions between Ankara and Washington.

Frictions in Turkish-American relations first surfaced in 1963, when President John Kennedy ordered U.S. Jupiter missiles withdrawn from Turkey without fully consulting the Turkish government. Ankara had viewed the missiles as an important demonstration of Washington's commitment to Turkish independence. Because this action came only three months after the Cuban crisis, the Turks suspected a superpower deal at the expense of Turkish security.

The 1964 Cyprus crisis jolted Ankara into a far more serious reassessment of its heavy dependence on the United States. In June 1964, President Lyndon Johnson sent a stiff note to the Turks warning them not to intervene in Cyprus and hinting that NATO

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[10] Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 46.
[11] Rubinstein, op. cit., p. 48.

would not be obligated to come to Turkey's defense if its action triggered a Soviet attack on Turkey. The Turks were shocked by Washington's seeming insensitivity to their regional interests and to Turkish domestic political repercussions.

Turkish-American relations hit their nadir after the 1974 Turkish occupation of Cyprus. The U.S. Congress terminated military aid to Turkey in February 1975 in an effort to pressure Turkey to withdraw. Ankara retaliated by closing U.S. military installations in Turkey.

Spotting an opening, the Soviets quickly stepped in. They expressed "understanding" for Turkey's position on Cyprus, in contrast to Washington, and proffered a large package of economic credits to off-set Turkey's loss of American aid. By the end of 1975, Soviet President Alexei Kosygin had visited Turkey and signed a joint communiqué stating that the two countries were working on a "document on friendly relations and cooperation." In July 1976, the Turkish government very loosely interpreted the Montreux Convention by designating the Soviet aircraft carrier Kiev as an "anti-submarine cruiser," thus making it the first carrier to transit that strategic waterway. Observed one Turkish diplomat: "the Kremlin couldn't have done it without help from the U.S. Congress."[12]

Turkish-Soviet relations reached a postwar high in the late 1970s. Since then, however, they have been strained by: (1) Ankara's growing suspicion that Moscow covertly backed leftist terrorists in the murderous civil strife of 1977-1980; (2) improved Turkish-American relations; and (3) the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Turkish suspicions about links between Moscow and leftist Turkish terrorists have been fueled by the vast amounts of Soviet-made weaponry captured in terrorist safehouses;[13] the interception of arms shipments from Bulgaria;[14] the smuggling of arms into Turkey from two other Soviet client states, Syria and Iraq;[15] and the training and logistical support that some terrorist groups received from pro-Soviet elements of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[16] Soviet links to Turkish terrorism had earlier been confirmed by a KGB defector in the early 1970s.[17]

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12 Rubinstein, op. cit., p. 47.

13 Claire Sterling, The Terror Network (New York: Berkley, 1981), p. 221.

14 Ibid., p. 223.

15 Richard Staar, ed., Yearbook on International Communist Affairs 1980, (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1980), p. 216. See also Paul Henze, "The Long Effort to Destabilize Turkey," Wall Street Journal, October 7, 1981.

16 The Kurdish Workers' Party and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) have extensive links with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Sterling, op. cit., p. 226. See also Foreign Report, August 19, 1982.

17 John Barron, KGB (New York: Reader's Digest, 1974), pp. 56, 79, 175-176, 256.

The lifting of the U.S. embargo on aid to Turkey in 1978 led to improved Turkish-American relations and the reopening of U.S. intelligence bases in eastern Turkey. These are crucial to the monitoring of Soviet missile tests in Central Asia and the verification of Soviet compliance with strategic arms control agreements. As Washington and Ankara were negotiating the terms for the reopening of the bases, Moscow unleased a furious propaganda barrage, warning that if Turkey permitted Americans to return it would "spoil relations with its neighbors and in the event of a conflict become a nuclear cemetery."[18] Turkey ignored the threats and signed a Five Year Defense Cooperation Agreement in April 1980, enabling the U.S. to regain emergency access to Turkish air bases and to fill the gap in its intelligence-gathering capabilities that had existed since the abandonment of two facilities in Iran in early 1979.

Most damaging to Turkish-Soviet relations was the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. To Turkey this meant that the Soviets were on the move again in Central Asia. Less than a week after the invasion, Turkey's military leadership warned Turkish politicians that Turkey's house must be put in order. This was the first in a series of warnings that presaged the September 1980 military coup, which effectively ended several years of civil strife.

For the foreseeable future, the Soviet threat to Turkey is more likely to take the form of indirect Soviet support for subversive and separatist groups than of direct military pressures. Although it lacks modern equipment, the 470,000-man Turkish Army remains a tough, disciplined fighting force. Given the stalemate in Afghanistan, the Soviets are unlikely to move militarily against Turkey.

Moscow instead will try to erode Turkey's ties to the West and to undermine the central government. Radio broadcasts from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe continue to encourage and play upon the grievances of Turkey's Shiites. Of particular concern is the Soviet link to leftist Kurdish separatist groups who purport to represent the aspirations of eastern Turkey's 7 to 8 million Kurds. Eleven Middle Eastern communist parties recently declared their support for the "Kurdish National Liberation Movement."[19] Ankara appears increasingly nervous about external manipulation of the Kurds. In late May 1983, the Turkish Army launched a major offensive against Kurdish guerrillas inside Iraq.[20]

Another Soviet tactic is the subversion of Turks working elsewhere in Europe. Many of these two million Turks are bitter about their life in Western host countries and angry that the

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18 Pravda, February 27, 1980.

19 The Economist, June 18, 1983, p. 54.

20 New York Times, May 31, 1983.

Turkish economy cannot absorb them. They form a potentially large pool for recruitment by Turkish leftists. Leaders of the outlawed Turkish Communist Party remain in cold storage in Eastern Europe, should they be called to administer "liberated" territory.

A successful Soviet campaign to "Finlandize" Turkey would damage U.S. interests. Turkish withdrawal from NATO would weaken critically Western defenses in the eastern Mediterranean, remove NATO's second largest standing army, and expose NATO's vulnerable southern flank. In the event of a conventional military conflict between NATO and the Soviet bloc, Moscow would no longer be forced to take into consideration the almost four million Turkish reservists that could be mobilized. The important NATO air base in Incirlik would be lost along with access to air bases in eastern Turkey that would be indispensable in the event that the U.S. was called upon to blunt a Soviet invasion of western Iran. Loss of Turkish intelligence facilities would deprive the U.S. of an estimated 30 percent of its intelligence on the Soviet Union.[21] Assured Soviet overflight rights over Turkey would reduce Soviet air deployment times to the Middle East and Persian Gulf, further widening the gap between Soviet and American capabilities in these strategic regions. A neutralized Turkey would severely constrain Western military options in future regional crises, while lifting an important restraint on future Soviet behavior.

THE SOVIET THREAT TO PAKISTAN

Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union have been cool but correct since Pakistan attained independence in August 1947. As a strongly anti-communist state, Pakistan was a natural ally of the West in the struggle to contain communism. Islamabad joined CENTO and the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1955. Shortly thereafter Nikita Khrushchev visited India and Afghanistan, declaring Soviet support for India's claim to Kashmir and for Afghanistan's claim to Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.

Until the late 1970s, the Soviet threat was a distant and indirect one. The Kremlin spouted a steady stream of anti-Pakistani invective and became the chief arms supplier for India, which fought three wars with Pakistan in 1947, 1965, and 1971. The April 1978 communist coup in Afghanistan, however, brought the Soviet threat much closer. Yet the Carter Administration continued to focus more on Pakistan's nuclear program and human rights situation than on expanding Soviet influence. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan stripped Pakistan of its buffer against the Soviet Union, transforming Pakistan into a frontline state.

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[21] George Gruen, "Ambivalence in the Alliance: U.S. Interests in the Middle East and the Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy," Orbis, Summer 1980, p. 367.

The invasion dangerously compounded Pakistan's national security problems.[22] The Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation, for instance, could spill over into Pakistan at any time. The Russians may be tempted to strike at Afghan sanctuaries in the tribal belt of the Northwest Frontier Province in an effort to deny the Afghans aid from friendly tribes across the border. Moscow publicly has warned the Pakistanis against aiding the Afghan freedom fighters and has dramatized the threat with hundreds of overflights of Pakistani air space. Pakistani border posts have been attacked and Pakistani soldiers have been killed.[23]

Islamabad's greatest nightmare is of a Soviet-Indian alliance designed to dismember Pakistan. Such fears have been heightened by former Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai's disclosure that Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin suggested to him after the 1978 Afghan coup that the time was ripe "to put Pakistan in its place." A few months later an Afghan communist delegation to New Delhi recommended carving Pakistan into four pieces.[24]

Until Moscow has consolidated its control over Afghanistan, the primary threat to Pakistani security posed by the Soviet seizure of Afghanistan is subversive. Moscow and its Afghan clients have supported the activities of the Al-Zulfiqar terrorist group, which targets the Pakistani government. A more serious threat to Pakistan's internal security is the prospect of Soviet aid to ethnic separatist groups, particularly the Baluchi groups that claim to speak for the 1.25 million Baluchi tribesmen in southwestern Pakistan.

The Baluch have risen against the central government three times since 1947 and can do so again. During the last round of fighting, from 1973 to 1977, more than 3,000 Pakistani soldiers and at least 5,000 Baluchi guerrillas died, along with hundreds of civilians. There have been reports that the Soviets have been training Baluchi in the USSR[25] and have agents working with Baluchi groups in Afghanistan.[26] A Soviet-backed Baluchi uprising would pose grave risks for Pakistan's internal security, might spill over into Iran's Baluchi region, and might lead to a full-blown Soviet military intervention if allowed to fester. A pro-Soviet Baluchistan, composed of portions of Pakistan and Iran, would control the northern coast of the Arabian Sea and pose a potential threat to Western oil shipping lanes.

Pakistan has responded to these Soviet threats in several ways:

1. It has drawn closer to the United States and signed, in 1981, a five-year $3.2 billion aid agreement with Washington.

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22 See Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "The Afghanistan Crisis and Pakistan's Security Dilemma," Asian Survey, March 1983.

23 Christian Science Monitor, September 26, 1981.

24 The Economist, Foreign Report, December 17, 1981.

25 Business Week, January 21, 1980.

26 New York Times, April 6, 1981.

2. It has improved its relations with India. In 1981 President Zia al-Haq travelled to India to meet Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the first time since 1972 that the heads of the two countries had met.

3. Pakistan has been going to great lengths to avoid antagonizing Moscow. Islamabad has refrained from actively supporting the anti-Soviet Afghan freedom fighters, has not built up its military forces along the Afghan border to avoid provoking Soviet countermoves, and has begun negotiating with the Kabul regime to test Moscow's much heralded "willingness" to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.

Pakistan is trying to accommodate the Soviets because it still distrusts Washington. Like Turkey, Pakistan has been bitterly disappointed by the perceived unreliability of the U.S., which embargoed arms transfers during its 1965 and 1971 wars and cut off aid in 1979 due to its nuclear program. Unsure of its unpredictable ally, Pakistan sought to reach an acceptable accommodation with its more predictable enemy. Observes President Zia: "You cannot live in the sea and [incite the] enmity of whales. You have to be friendly with them. The Soviet Union is on our doorstep. The United States is ten thousand miles away."[27]

Should Moscow successfully intimidate Pakistan or manage to neutralize it through subversion or dismemberment, it will have assured itself of eventual victory in Afghanistan. The Afghan freedom fighters would face the grim prospect of slow strangulation if their supply lines to friendly tribes across the Pakistani border were severed. Once it had consolidated control of Afghanistan, Moscow would be poised for further advances into Iran or Pakistan's Baluchistan province. Even without further advances, Afghan air bases give the Soviets the capability of dominating the Strait of Hormuz with their tactical fighter-bombers and threatening U.S. naval operations in the Arabian Sea with long-range strategic bombers.[28]

A cowed Pakistan would be unable to perform its stabilizing functions in the Persian Gulf. It no longer could be entrusted to train Arab armed forces in the Gulf, and its advisers would no longer be able to bolster the internal security of Gulf regimes. Finally, the neutralization of Pakistan would be a psychological blow to the Gulf's pro-Western regimes. They would question again the value of an American tie, as they did in 1979 when the Shah of Iran fell. If the U.S. should prove unable to prevent another ally from drifting into anti-Western nonalignment, its credibility in the Gulf would be severely damaged.

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27 New York Times, January 16, 1980.

28 Prepared statement of Professor Zalmay Khalilzad, Situation in Afghanistan. Hearings Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, March 8, 1982, p. 82.

THE SOVIET THREAT TO IRAN

After the failure of its 1946 attempt to establish puppet regimes in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, Moscow's relations with Iran remained chilled by suspicion and mutual recriminations for more than a decade. The growing Soviet presence in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq after 1958 increased the Shah's sense of vulnerability. It prompted him to mollify the Soviets in 1962 by pledging that Iran would not allow American missiles to be based on its territory. The Shah was dismayed by the Kennedy Administration's flirtation with Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and its pressure to reform Iran. The Johnson Administration deepened his disillusionment by failing to back up Turkey in the 1964 Cyprus crisis and Pakistan in its 1965 war with India. To minimize his dependence on the U.S., the Shah took out an insurance policy with Moscow by improving bilateral relations. From 1962 until 1978, Soviet-Iranian diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations flourished, although the Soviets relentlessly criticized the Shah's military buildup, his Western ties, and his interventions on behalf of the governments of Oman and Pakistan against separatist guerrillas.

The Soviets initially adopted a cautious posture toward the Iranian revolution and did not write off the Shah until late 1978, when it was obvious he was losing control of the country. In mid-November, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev warned the U.S. not to intervene in Iran.[29] Clandestine radio stations broadcasting from Soviet territory launched an inflammatory propaganda campaign to exacerbate anti-American sentiments, and pro-Soviet Iranian exiles returned to Iran across the Soviet-Iranian border.[30] The Tudeh joined the anti-Shah coalition and infiltrated recruits into Iran from training camps in Afghanistan.[31]

After the fall of the Shah, the Soviet Union posed as the "protector" of the revolution and sought to equate anti-Soviet criticism with counter-revolution. Moscow strived to intensify Iran's alienation from the West, deepen its radicalization, and block any normalization of relations with Western countries, particularly the United States. The Soviets exploited the American hostage crisis and further ingratiated themselves with the Iranians by using the Tudeh and KGB to infiltrate and betray opposition groups, by warning Iran of the impending Iraqi attack in September 1980, and by channeling arms to Iran through Syria, Libya, and North Korea.

With the end of Iran's confrontation with the United States over the hostages and after Iranian opposition groups had been

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29 Pravda, November 19, 1975.

30 Cord Meyer, "The Kremlin's Work in Iran," Washington Star, February 10, 1979.

31 Robert Moss, "Who is Meddling in Iran?" The New Republic, December 21, 1978.

neutralized, Teheran became more critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and of Soviet arms shipments to Iraq. Teheran took a number of tough anti-Soviet steps: in July 1982, the Tudeh newspaper was closed down; in February 1983, the members of the Tudeh Central Committee were arrested; and in May, the Tudeh was dissolved after its leaders admitted conducting espionage for the Soviet Union.

Yet Moscow retains several channels of influence in Iran. Approximately 2,000 technical and economic advisers remain in the country along with a sizable Soviet bloc diplomatic community. The Soviets have maintained contacts with leftists in Azerbaijan, Kurdistan[32] and Gilan province and may attempt to orchestrate a repetition of the events of 1920 or 1945-1946.[33] Geidar Aliyeu, a protegé of Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, who was recently elevated to the Politburo, has told Western visitors that it was his "personal" hope that Iranian Azerbaijan would be united with its Soviet counterpart in the future.[34] Moscow also has the option of forging an alliance with underground leftist organizations such as the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq.[35] Although Teheran unilaterally abrogated the 1921 Friendship Treaty in 1959 and again in 1979, Moscow continues to assert that it is still in force, an ominous sign that it may be considering an intervention in Iran at some point in the future.

Iran is the most vulnerable target of Soviet opportunism in the Northern Tier. It shares a highly permeable 1,250-mile border with the Soviet Union and a 400-mile border with Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. Iran occupies the most strategic territory in the Northern Tier because it offers the most direct access to the Persian Gulf, which it dominates, and because it possesses large reserves of oil and gas. Iran is a less risky target because of its chaotic internal politics, its military weakness, and its relative isolation from the West. Moreover, Moscow is likely to find more local allies within the underground opposition in Iran than in either of its Northern Tier neighbors.

Once Khomeini dies, the Islamic revolution regime will lose its chief source of legitimacy and popularity. It is likely to be rocked by internal rivalries as well as rising domestic opposition. In a situation of flux, Moscow will be tempted to back one of the contending factions, perhaps by dispatching "volunteers"

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32 There is evidence that Soviet aircraft recently have dropped supplies to Kurdish insurgents. Zalmay Khalilzad, "Soviet Interests in Iran," New York Times, May 12, 1982.

33 Thomas Hammond, "Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf," Survey, Spring 1982, pp. 88-89.

34 Sharam Chubin, "The Soviet Union and Iran," Foreign Affairs, p. 933.

35 In the fall of 1982 Soviet media began to report the Mujaheddin in a favorable light. See Karen Dawisha, "The USSR in the Middle East," Foreign Affairs, Winter 1982-1983, p. 447.

to support its clients in the civil war as it did in Spain in the 1930s. Since the Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and Turkoman ethnic groups straddle the border, Moscow would have thousands of potential subversives at its disposal.

While the present Islamic regime in Teheran poses significant threats to Western interests in the Gulf region, a Soviet-backed Iran would pose much greater threats. If Teheran's revolutionary ideology were broadened beyond the narrow base of Shiite fundamentalism, it would have a much greater appeal on the predominantly Sunni Arab side of the Gulf. The Iranian Army, long deprived of assured access to American weapons and spare parts, would become a more formidable fighting force if it were equipped with Soviet weaponry. A Soviet-backed Iran would have a much better chance of installing a Shiite revolutionary regime in Iraq and would be less reluctant to attack U.S.-backed Saudi Arabia. Soviet influence in Gulf capitals would increase in direct proportion to its influence over Iran, the chief external threat to all the Gulf states. Such influence would eventually translate into influence over Gulf oil flows, a prospect that threatens the unity and long-term strength of the Western alliance.

CONCLUSION

Two major geopolitical events--the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan--have heightened dramatically the Soviet threat to the Northern Tier and, by extension, the Persian Gulf. The Iranian revolution greatly eased constraints on Soviet policy by removing a pro-Western regime and replacing it with a violently anti-Western one; it increased Soviet opportunities for expanding its influence by transforming a status quo power into a revolutionary power at odds with its neighbors. The seizure of Afghanistan was a disturbing strategic coup because of that country's pivotal geopolitical position. Afghanistan is a well-placed fulcrum that gives Moscow strong diplomatic leverage over both Iran and Pakistan. It is a valuable forward base for the projection of Soviet military power, a secluded staging area for mounting subversive and separatist operations, and an excellent springboard to the Persian Gulf and Indian subcontinent.

Now that the invasion and prolonged occupation of Afghanistan has shocked some of the West out of complacency, Moscow is likely to resort to direct military force in the Northern Tier only if and when its position in Afghanistan is consolidated. It is far more likely to engage in low-cost, indirect, and incremental activities that are difficult to detect and to deter. By covertly supporting separatist and dissident groups, or merely threatening to do so, Moscow can exert great pressure on central governments, bend them to its will, and eventually "Finlandize" if not "Sovietize" them. This Mafia-like protection racket gives the Soviet Union a flexible, low-risk instrument of coercion that can be calibrated to exploit the specific internal weaknesses of various countries.

The most troubling issue raised by Soviet policy in the Northern Tier was that identified by Prince Gorchakov in the last century: "the difficulty of knowing when to stop." Stalin boasted of his ability to ascertain the limits of what he could get away with and demonstrated this knack by withdrawing from Iran in 1946. Since then, the Soviet Union has gained strategic nuclear parity, if not superiority, and has greatly increased the range and strength of its power projection forces. Given its preponderance of regional military power, it is by no means clear that the newly installed Andropov regime will "know where to stop" in the future.

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