

**UPDATE**

## WINNING THE ENDGAME IN AFGHANISTAN

(Updating *Backgrounder* No. 754, "Consolidating Victory in Afghanistan," February 20, 1990.)

The April 15 collapse of the Afghan communist dictatorship of President Najibullah has ignited a power struggle within the broad anti-communist resistance coalition that overthrew the regime, imposed by Moscow in December 1979. The Afghan resistance, which fought and won a fourteen-year war against the Soviet Union and its puppet Afghan communists, has dissolved into warring factions. U.S. inaction threatens to jeopardize the hard-won victory of moderate Afghan leaders and could allow Afghanistan to slide into anarchy or revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism. It would be a critical mistake if the United States, which provided vital military, economic, and diplomatic support for the resistance, turned its back on its former Afghan clients before a stable and lasting peace can be brought to Afghanistan.

There are many reasons for this conclusion. Although Afghanistan has lost its Cold War importance as a cockpit for anti-Soviet struggle, this Texas-sized country remains a strategic crossroads that links Central Asia to the Persian Gulf region and the Indian subcontinent. Afghanistan looms large as a factor in the outcome of the intensifying political and ideological struggle for influence in Central Asia between Islamic fundamentalist Iran and secular democratic Turkey. If radical Muslim fundamentalists seize power, Afghanistan could become an ally of anti-Western Iran, a base for international terrorism, and a dangerous source of instability in Central Asia and Pakistan.

**Restless Ethnic Minorities.** Alternatively, a prolonged civil war that transformed Afghanistan into another Lebanon would generate destabilizing spillover effects that could harm neighboring Pakistan, a long-time American ally, while boosting the influence of another neighbor, Iran. In the event of protracted fighting, restless Afghan ethnic minorities increasingly will be tempted to break away from the Pushtuns, who historically have dominated the country with just over 50 percent of Afghanistan's 16.4 million people. The Persian-speaking Tajiks (about 25 percent of the population) and the Turkish-speaking Uzbeks (about 9 percent) concentrated in northern Afghanistan might seek independence or unification with Tajikistan or Uzbekistan. The Hazaras (12 percent to 15 percent) of central Afghanistan, who share Iran's Shiite faith, could be pulled into Iran's orbit. Pakistan is concerned that Afghanistan's Pushtuns might foment separatism among Pakistan's Pushtun minority. If Afghanistan disintegrates along ethnic lines, it could incite turmoil that would threaten the territorial integrity of Afghanistan's ethnically heterogeneous neighbors—Pakistan and the Central Asian states—and ultimately perhaps India.

The U.S. has an interest in building a moderate, stable Afghanistan. This would help to contain the spread of Iranian-style Islamic fundamentalism and help forestall instability in the emerging central Asian Muslim states that may be susceptible to fundamentalism. The U.S. also has a humanitarian interest in easing the suffering of Afghanistan's war-weary people. A stable peace in Afghanistan would lead to the return of over three million Afghan refugees from Pakistan, relieving that country of an enormous economic burden. It also would encourage the return of over one million Afghan refugees from Iran, depriving that

country of a recruiting pool of destitute young men that Tehran has used as surrogates in Afghanistan and as cannon fodder in its war with Iraq.

Restoring a stable and effective Afghan government in Kabul also would reduce the flow of illegal drugs from Afghanistan, which today is the world's second largest producer of opium, after Burma, and a major source of heroin and hashish. During the war the communist regime encouraged farmers to grow drug crops rather than food. Now that some border tribes have developed a vested interest in drug smuggling, the reestablishment of effective government authority is necessary to reduce the flow of drugs, much of which ultimately are consumed by Western users.

## **THE KABUL KALEIDOSCOPE**

The collapse of the communist regime following Najibullah's flight to a United Nations compound in Kabul on April 15 has left power in the hands of a loose coalition of resistance leaders. An interim ruling council of 51 Afghan political and religious leaders took power in Kabul on April 28, headed by acting President Sibgatullah Mojadidi, the leader of a moderate resistance group called the National Front for the Rescue of Afghanistan. The new government immediately was opposed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the ruthless leader of one of the most radical and most heavily-armed resistance groups, the Islamic Party. Hekmatyar's forces bombarded Kabul with artillery and rockets for several days in late April and early May in a vain effort to force rival resistance groups to accept Hekmatyar's political dominance.

Hekmatyar's real target is not President Mojadidi but archrival Ahmad Shah Massoud, who has been the most effective resistance commander. Hekmatyar's strategy is to militarily batter and politically discredit Massoud, who is the biggest obstacle to Hekmatyar's relentless drive for a radical fundamentalist Afghanistan. Massoud, a Tajik, engineered the nearly bloodless overthrow of the Najibullah regime by forging an alliance with disaffected army and militia commanders, particularly those of Tajik and Uzbek descent. Hekmatyar, a Pushtun, increasingly is practicing a divisive brand of ethnic politics by stirring up Pushtun resentment over the prominent role that Tajiks and Uzbeks have assumed in Kabul. Hekmatyar thus hopes to isolate Massoud, drain away his Pushtun support, and outbid other leaders for the allegiance of Pushtuns.

Although Hekmatyar and Massoud once belonged to the same fundamentalist group, they have developed markedly different political and ideological goals. Hekmatyar is an uncompromising revolutionary who has received backing from Libya and Arab fundamentalists. He is violently anti-Western and denounced the coalition that went to war with Iraq to liberate Kuwait in 1991. Massoud, on the other hand, is a pragmatic fundamentalist who practices an inclusive brand of politics based on consensus, not on a drive for personal power.

If Hekmatyar triumphs, Afghanistan will become a radical state, possibly allied with Iran, that will foment Islamic revolution in Central Asia and the Middle East. Hekmatyar already has given arms to the Islamic Party of Tajikistan, one of the members of the Revolutionary Council that overthrew the government of Tajikistan on May 7. Hekmatyar also trained Islamic fundamentalists from throughout the Arab world that flocked to Afghanistan during the war against the Soviets. If Hekmatyar transforms Afghanistan into an Islamic revolutionary state, Afghanistan may become a potent sponsor of Islamic revolution that will destabilize the Muslim world for years to come.

## **THE U.S. ROLE IN THE AFGHAN ENDGAME**

The Bush Administration has given Afghanistan short shrift since 1989 because it was an obstacle to improved relations with then Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Secretary of State James Baker negotiated a September 13, 1991, agreement with Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin that halted Soviet and U.S. military aid to Afghan clients on January 1, 1992. Ironically, by the time the agreement came into effect, the Soviet Union had dissolved and Gorbachev had been eclipsed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who was ill-disposed toward helping the Afghan communists anyway.

The U.S. should not abandon the Afghans, as it tragically and mistakenly has abandoned the Kurds. The U.S. goal should be to help build a stable, moderate, pluralistic Afghanistan that would be acceptable both to the Pushtuns and non-Pushtun minority groups and would threaten none of its neighbors. The biggest obstacle to this goal: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

To limit Hekmatyar's political appeal in Afghanistan, help contain Iranian influence, and strengthen moderate political leaders in Afghanistan, the U.S. should:

- ◆ **Recognize the interim government of President Mojadidi and reopen the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.** This will strengthen the ability of moderate Afghans to resist Hekmatyar's intimidation by demonstrating that the U.S., which allowed Pakistan to funnel a disproportionate amount of American military aid to Hekmatyar's Islamic Party during the anti-Soviet war, will back a moderate alternative to Hekmatyar. Peter Tomsen, the U.S. special envoy to the resistance, has done a creditable job under difficult circumstances and enjoys the trust of the resistance leaders. He should be appointed as ambassador and immediately be dispatched to Kabul with a full staff to reopen the U.S. Embassy, which has been closed since 1989 due to security concerns. The U.S. cannot afford to leave its embassy vacant when Afghan moderates are fighting an uphill struggle to build a stable peace.
- ◆ **Cooperate with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in supporting moderate Afghan leaders.** Both of these states, which formerly supported Hekmatyar and other Afghan fundamentalists, have suspended their military aid to those groups. The Saudis were incensed by Hekmatyar's support for Iraq in the Persian Gulf War and the Pakistanis hope to improve relations and foster trade with the secular Central Asian states, who fear Hekmatyar. Both states share Washington's concern about containing the expansion of Iranian influence in Afghanistan. Washington, Islamabad, and Riyadh should coordinate their diplomatic and economic support policies to boost the political and military strength of moderate Afghan groups.
- ◆ **Recover unused *Stinger* anti-aircraft missiles.** The resistance is believed to possess several hundred U.S.-supplied *Stingers*, which could pose a formidable threat in the hands of terrorists. The U.S. should offer a bounty of \$50,000 for the return of each missile. This is roughly what it would cost America for each new one. The U.S., in cooperation with Pakistan, also should press the new Afghan government for the return of the *Stingers* and cut all links to any resistance group that refuses to return them.
- ◆ **Target economic aid to the Afghans to encourage postwar reconstruction through free market principles.** The Bush Administration has requested \$50 million from Congress for fiscal 1993 in development assistance and economic support for Afghan civilians in resistance-held areas. This is down from \$70 million in fiscal 1992. In view of the establishment of the new government and the prospective return of millions of refugees, the Administration instead should boost economic aid to at least \$150 million in fiscal 1993. The additional funds might be used to: revive Afghan agriculture by providing improved seeds, oxen, fertilizer, and reconstructing irrigation systems; repair Afghanistan's war-torn infrastructure; and assist effective private voluntary organizations, such as Afghan Aid, to prepare for a gradual return of Afghan refugees.

American reconstruction aid should be extended directly to Afghans, rather than funneled through such multilateral organizations as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or the United Nations. This aid should be used to help build a free market economy rather than wasted on statist economic schemes usually espoused by these organizations. Western specialists should assist the Afghans in privatizing state-run companies, encouraging free enterprise and revitalizing a decentralized agriculture economy. Washington should

press other potential aid donors, such as Saudi Arabia, Germany, and Japan to adopt similar policies.

- ◆ **Increase mine removal efforts.** The return of roughly five million Afghan refugees and the revitalization of Afghanistan's agricultural economy depends on the rapid removal of the estimated ten million mines sown throughout the country by Soviet and Afghan communist troops. The U.S. should press Russia and other Soviet successor states to deploy mine removal teams under U.N. auspices to aid in this mammoth task. The U.S. also should increase its own efforts to train Afghans to remove mines, which currently consist of two training teams based in Pakistan.
- ◆ **Maintain the leading role played in American policy toward Afghanistan by the Congressional Task Force on Afghanistan.** Now led by Representative Don Ritter of Pennsylvania and Senator Steve Symms of Idaho, both Republicans, this bipartisan task force played a vital role in marshalling U.S. support for the Afghan resistance during the Soviet occupation. It now should press the Administration to end its passivity and formulate a coherent U.S. policy toward Afghanistan's postwar reconstruction to assure that America's Afghan friends are given the opportunity to construct a stable and democratic political system and a flourishing free market economy. If the U.S. neglects to help moderate Afghans to consolidate their victory, Afghanistan may export drugs and terrorism for years to come.

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