

AFGHANISTAN: Why Soviet Intervention?



By Denis Freney

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has led to many conflicting views and stands. We must first ask why the Soviets intervened. Yet much of the debate has taken place without any investigation or study of the evidence.

The Soviet explanation has been given many times. President Leonid Brezhnev on

January 14 outlined his view in an interview with *Pravda*: "The unceasing armed intervention, the well-advanced plot by external forces of reaction created a real threat that Afghanistan would lose its independence and be turned into an imperialist military bridgehead on our country's southern border."

Pravda (January 19) spelt out that "in recent months, the (imperialist) aggression assumed such forms and scale as to jeopardise the very existence of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan as an independent and sovereign state."

The *Pravda* article, by A. Petrov, defines this aggression as "tens of thousands of mercenaries, armed with foreign arms and trained by foreign instructors, who are sent into Afghanistan". He claims that on June 20 and 21, 1979, two Pakistani vessels brought arms to Karachi for the Afghan rebels. The first brought 2,000 tons of US-made weapons from Britain and the second 8,000 tons of war materials from China. The material was allegedly taken to Peshawar. This operation was supervised by CIA agent Louis Dupree who, with a CIA team, was trying to force a united front of the rebels and a government-in-exile.

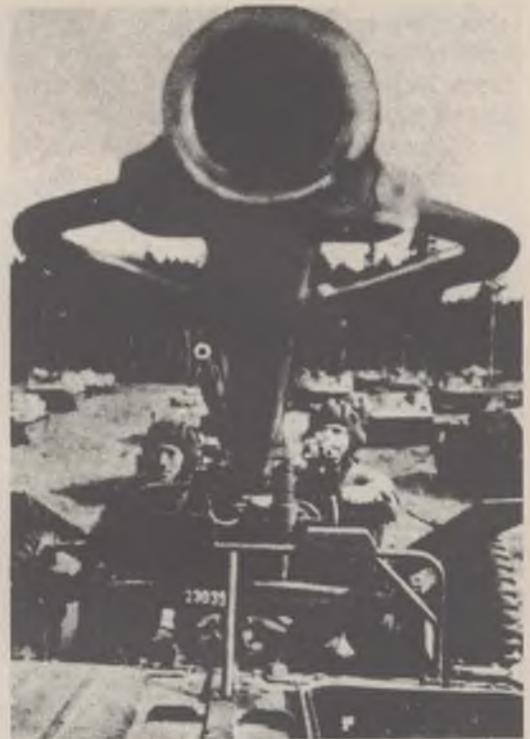
Units of American-trained mercenaries were sent into Afghanistan and when they "were routed, proofs were obtained that confirmed the fact of external aggression".

One thing should be noted: Petrov speaks of aggression reaching a scale which would have endangered Afghan independence in "recent months".

This would therefore refer to the period when Hafizullah Amin was president. Leaving aside the question, for the moment, of whether Amin was a "CIA agent", let us examine the military position in Afghanistan between September and December 1979.

It is easily documented that the CIA, Pakistan and China were training and aiding the Afghan rebels. The question is rather how successful they had been in developing a force which would have been close to seizing power and which would, therefore, have required the presence of so many Soviet troops.

It must be noted, first of all, that **both sides** — the American and Soviet — have a clear interest in showing that the rightist rebels did indeed pose a real threat to Kabul. The Soviets need to show that there was a threat of a new "Chile" to justify their action. The Americans need to show it is true, to justify their action. The Americans need to show it is true to justify their claim that the Afghan people were valiantly and successfully



challenging the "communist" regime in Kabul.

Second, linked with the above point, we must be cautious in estimating sources of information. The various Afghan rebel groups are notoriously unreliable as sources of information. They seek to promote themselves over their rivals, each claiming great victories. This was also part of the bidding for aid from imperialism and China.

One of the best examples of unreliable information was the claim that 10,000 Soviet soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan in one week after the Soviet invasion! It is also true that such stories were enthusiastically seized upon by the sensationalist western media. The Americans, particularly the CIA, also broadcast misinformation, as the media have now discovered.

The ABC's Geoff Herriot has been particularly strong in emphasising the unreliability of guerrilla sources and US embassy misinformation (see *Sun-Herald*, January 27 for summary of these views).

Dr. Beverley Male, lecturer at Duntroon military college, an expert in Afghan affairs who spent some months there in early 1979, and who is certainly not pro-left, is even more definite. Dr. Male in a letter to *The Bulletin* (January 29) says that it was clear when she was in Kabul last year "many reports were based on unsubstantiated and unchecked rumors, the most vicious of which could often, regrettably, be traced to US Embassy sources".

"The Taraki-Amin regime was certainly no worse and probably much better than many others that are not subjected to such a sustained and savage media attack," she writes in *The Bulletin*.

We must very strongly make the point that there was a CIA-sponsored "disinformation" throughout this period. As journalists have since found out, this disinformation was highly exaggerated then as it is now. We must therefore sift our reports which uncritically report rebel or US "information service" sources, and to search for reports which are either independent first-hand reports, or seriously try to evaluate reports.

Military situation, September-December 1979

Amin had, from the early 'seventies, been the Khalq leader responsible for organisation within the army. When he seized power from Taraki in September 1979, it seems that the military operations of the army improved and that, in fact, after Amin took power the army broke the back of resistance in Pakhtia province, one of the main centres of the rebels. Certainly the position was better than six months previously. Pakhtia province, like the other major centres of revolt, is on the Pakistani border, was the subject of a major offensive by Amin's army, and the rebels suffered a major defeat there.

Asia Week (December 14, 1979) under the heading "Amin hits Back" reported heavy bombing of dozens of rebel villages in Takhar province "seemed to turn the course of the 14-month-old civil war in the Government's favor". Rebels withdrew from several key areas in Pakhtia and Badakhshan provinces. The government recaptured Taghab, Nejrab and Wardak, 40 kms from Kabul. Similarly the *Far Eastern*

Economic Review (January 25) reports "The Afghan forces say they were not doing too badly against the rebels before the coup".

Dr. Male *The Age*, January 21) speaks of the "effectiveness" of Amin's policies. She adds: "and rebel sources admitted they were effective".

Amin, after taking over from Taraki, she claims then, "had the authority to pursue a more vigorous campaign against the rebels and to press on with the economic and social reforms. He embarked on a successful offensive against the rebels in Pakhtia province and at the same time turned the religious propaganda against them."

In fact, Dr. Male claims, the very success of Amin's policies "probably signed his death warrant", as "once the rebellion was crushed there would no longer have been any need for a friendship treaty (with a military co-operation clause) with the USSR". We shall return later to Dr. Male's explanation of Soviet intervention, as we shall also to a discussion of the nature of Amin's repression of the rebels.

It is possible to also find references to the "tottering" Amin regime, but a close examination of these reports finds almost no reference (except in direct reports of highly doubtful rebel claims) of the danger to Amin coming from an imminent rebel defeat of the Afghan army. Rather, the danger referred to is from mutinies in the army itself, and attempts to stage coups. There were, for example, coup attempts in Kabul in November and December and mutinies in other centres. But such mutinies were not, of course, new phenomena.

In fact, successes gained by the rightist rebels were due almost entirely to army mutinies which, for example, allowed rebel tribesmen to capture part of Herat, the third largest city, for four days in March 1979.

The documentary by British TV man Nick Downey, screened on ABC TV's "Four Corners" (February 2), was ample evidence that defections from the army provided the rebels with their strength — particularly in arms. But the divisive tribesmen failed because they did not use the army defectors. Downey also noted that the leader of the army defectors was, in fact, an officer who was the son of one of the feudal chiefs of the area.



Taraki



Amin



Karmal

Within the army there were two factors operating to "purge it". First, officers linked with the feudal lords naturally were against the land reform, and led many of the mutinies. This was a "self-purge" of the old feudal army of its counter-revolutionary elements (many of whom were also eliminated, once discovered, before they could defect). The second factor was the division among the different revolutionary officers, based upon their support for Khalq (and within that Taraki or Amin), or Parcham, or different bonapartist tendencies that emerged.

There is no suggestion that the revolts in Kabul in November and December were counter-revolutionary, pro-feudal revolts, but, on the contrary, there is evidence that they were launched by dissident Parcham and Khalq elements.

Finally, it remains the Afghan army which is fighting the rebels today. Abdul Sammat Azhar, head of the "security organs" under Karmal, speaking on East Berlin TV "resolutely rejected allegations that there had been an interference by Soviet troops. Not a single Soviet soldier had taken part in such (anti-rebel security) operations and this would remain so in the future." (ADN Bulletin, No. E4, January 1980.) He did, however, stress that Soviet forces "are stationed here to oppose any aggression from abroad".

His claims are confirmed by western and even CIA reports that Soviet troops are not

engaged in operations against the guerrillas. If they are not needed now, then they were not needed in December for such operations, particularly as it is the height of winter and the rebel areas are snow-bound, removing the chance of any major rebel offensive.

Dangers of foreign invasion of Afghanistan?

Was there then a danger of US, Pakistan and/or Chinese troops invading Afghanistan?

This is a separate question to that of well-documented US, Pakistani and Chinese support for and training of the rightist rebels. When Azhar speaks of Soviet troops being present to "oppose any aggression from abroad", we must assume he means actual invasion.

The allegations made by Petrov (quoted earlier), the well-documented article by Konrad Ege in *CounterSpy* (Vol. 4, No. 1) showing US, Chinese and Pakistani aid for and training of rightist guerrillas and other such charges, do not add up to an invasion.

The Japanese Communist Party daily *Akahata* (January 19) correspondent in Kabul says he was told by the Karmal government that it was not under threat of foreign invasion when the Soviet troops moved in. In the Kabul press, from October to December 1979, before the Soviet intervention, the *Akahata* correspondent "found no reports on a threat of aggression

from outside. During my stay in Kabul, newspapers rarely referred to this problem”.

But, he reports, “the Afghan authorities stressed that the despatch of Soviet troops saved the lives of many political prisoners (who were) liberated by the USSR. This statement happens to throw into relief the fact that not only international relations but also internal affairs were important reasons for the Soviet troops being sent in”.

Indeed, if there was no danger of foreign aggression from, necessarily, foreign troops, and only aid and training of the rightist rebels, then there is no justification for Soviet troops being present, particularly in such large numbers. If such imperialist aid to rightist forces was a justification for such large-scale deployment, then Soviet troops could go into any country in the world, because the CIA is active everywhere, including Australia.

Indeed, the Soviet leadership used similar excuses for the invasion of Czechoslovakia which was supposedly under imminent threat from CIA and West German infiltration. No doubt the CIA and West Germans were active, but there was no reason to believe that Dubcek and the Czech communists were not capable of defeating their efforts. Warsaw Pact troops quite clearly moved into Czechoslovakia for other reasons: they wanted a regime in power they could completely control — they did not want another Yugoslavia or Romania in eastern Europe, particularly as it was beginning a unique experiment in socialist democracy.

It is difficult, therefore, to accept the Soviet's basic explanation for such a large-scale deployment of troops. WE must look elsewhere for the real reason.

The overthrow of Amin

One does not have to look far for one obvious factor: the overthrow of Amin came only days after the massive Soviet airlift had begun. It is impossible to accept the Soviet explanation that the overthrow of Amin was purely a Parcham operation which they had nothing to do with. Subsequent Soviet condemnation of Amin (including that by Brezhnev himself) shows they had no love for him. There is no sign of equanimity or restraint in their condemnation. They are also assiduously repeating the stories

coming from Karmal that Amin was a CIA agent, etc.

All the evidence points to the Soviets either directly overthrowing and executing Amin, or directly aiding those who did so, by disarming or demobilising Afghan troops loyal to him. Thus, either incidentally, or as a major reason, the overthrow of Amin and installation of Karmal was an objective of the Soviet invasion. Why should this be so, and did it necessitate such a massive presence of Soviet troops to do so?

Indeed, it is emerging from Soviet and pro-Soviet propaganda that the overthrow of Amin may have been the major reason precisely because, they claim, he was a CIA agent and was about to throw the Soviets out and even invite American troops into Afghanistan. In fact, the only pro-Soviet allegation made of imminent invasion by American troops refers to the allegation that Amin was going to invite them in.

Jim Mitchell (*The Socialist*, January 30, 1980) reported the allegations from Kabul, after a press conference. In summary, Karmal's Interior Minister S.M. Galabzoi claimed to have “obtained information” that “on instructions from the CIA, Amin, in collusion with counter-revolutionaries in Pakistan, planned a coup to take place on December 29 last”. (Two days before he was executed by Karmal.)

They planned to execute all remaining “honest leaders and party activists” and establish a government with Amin as president and Gulbuddin Ekmatiar, leader of the rightist Islamic Party based in Pakistan, as prime minister. In late last September, an Amin emissary met with Ekmatiar. On October 4, Amin and his accomplice held a secret meeting in Kabul and endorsed the plan. In December, Amin's representative met US special services agents in Paris, Rome and Karachi.

Another Amin representative went to Peshawar in Pakistan on December 22 and informed Afghan counter-revolutionaries that the plot was set for December 29. Mitchell reports: “Assurances had been received from American circles that Washington ‘if necessary’ would support the initiators of the coup ‘with the full might of the US armed forces’.”

Investigations are continuing, Mitchell

reports, and Karmal said "all evidence of Amin's connection with the CIA will be produced to the world press in due course".

The allegations of the scale of the massacre which Karmal claims Amin was planning has also escalated. Karmal claimed on January 23 that Amin was planning to massacre "half the Afghan population" in the period December 31 to January 2. This was "more terrifying than those that took place in Kampuchea or Chile," he said. (*Le Monde*, January 31.)

Any rational person must be highly sceptical of these claims which go alongside allegations that Amin was too radical, too harsh on the rebels, thus turning the population against the revolution. Moreover, some can still recall the Moscow Trials of the 'thirties where similar allegations were made, "confessions" obtained and "evidence" produced to prove that old Bolsheviks, leaders of the October Revolution alongside Lenin, were "Hitler agents".

Was Amin a CIA agent?

Who was Hafizullah Amin and does his life history show him as a likely CIA agent?

In August 1979, Romesh Chandra, President of the World Peace Council whose ideas for many years have exactly coincided with the Soviet leadership's, had no doubts about Amin. Thanking Amin for his opening speech at a WPC-sponsored International Conference of Solidarity with Afghanistan held in Kabul from August 24-27, 1979, Romesh Chandra said:

"It has been a great honour and privilege for us to hear the inaugural address of our dear friend, comrade Hafizullah Amin. We have been given great new strength by his brilliant exposition of the situation as it now exists. His address has been the address of a man who loves his own people and who loves all the peoples of the world. It was the address of a true patriot, it was the address of a true internationalist. We are very grateful to you for your inspiring words." (Publication of WPC Information Centre, Helsinki.)

Leaving aside the customary hyperbole of Chandra at such gatherings, it is clear that

he (and the Soviet delegates present) did not think Amin a CIA agent then!

Similar comments in less flowery language can be found in other Soviet and pro-Soviet publications of that time.

The introduction to the WPC booklet reports delegates were able to move freely around the city and country, and replies to "imperialist slanders" about 75 per cent of the country being in the hands of rebels, etc. The introduction continues: "Mr. Hafizullah Amin in his statements and speeches spoke warmly of Afghan friendship with the Soviet Union."

After the conference, delegates divided into groups and visited Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Mazare Sharif and Parwan, by plane or bus where they addressed rallies of tens of thousands (Herat 50,000; Jalalabad 10,000; Mazare Sharif 10,000). All the cities had been attacked by rebels but "calm and tranquility now prevail in all these areas".

Of course, all this could be nonsense, lies and pure propaganda. But the source is pro-Soviet, and there have been no reports of similar rallies or popularity for Karmal not even from pro-Soviet sources. Mitchell can only claim "hundreds of thousands of toiling people are willingly co-operating in the new situation".

We have no space to quote from the speech of Amin opening the WPC conference. However, the emphasis is on the socialist nature of the revolution. His speech is sprinkled with quotes from Lenin (and one from Brezhnev!).

Amin returned to Afghanistan in 1965 after studying abroad at Columbia University in the USA, where in the mid-'fifties he first came into contact with socialist ideas. He was an alternate member of the PDP Politbureau formed at its founding conference in 1965, and quickly emerged as number two to Taraki in the Khalq faction.. He stood for the PDP in the elections in 1969 and won a seat in Laghman, a predominantly nomad area in the north-east. Karmal was the only other successful PDP candidate (Fred Halliday, *New Left Review*, November-December 1978).

After Parcham played a successful role in bringing Daud to power in the 1973 coup,

Khalq also began to work in the army, and Amin was responsible for this work. After the wave of repression launched by Daud in April 1978, it was Amin, just before his arrest, who managed to get orders to the Khalq military officers to launch the coup, which they did successfully on April 27. After the April 1978 revolution, Amin became Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. In July 1978 he remained in these posts, after Karmal was exiled. In March 1979 he became Prime Minister, as well as Foreign Minister, and in July 1979 gave up foreign affairs and took over defence. In September, he became president.

He was never (as some claim) Interior Minister, in charge of the police, and when he became Defence Minister he was to "execute the President's (Taraki's) directives and supervise the Ministry of Defence". A Supreme Council for the Defence of the Country was formed on March 29, 1979 which included Taraki, Amin, Watanjar (Defence), Mazduryar (Interior) and Major Yakub, chief of the general staff. The Council was clearly the body responsible for decisions on repression aimed at foiling conspiracies, "eliminating traitors", etc.

Amin then was a key figure, but not alone, as Taraki particularly remained in overall charge.

We must examine the events of September 14, 1979, the day Amin took power from Taraki, to fully understand the situation.

Taraki had returned from Havana (the Non-Aligned Conference) and Moscow a few days before. All versions of the events agree that Amin had asked Taraki to agree to the dismissal of Interior Minister Watanjar and Border Affairs Minister Mazduryar. Taraki, according to most reports, was not happy and invited Amin to the Presidential Palace. Amin was suspicious and took along a military escort.

In the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (October 5), 1979, Rodney Tasker reports: "The guards opened fire as Amin and his men were climbing the stairs. (This correspondent saw evidence of some replastering on the staircase wall in the palace on the way to Amin's press conference.)" Former Kabul police chief and then Taraki's chief aide Syed Daud Tarun was killed in the shoot-out and given a hero's

burial two days later by Amin who said he had been killed by "counter-revolutionaries". Amin, according to most reports, escaped and returned with troops who captured the palace and Taraki. Watanjar and others escaped and Amin told Tasker he did not know where they were.

Fred Halliday in the *New Statesman* (see CICD "Dossier on Afghanistan") presents another version: Taraki, he claims, was going to arrest Amin peacefully after lunch.

Taraki did not die until early October when, according to Karmal, he was smothered to death on Amin's orders. Others claim he was wounded in the shoot-out and died of his wounds or even died from illness or shock, as he was an ill man.

Many reports claimed that Taraki, in trying to remove Amin, was acting on instructions from Moscow. This cannot be verified, but it seems certain that Watanjar and other sacked ministers either were given refuge in the Soviet Embassy or were smuggled out to the Soviet Union. Some reports claim that Watanjar took part in the attack on Amin's palace on December 27.

After he took power, Amin had consultations with the Soviet Ambassador and announced measures similar to those Karmal is now announcing: freeing political prisoners (60 were released in one day according to Tasker's report); overtures to the Muslim population; an end to Taraki's previous "one man rule", etc. Amin removed the Ministers of Interior (Watanjar), chief of Agha, the military intelligence (Assadulah) and Karmal's present Interior Minister Gulbazoi (then Communications Minister). He also promised to replace Agha.

Halliday claims that 4,000 Taraki supporters were arrested, and many of the military men loyal to him executed.

The Soviet government sent a congratulatory telegram to Amin after he became president, but obviously all was not well. We will examine later the reasons for the coup and probable Soviet involvement. While Amin was, and always had been, pro-Soviet, he was also opposed to total Soviet control. He told an Arab journalist on the day before his death that the USSR had shown it did not interfere in Afghan affairs by accepting his (Amin's) veto on Soviet

military bases in Afghanistan. (See *The Age*, January 10, a reprint of a London *Sunday Times* investigation.)

Fred Halliday (*ABC Broadband*, February 11) claims from US and Afghan sources that Amin personally shot dead the head of the KGB in Kabul in December — a claim which is unverified by other sources, but which certainly captures the mood that undoubtedly existed (particularly seen from hindsight) between Amin and the USSR.

Here it is worth returning to Dr. Beverley Male's (*The Age*, January 21) analysis. Dr. Male has a very specific explanation for the Soviet invasion: it resulted not from a drive to the Gulf nor to save the country from Muslim rebels, but to "save" Afghanistan from "an independent-minded national communist government with no reason to love Moscow."

"The effectiveness of his policies (and rebel sources admitted they were effective) probably signed his death warrant. Soviet involvement in the first attempt to kill him (by Taraki — D.F.) would have ensured that he never again trusted the Russians. Once the rebellion was crushed there would no longer have been any need for a friendship treaty (with a military co-operation clause) with the USSR.

"With the increasing likelihood of US military intervention in Iran, as the hostage crisis dragged on, Moscow could not risk the abrogation of its treaty with Afghanistan and the expulsion of Russian advisers.

"The success of Russia's desperate gamble to 'save' Afghanistan depends on the speed with which it can defeat units of the Afghan armed forces loyal to the previous government and on the readiness of the Peshawar-based rebels to respond to Babrak Karmal's overtures"

Dr. Male also claims that Afghanistan under Khalq was an "international liability" to the USSR, alarming both Iran and Pakistan and making more problems with Carter. The cost of supporting Khalq's revolutionary measures was too high. They wanted to replace Amin particularly "with someone less committed to the regime's revolutionary objectives".

This fits into other explanations which claim that Amin went too far in carrying the



Afghan army tank in Kabul during marxist coup of 1978

revolution forward, and was brutal and bureaucratic in applying measures against the rebels, let alone against Khalq and Parcham dissidents.

But before we examine the question of whether Amin took the revolution too fast, too far, too brutally, let us examine an accusation which is seen as a justification for Soviet intervention, and is linked with the last point: was Amin the Afghani "Pol Pot"?

To conclude first on the accusation of him being a CIA agent. There is no evidence from his life history that this is likely. On the contrary, if anything, the evidence points to him being a too fanatical, too devoted, and too brutal a revolutionary.

Was Amin the "Pol Pot" of Afghanistan?

The Soviet and Karmal line is that Amin was responsible for all the repression of the previous 18 months. Taraki was "clean", a hero assassinated by the ruthless Amin.

Amin was the "Pol Pot" of Afghanistan. Space does not allow a long examination of all the evidence but we will summarise the main aspects regarding repression.

According to Keesing's Archives 1978 (pp. 29198-9) estimates put dead in the April 1978 coup at some 3,000. About 4,500 were estimated imprisoned (in July 1978). Some 1,000 political prisoners held before April 1978 were released in June and their dossiers burnt in public.

In July 1979, the US State Department said 3,000 political prisoners had been killed. In August 1979, Senator Frank Church claimed 20,000 political prisoners and 50 prisoners executed a day. In September 1979, Amnesty International claimed 12,000 in Kabul prisons, and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* speaks of up to 16,000 there, and 40 a day being killed.

The Amnesty investigation began with a visit to Kabul by an Amnesty team in October 1978, followed by a discussion with Amin in March 1979. He was then vice-premier and Foreign Affairs Minister. Amin said "72-74 women and children, members of the previous royal family, had been released" with three former ministers. He told Amnesty in March that there were only 100 in Kabul's Pul-el-Charki prison. The Amnesty figures are similar to the US and Senator Church's figures provided before. Even if we accept the highest figure of 20,000 in prison in August, and add on the 4,000 allegedly arrested by Amin while president, how do these figures compare with Pol Pot's massacres?

We must also recall the total situation. In March 1979 for example the rebels seized Herat after an army mutiny. According to the *Washington Post* (quoted in *CounterSpy*, op. cit.), the rebels massacred 5,000 in four days. Amnesty claimed the government jailed 1,000 after retaking Herat, others claim 1,000 were killed in a "red terror".

Similar massacres occurred on a smaller scale wherever the rebels seized villages or towns. The country was in a state of civil war at least until August when heavy reprisals had seriously weakened the guerrillas.

Even 20,000 is not a high figure for those in prison in such a situation, no matter how much it is to be deplored. Yet when Karmal came to power he found only 4,000 in Kabul

prison, and released 2,000 of them. *Far Eastern Economic Review* claimed there were only 2,000 there in prison on December 28.

Karmal later claimed (*Le Monde*, January 31) to have released 15,000 political prisoners, but there is no independent verification of this figure. Whatever the truth, the repression does not add up to a Pol Pot massacre.

Second, who was responsible for repression? As we already noted, Amin was never Interior Minister. He was only one of a number with overall responsibility for repression on the Supreme Council for the Defence of the Country set up in March 1979, at the peak of rebel activity. When he took power in September 1979, one of his enemies was the head of the secret police. If Amin did emerge as the "strong man" in July 1979, he alone did not share the responsibility for the repression.

In the new Karmal government on the other hand, the former head of secret police is now Deputy Prime Minister, and the three former Interior Ministers Watanjar, Mazduryar and Nur are in Karmal's cabinet in prominent positions. And Taraki, as "father of the revolution", exercised real power at least until July 1979.

Moreover, no ministers purged under Taraki and Amin were executed and many of them are now in Karmal's cabinet. This is not exactly the style of an Afghan Pol Pot.

Indeed, Karmal can only claim that Amin would have been worse than Pol Pot if the alleged massacre of "half the population" had not been stopped by Amin's overthrow and execution.

It is not my intention to whitewash Amin. He certainly played a role in the constant factionalism and purges that affected the regime. He at least shared responsibility for the many mistakes and unnecessary repression and bombing of villages, etc.

It is even possible that he was the harshest of all previous leaders, although I do not regard that as proven: Taraki certainly was no angel, and we can ask what is the fate of pro-Amin forces (which were not inconsiderable) after Karmal took over.

Thus, it is difficult to believe that the

Soviet moved into Kabul in such strength simply to remove Amin for humanitarian reasons, as is suggested by the *Akahata* report previously quoted.

Moreover, the Soviet leadership has shown no such humanitarian concern over the much more brutal regime of Ethiopia's Mengistu.

Next, let us briefly examine the argument that the Soviet intervened because Amin had taken the revolution forward too fast, too far, and too brutally. Again, if the revolution did go too fast, etc., then it was not only Amin's responsibility. Taraki in his many public statements endorsed the rapid land reform and so on. If there were mistakes (as seems certain) in carrying out the land reform without providing the necessary back-up in terms of seed, finance, equipment (previously supplied by the feudal lords) then it was the responsibility of all the previous leadership, many of whom are in Karmal's government. In addition, there has been no suggestion that Karmal is slowing down the land reform. Rather, he is attempting to reconcile Islamic feelings by going to prayers, etc., admittedly something Amin does not appear to have done.

It is true that Amin promised after taking power last September that journalists could "expect the expansion and deepening of the revolution". (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 5, 1979.) It is also true he stepped up the previous policy of bombing of rebel villages (but that still continues under Karmal).

Fred Halliday (*New Left Review*, November-December 1978) stressed a point that it is hard to contest: that the success of the revolution depended in large part on a land reform that would win the peasants to the revolution. In his *New Statesman* articles he appears rather to retract that, and argue that the land reform was too rapid. However, the contradiction is clear, in terms of survival of the revolution. Beginning from an urban base, it had to quickly win support from the peasants. In some areas it was successful, as Salamat Ali reports (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 19, 1979) in an article which earned him one year's jail from Zia. Salamat Ali reports that the Baluch minority in southern Afghanistan had welcomed the land reform, and that their Pushtun landlords had fled to Pakistan's



Afghan guerrilla watches from the heights

Baluchistan province. No doubt similar stories could be told in other, particularly minority, areas where the landlords tended to be from the previous Pushtun-speaking aristocratic elite.

In other areas, intimidation by feudal gangs, the failure to provide back-up facilities and Islamic propaganda had their effects, particularly in Pushtun strongholds on the Pakistan border.

If one reason the USSR did move in was to moderate the revolution, as Dr. Male also suggests, then they miscalculated, as they have succeeded rather in whipping up nationalist feeling against themselves. Any hope of installing a Husak-style regime will be difficult to realise and such a plan would be unlikely to succeed. (That is, to instal, as they did after the invasion of Hungary, a liberal regime.)

Personally, I find it hard to see this as a major reason for the intervention. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine that the fear of unrest in the central Asian Soviet Muslim republics was a reason. First, there are very few signs of such discontent and, second, Afghanistan is hardly a model. Living standards in Soviet Central Asia are much, much higher than in Afghanistan, as are educational standards.

In fact, one reason the Soviet leadership seems deliberately to be sending soldiers from Central Asia to Afghanistan is precisely to inoculate them against any illusions of how great life is there!

Iran — a reason for intervention in Afghanistan?

Dr. Male and others suggest American threats to Iran was a reason for intervention. That is, to give evidence to Carter that the Americans would not be allowed to invade Iran with impunity. Certainly, Carter was making dark threats just before the Soviet intervention to blockade Iran's ports and even to invade, after the hostages were taken. He continues to do so. But the Soviet intervention has given hope to Carter that the Iranian leadership will see the USSR as the main threat, given its invasion of a Muslim country, rather than the USA, and that the hostages crisis can be solved, particularly by the new president Bani Sadr.

Thus, Soviet intervention has helped Carter's manoeuvres in Iran, rather than hindered them.

It is true, however, that an evident factor in the Soviet decision to intervene was the weakened position of imperialism worldwide, particularly following its defeat in Indochina. However, such calculations fail to take account of Carter's long-standing determination to "relegitimise" Viet Nam-style intervention.

The main purpose of this article has been to examine the explanations given for Soviet intervention. We, of course, completely reject any talk of long-term Soviet "drive for the Persian Gulf", to seize its oil resources, etc. Articles I have written in *Tribune* cover these and other similar extreme rightist explanations, which no one believes, other than the paranoid right. Nor is it in the compass of this article to examine such questions as the right of self-determination, non-interference in other country's affairs etc. Eric Aarons in *Tribune* (January 23, 1980) has touched on these questions.



Why, then, did the Soviet leadership intervene so massively in Afghanistan? It is, of course, still too early to give definitive

answers to this question, particularly as we have so far no answers from the pro-Amin side. Maybe we never will.

In any case, I would personally opt for the obvious reason: they mainly intervened to get rid of Amin. For those who think it is impossible for the Soviet leaders to accept such risks and odium from public opinion for such a reason, we need only recall Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. For the Soviet leaders, Afghanistan after April 1978 was in the same situation as eastern Europe. It was no longer a "Finland". For the Soviet leaders, the risks they have taken were worth it to keep Afghanistan completely loyal to them. They were not prepared to risk seeing Amin transform Afghanistan into a central Asian "Yugoslavia".

In that sense, it was a defensive action given the Soviet leaders' view of what Afghanistan had already become after April 1978. But it is equally totally to be condemned.

We must, of course, (as *Tribune* has) concentrate on the way Carter and Fraser are using Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to step up the Cold War and endanger world peace. But that does not mean we must ignore examination of Soviet action, nor fail to condemn it in an appropriate fashion.

