

Entry of Soviet Troops - Overthrow of President Amin - Installation of Karmal Regime - Deployment of Soviet Troops throughout Country - The Internal and Military Situation - International Reactions - Imposition of Sanctions by United States and Other Countries - Moves to boycott Moscow Olympics

A new Soviet-backed regime was installed in Afghanistan at the end of December 1979 under Mr Babrak Karmal, a former Deputy Prime Minister, who was flown into Kabul on a Soviet aircraft from virtual exile in Eastern Europe to replace President Hafizullah Amin, who had himself taken power only in September 1979. The change of regime-details of the course of which remained somewhat obscure-was accompanied by the entry into Afghanistan of several thousand Soviet combat troops, whose numbers had risen by the end of January 1980 to an estimated 85,000 and who were deployed throughout the country with hundreds of tanks, giving rise to fears for the security of Pakistan and Iran (respectively Afghanistan's eastern and western neighbours).

Internationally, the Soviet move was strongly deplored as an invasion of a sovereign country, but the Soviet Union maintained that the Afghan Government had invited it to send troops under a 1978 treaty of friendship in the face of provocation from Afghanistan's external enemies. One of the immediate reasons for the introduction of troops appeared to be to provide military support to the Afghan armed forces currently engaged against diverse Moslem insurgent groups which were opposed to the communist orientation of recent Afghan governments and which subsequently called for a holy war (*jihad*) to expel the Soviet troops from the country.

In Afghanistan, more than 90 per cent of the population of 15,500,000 are Moslems, the vast majority being Sunni Moslems, although there are some Shia (Shi'ite) Moslems among the Persian-speaking Hazaras and in the western city of Herat as well as in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan.

The Soviet invasion occurred at a time of instability in the region caused largely by events in Iran, where the attention of the United States was concentrated on securing the release of some 50 American citizens held hostage in the US embassy in Tehran. Internationally, relations between the Soviet Union and the West had worsened over the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) decision to station new medium-range nuclear weapons in European countries. Following the events in Afghanistan, and the subsequent exiling within the USSR of the leading Soviet dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr Andrei Sakharov, serious concern was expressed in the West that the process of détente had been irretrievably damaged.

In response to the Soviet action the United States not only deferred consideration of the Senate ratification of the strategic arms limitation treaty signed in Vienna in June 1979 (SALT IIA) but also imposed and sought international support for a series of sanctions against the USSR, including a grain embargo. Furthermore, the USA was at the forefront of an initiative to boycott, cancel or move to another venue the Olympic Games which were due to take place in Moscow in June 1980.

These and related developments concerning the Afghan crisis are described below.

In a massive airlift on Dec. 25–26, An-22 and An-12 transport aircraft brought into Kabul an estimated 4,000–5,000 Soviet combat troops and their equipment. The presence of five Soviet army divisions (which at full strength would number 50,000 men) was also reported along the Soviet-Afghan frontier.

Following immediately upon the airlift, a Kabul radio report monitored by the Iranian news agency Pars on Dec. 27 at 7.45 p.m. local time said that the “tyrannical, murderous, treacherous, dictatorial and fascist” regime of President Amin had been overthrown by Mr Babrak Karmal this report was confirmed the same night by Moscow radio, which carried a speech by Mr Karmal denouncing Mr Amin as the head of a “bloody dynasty” and an “agent of US imperialism”.

The following statement from the Government of Afghanistan (as reported by the Soviet news agency Tass) was broadcast on Dec. 28:

“The Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, taking into account the continuing and broadening interference and provocations of external enemies of Afghanistan, and with a view to defending the gains of the April revolution, territorial integrity and national independence, and maintaining peace and security, proceeding from the treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and co-operation of Dec. 5, 1978, has approached the USSR with the insistent request to give urgent political, moral and economic aid, including military aid, which the Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan repeatedly requested from the Government of the Soviet Union previously. The Government of the Soviet Union has met the request of the Afghan side.”

Another government statement broadcast on Dec. 31 maintained that the “anti-Afghan campaign” had been led by the USA, which had “taken a hostile attitude towards the April revolution and was now striving to divert world attention from its aggressive action towards Iran”. As soon as “armed incursions and provocations from outside” ceased, there would be no more need for the aid which was being given, but in the meantime the Government was invoking the treaty of friendship and the UN Charter to underline the right of a sovereign country to self-defence.

Although the Soviet Communist Party organ *Pravda* referred on Dec. 30 to the “limited military contingent” in Afghanistan, which would be “fully recalled” as soon as its mission was completed, Western observers estimated that by early January 1980 some 50,000 Soviet troops and 1,000 tanks had been sent into Afghanistan, either by airlift or across the Amu Darya river

(Oxus) at Shir Khan Bandar/Qizil Qala and then via Kunduz through the Salang Pass and road tunnel.

Fighting involving Soviet troops and tanks was reported in the capital on Dec. 27 and a curfew was imposed, telecommunications links were cut and Kabul airport was closed to international traffic. Refugees arriving in Pakistan claimed that over 3,000 Afghans had died in 48 hours of fighting between Afghan soldiers and Soviet troops, but Kabul radio said on Dec. 29 that there was complete calm in the country and that the Army was in control of the situation.

The groundwork for the introduction of combat troops into Afghanistan was believed to have been laid by a Soviet Deputy Defence Minister, Gen. Ivan G. Pavlovsky, during a lengthy stay in Afghanistan in August-October 1979 (in the course of which President Taraki was overthrown by Mr AminA). During this visit Gen. Pavlovsky was thought to have made a pessimistic assessment of the military position of the regime vis-à-vis the activities of anti-government insurgents.

The United States, which claimed to have foreseen a large-scale Soviet intervention as early as October 1979, noted that the first real increase in Soviet troop activity occurred on Dec. 8–9. On this date a special brigade of Soviet airborne troops arrived at Bagram air base (north of Kabul), from where it moved out on Dec. 20 with tanks and armoured carriers to clear rebels from the Salang Pass (over which large contingents of Soviet ground forces later entered the countrybove).

Having already protested to the USSR on Dec. 4 that Soviet advisers (hitherto estimated to number about 1,500) had “increased their role in support of the Afghan military, especially in the area of command and control functions”, the USA issued a further protest on Dec. 14 at the recent entry into Afghanistan in An-22 aircraft of 400–800 combat troops, and on Dec. 18 it expressed renewed concern at the continuing Soviet military build-up. On Dec. 21 the US Administration disclosed that the USSR had moved three army divisions to the Afghan border and claimed that at least 1,500 Soviet soldiers had entered the country in the past few weeks; the preparations showed, it said, “all the marks of a major military intervention” and were similar to those observed prior to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The Soviet military build-up coincided with reports from Kabul in early December 1979 of a sharp increase in Soviet support operations against the internal Afghan insurgency. Soviet-piloted MiG aircraft and helicopter gunships were believed to have bombed rebel-held villages in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan after the rebels seized townships including Faizabad, the provincial capital. At the same time the Pakistani press reported that the Russians had captured Khanabad and Ishkashim (both in the north-east) after clashing with rebels, and claimed that 900 people had been killed or wounded.

Following the Dec. 25–26 airlift the USA issued a strong protest to the Soviet Union on Dec. 26 at its “blatant military interference in the internal affairs of an independent sovereign state” and accused it of crossing a “new threshold” in military deployments and of causing a threat to a region of great instability.

The deposed President Amin was reported to have been executed immediately after the coup on Dec. 27 (some sources claiming that he was already dead by the time the coup was announced) together with members of his family including his brother, Mr Abdullah Amin (who as Chief of Intelligence headed the secret policeage 30031); those executed were said to have been found guilty by a revolutionary tribunal of crimes against the Afghan people. However, there were conflicting reports of the events leading up to the coup and of Mr Amin's fate.

According to a report in *The Observer* of London on Feb. 17 attributed to “informed Russian sources in Moscow”, Mr Amin was not executed but was killed by mistake. This account claimed that not only President Amin but also his predecessor, Mr Taraki, had brutally suppressed opposition to the Government and that both had requested Soviet assistance. Mr Amin's early requests had, it said, been turned down because of the prevailing international situation (particularly the then impending ratification of the SALT II treaty and the forthcoming decision by NATO on the deployment of nuclear missiles in Europe), but a decision to intervene was finally taken by the USSR in early December at an enlarged Politburo meeting; the report maintained that one motive of the intervention was to improve the USSR's strategic position vis-à-vis China (which was reported to have missile sites near the Afghan border).

The report claimed that the Soviet Union envisaged the holding of elections after the intervention, the election of Mr Babrak Karmal to the presidency and the maintenance of Mr Amin in a lesser government position to legitimize the new regime. Apparently for his own safety, Mr Amin moved to the Darulaman Palace outside Kabul prior to the Soviet intervention, where he was guarded by Afghan soldiers and Soviet military advisers under the supervision of the Soviet First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Lt.-Gen. Victor Paputin. **On the arrival of Soviet troops on Dec. 27, however, fighting broke out in the palace during which, the report said, Mr Amin was killed but not at Soviet hands.** In view of the embarrassment caused to the Soviet Union by the ensuing vacuum of power before the arrival of Mr Karmal in Kabul, Lt.-Gen. Paputin was recalled to Moscow but committed suicide on his arrival. (*Pravda* reported his “untimely death” on Jan. 3 without disclosing the circumstances. Mr Yuri Churbanov, the son-in-law of President Brezhnev, was appointed in March to replace him.)

The *Observer* report conflicted with other assessments in the Western press of events surrounding the coup, many of which indicated that the USSR had been taken by surprise when Mr Amin overthrew President Taraki in September 1979, that Mr Amin had been unpopular with the Soviet Union because of his policies, and that he had rejected Soviet proposals for the introduction of combat forces to assist the Afghan Army in suppressing Moslem rebel activity.

According to Soviet reports and accounts by political prisoners who were released by the Karmal Government, as quoted in Kabul's official newspapers towards the end of January, Mr Amin had planned a bloodbath for Dec. 29 in which many prisoners were to have been executed, including President Taraki's widow, Mrs Nurbibi Taraki. East European sources claimed that Mr Amin had planned for the same date an assault on the Soviet embassy compound in Kabul in which diplomats and their families were to have been killed, the intention then being to ask for US assistance to counter the expected Soviet retaliation.

The Pakistani Urdu-language daily *Morning* claimed that Mr Amin had been the target of two assassination attempts in December 1979—the first on Dec. 3 at the presidential palace, in which it said 200 people had been killed and Mr Amin and his brother wounded, and the second on Dec. 19, after which he had moved to the Darulaman Palace.

Furthermore, it was reported after the latest coup that President Taraki had been smothered to death with a pillow on Oct. 8, 1979, after his overthrow and thus had not, as previously claimed, died of illness or in a shooting incident.

Tass stated on Jan. 14 that investigations since the Karmal coup into President Taraki's death had shown that he was killed by Capt. Abdul Khadud (the former chief of communications in the Defence Ministry) and Lt.-Col. Mohammad Eqbal (commander of a guard unit at the presidential palace), together with a third man who escaped. The assassination was carried out, according to Capt. Khadud, on the orders of Mr Amin while ex-President Taraki was under house arrest following the September coup, and the body had been buried secretly.

In his first speech broadcast on Dec. 27 in the name of the central committee of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA or *Khalq* party), the Revolutionary Council and the Government of Afghanistan Mr Karmal undertook to release all political prisoners, to respect the Islamic faith, to halt arbitrary arrests and to allow free political parties and a free press. He also said that Afghanistan would continue to follow a non-aligned foreign policy and would settle its differences with Pakistan.

Tass also quoted Mr Karmal as promising a political solution to the Moslem insurgency and the formation of a “broad front of all national and democratic forces under the PDPA”; he was further reported to have said that if “truly revolutionary and patriotic forces” had not taken an initiative, Afghanistan would have turned into “a slaughterhouse for millions of people” and that national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity would have been gravely imperilled. The new Revolutionary Council had to strengthen and develop progressive social and political foundations for the country, but the Government's immediate objective was not the “introduction of socialism”.

Mr Karmal on Dec. 27 named the Presidium of the (57-member) Revolutionary Council and on Dec. 28 Kabul radio announced that he had appointed a new Cabinet and that he would be head of state, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council (as well as general secretary of the PDPA—reported by Tass on the same day—and C.-in-C. of the Armed Forces). President Brezhnev on Dec. 28 sent a message to Mr Karmal congratulating him on his election to the above posts.

The membership of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council was as follows: Mr Karmal (Chairman), Mr Assadullah Sawari and Mr Soltan Ali Keshtmand (Vice-Chairmen), Mr Nur Ahmed Nur, Brig.-Gen. Abdul Qadir, Lt.-Col. Mohammad Aslam Watanyar and Lt.-Col. Gol Aqa. Most of the Presidium's members had played an active part in the 1978 revolution.

Kabul radio said on Jan. 10 that the PDPA general assembly had approved the composition of the politburo, most of whom belonged to the *Parcham* (“Flag”) faction. Its seven members were

Mr Karmal, Mr Sawari, Mr Keshtmand, Mr Nur, Dr Anahita Ratebzad (the Education Minister), Dr Saleh Mohammad Ziray and Mr Ghulam Dastagir Panjshiri A 36-member central committee, eight candidate members of the central committee and a three-member secretariat were also named, Mr Karmal being a member of both the central committee and the secretariat.

The composition of the new Cabinet, many of whom had been supporters of President Taraki, was as follows:

Mr Babrak Karmal	Prime Minister
Mr Assadullah Sawari	Deputy Prime Minister
Mr Soltan Ali Keshtmand	Deputy Prime Minister and Planning
Lt.-Col. Mohammad Rafi	Defence
Maj Mohammad Ghulabzoi	Interior
Mr Shah Mohammad Dost	Foreign Affairs
Col. Sheryan Mazduryar	Transport
Dr Anahita Ratebzad	Education
Mr Mohammad Khan Jalalar	Commerce
Mr Faiz Mohammad	Border Affairs
Mr Abdul Wakil	Finance
Mr Mohammad Ismail Daneshwar	Mines and Industries
Lt.-Col. Mohammad Aslam Watanyar	Communications
Mr Abdol Majid	Information and Culture
Mr Abdorrashid Arian	Justice
Dr Raz Mohammad Paktin	Water and Power
Mr Gol Dad	Higher Education
Mr Nazar Mohammad	Public Works
Prof. Mohammad Ibrahim Azim	Public Health
Mr Fazl Rahim Mohmand	Agriculture and Land Reform

* Member of Taraki Cabinet.

Mr Karmal (50), a law graduate from Kabul University, served a five-year prison sentence in the 1950s for political activities. He worked in the Ministry of Planning from 1957 to 1965 and then was elected to Parliament for the PDPA, being head of the Parcham faction. (Parliament was

dissolved in 1973, when the monarchy was overthrown by Gen. Mohammad Daud.) Mr Karmal was installed as Vice-Chairman of the Revolutionary Council and Deputy Prime Minister in the first Taraki Government after the April 1978 revolution which overthrew President Daud; following differences with Mr Amin, then Prime Minister, he was appointed ambassador to Prague but was relieved of this post later in the year, remaining in exile in Czechoslovakia because he faced charges of treason in Afghanistan.

Lt.-Col. Watanyar had been Deputy Prime Minister, Communications Minister and Interior Minister under President Taraki and had sought refuge in the Soviet embassy in Kabul when Mr Amin took over (when he was reported to have been among those killed together with Mr Panjshiri and Col. Mazduryar). Dr Ratebzad had been Minister of Social Welfare under President Taraki and had, like Mr Karmal been given a diplomatic posting (in Yugoslavia) of which she was later relieved. Mr Daneshwar had been a member of Mr Amin's Cabinet. Dr Paktin had been ambassador to Moscow.

It was reported at the beginning of January 1980 that Soviet troops were fanning out from Kabul into the provincial towns and that they had taken up positions near the Khyber Pass (Afghanistan's only land route eastwards into Pakistan except for the road from Kandahar to Quetta) and in Jalalabad (the main town on the Kabul-Khyber road). At the same time troops were being airlifted into or were moving towards the regional towns of Herat (in the west), Kandahar (south), Ghazni (south of Kabul), Mazar-i-Sharif (north), Gardez (south-east) and Faizabad, and subsequently were reported to be moving outwards from these towns to mount assaults on rebel-held areas in conjunction with the Afghan Army. Diplomatic sources said on Jan. 6 that Soviet supplies were being landed at the air bases at Shindand (south of Herat) and Bagram, and also at Jalalabad, and that Kabul airport had returned to normal.

The Soviet troops in Afghanistan, many of whom were Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turcomans from Soviet Central Asia, having ethnic links with the Afghans, were reported to be commanded by Maj. -Gen. Moussa Yevanov from Uzbekistan

Fighting involving Soviet and Afghan troops against Moslem rebels was reported in the early part of January in several provinces (mostly in the north-east) including Paktia, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Konar, Logar, Takhar, Bamiyan and also Herat and Kadahar, and in towns including Jalalabad and Mazar-i-Sharif. Unconfirmed reports on Jan. 10 said that the rebels had taken Faizabad and Taliq-an (the capital of Takhar), while Pakistani press reports said that 400 Russians had died in the Faizabad fighting, that two helicopters had been shot down and that the airport had been taken by rebels. There were also unconfirmed reports that as many as 40 per cent of the Afghan Army had gone over to the rebels.

(In an appeal to the Afghan Army on Jan. 16 President Karmal urged them to “defend the freedom, honour and security of their people” for the sake of national independence and sovereignty. He promised that increased attention would be paid to their material needs, that the lives of their families would be improved, and that their “spurned political, military and social rights” would be restored as soon as possible.)

By mid-January the activities of Soviet troops appeared to be restricted largely to patrolling the main roads and controlling vantage points in the towns, with much of the actual fighting being done by the Afghan Army; Soviet troops were keeping a low profile in Kabul itself during the daytime, although there was a heavy troop presence around the capital. Five complete Soviet Army divisions were said to be in Afghanistan at this time, a sixth division arriving later in the month and deploying south of Herat (between Shindand and Farah) not far from the Iranian border.

The other five divisions and their deployment were as follows: the 105th airborne division, a quick-strike force with units around Kabul, in Jalalabad and at the Shindand airbase; the 360th motorized rifle division centred in Kandahar with units around Herat; the 357th motorized rifle division based in Kabul with units possibly in Herat; the 66th motorized rifle division based in Herat with units deployed west of the city near the Iranian border; and the 16th motorized rifle division, based in Kunduz, near the Soviet border.

According to available information on the Soviet Army, each rifle division was supported by 350 tanks and 450 armoured cars.

It had been reported on Jan. 14 that soldiers of the 66th Soviet rifle division were massing along the Iranian border, and on Jan. 19 Iranian reinforcements were reported to have been moved to the Afghan border. **On Jan. 18 Pakistan was reported by United News of India to have sent seven army divisions to the Afghan border, the report also stating that a large armoured force had been moved to the frontier region south of Peshawar, and that all air bases in the area were in a state of alert following reports on Jan. 9–10 that Soviet convoys were moving in the direction of the Pakistan frontier.**

It was claimed by *Pravda* on Jan. 9 and by the Press Trust of India news agency on Jan. 18 that China was sending large supplies of weapons and ammunition into Pakistan over the all-weather Karakoram Highway (opened in June 1978^{age 29701}).

By the end of January, when the number of Soviet troops was estimated to have reached 85,000, heavy snows were limiting military action, and the primary aim of the Soviet ground forces by this time appeared to be to keep open supply routes over the Salang Pass and to the main centres—an intensified airlift of supplies to Kabul having been carried out on Jan. 19–20 in anticipation of worsening weather conditions. Scattered rebel resistance was reported to be continuing in the north-east and the east as well as in Herat and other cities in the west and the south.

A US Administration official said on Jan. 11 that, according to “reliable information” (apparently partially based on a count of Soviet ambulances arriving at Kabul airport), between 900 and 1,200 Soviet soldiers had been killed and wounded in Afghanistan since the Soviet intervention began. However, Tass said on Jan. 18 that Soviet troops had suffered no losses in Afghanistan and were, moreover, not participating in the fighting.