



HCC

Oakridge MUN 2026

Historical Crisis Committee (HCC)

Agenda: Afghanistan — The Situation as of 25 December 1979

CONTENTS

1. Letter from the Executive Board	3
2. Rules of Procedure	4
3. Directives and the Tools of Committee	6
4. Introduction to Afghanistan	8
5. Historical Background (1919 to 1973)	12
6. The Rise of Political Instability (1973 to 1978)	15
7. The Saur Revolution (1978)	17
8. Afghanistan in Crisis (1978 to 1979)	20
9. The Power Struggle in Afghanistan	22
10. The Soviet Question	24
11. The International Dimension	29
12. The Situation as of 25 December 1979	31

1. Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the Historical Crisis Committee of OakMUN 2026, and to the winter of 1979.

The committee opens on 25 December 1979, in the last quiet hours before the storm. A communist government clings to power in Kabul over a country in revolt, a great power weighs its choices on the border, and the wider world looks on, uncertain and uneasy. Everything you need in order to understand how the world arrived at this moment lies in the pages that follow, and we urge you to read them with care. In a committee like this one, the delegate who truly knows the ground will always outlast the one who merely speaks well.

Up to the freeze date, history is settled. It is the record you will study, and it cannot be argued with. From the freeze date onward, history belongs to you. This committee is not a reconstruction of the past, and you are not here to repeat what once happened. The moment you take your seats the timeline forks away from the one written in the books, and where it travels from there is yours to decide. What came to pass in our world need not come to pass in yours. History is being made in this room, and it is being made by your hands.

Remember, too, that this is not a simple war between two sides. Beneath the obvious lines of battle runs a far deeper contest of interests, and almost no one in this crisis wants precisely what their neighbor wants. Those who sit beneath the same banner may still pull in different directions, each guarding his own ambition, his own survival, his own notion of how things ought to be. Your first task is to grasp not only which side you stand on, but the quieter and more telling question of how your aims differ from those of your supposed allies. Much of the sharpest play in this committee will be found in exactly those differences.

Above all, we care that you pursue your goal, and that you pursue it through the genuine powers of your portfolio. A directive is only as strong as the hand that could truly carry it out. Know what your portfolio commands and what lies beyond its reach, what it sees and what is hidden from it, and work within those bounds with all the cunning you can find. Grand declarations alone will carry you nowhere.

Knowledge, realism, and a clear sense of your own interest will carry you a very long way.

We look forward to the history you will write. The freeze date holds, for now. What comes after is in your hands.

Warm regards, The Executive Board Historical Crisis Committee, OakMUN 2026

2. Rules of Procedure

For the purpose of making the simulation easier to the procedurally-unacquainted, the following ROP cheat-sheet is being made available.

Motions

Setting the agenda

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to set the agenda as ____.

Establishing a GSL

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to establish the general speakers' list with an individual speaker's time of ____.

Moderated caucuses

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to suspend formal debate and move into a moderated caucus on the topic ____ for a total time period of ____ minutes with individual speaker's time being ____.

Unmoderated caucuses

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to suspend formal debate and move into an unmoderated caucus for a total time period of ____ minutes.

Extension to informal debate

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to extend the current moderated/unmoderated caucus by ____ minutes.

Introduction of documentation

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to introduce a draft resolution/press statement/Presidential statement [number].

Voting on introduced document(s)

Delegate of ____ would like to raise a motion to table formal debate and move into voting on [document name].

Points

Point of personal privilege

- Personal inconvenience e.g. inaudibility of some part of the speech of another delegate
- CAN interrupt an active speaker

Point of parliamentary inquiry

- Used to clarify doubts on the rules of procedure
- CANNOT interrupt a speaker

Point of information

- Used to ask questions to other delegates on their speeches
- CANNOT interrupt an active speaker

Point of order

- Used to point out inaccuracies in procedure and if allowed, even on factual inaccuracies within the speeches of other delegates
- CANNOT interrupt an active speaker

Yields

Yield to points of information

Yielding the remaining time to other delegates so that they can question you on the speech you made.

Yield to another delegate

Yielding remaining time to some specific delegate to let her/him make her/his speech.

Yield to the executive board

Yielding the remaining time to the EB. Such yielded time is deemed elapsed by the EB but not always. Such time's usage is upto the discretion of the EB.

3. Directives and the Tools of Committee

The Freeze Date

This is a historical committee, and its proceedings are frozen on 25 December 1979. Any event that, in actual history, took place after this date is inadmissible to the committee and its proceedings. Delegates must set aside all hindsight and foreknowledge of how events later unfolded, and act only on what is known and reasonable to a portfolio standing on the morning of the freeze date.

Approaching the Committee

The correct approach to this committee is to take cognizance of all that has preceded the freeze date, with particular attention to the chain of events since the Saur Revolution of April 1978, and to understand whether one event stood in relation to another, as cause or as effect. The Executive Board expects delegates to engage with the updates placed before the committee in order to make their portfolio's position on each of them clear.

In light of this, delegates have **six tools** of expression in committee, beyond the moderated caucus and the general and special speakers lists.

1 Directive. In the capacity of your portfolio, you may send a directive to the Executive Board setting out what you wish your portfolio to do next in light of the crisis and the recent updates. This may be sent by chit. Two or more portfolios may also send a Joint Directive, which is generally used to show support for a delegate's plan of action. The Executive Board holds complete discretion over whether a directive passes, and may decide whether the committee will vote upon it, according to the nature of the directive. The strongest directives are not merely those approved by a large majority of the committee, but those that prove that a portfolio, or a bloc, holds a deep understanding of the situation.

2 Secret Directive (Covert). Of the same nature as a directive, except that its contents are not communicated to the committee. Its outcome, however, is.

3 Communiqué. A message from the committee as a whole, or from an individual delegate, to another portfolio, organisation, person, or group of people. Communiqués open dialogue with the relevant actors in a crisis. They often carry negotiations, threats, and requests for aid or support, though they are not limited to these. They are used when the consent, opinion, or stance of a particular actor is required, but that actor holds no representation in committee.

4 Secret Communiqué. Of the same nature as a communiqué, except that all communication is kept private between the delegate or delegates and the recipient or recipients involved.

5 Press Release. A statement issued by a delegate, generally after the reasons for certain actions have been given by directive.* A press release resembles a communiqué in that it is

sent from the committee as a whole, the difference being that it is addressed to the public. A press release may not be used to make a statement unless a related directive or update contextually precedes it.

*Specific to those deemed to have been passed by the Executive Board.

6 Portfolio Request. A request made unilaterally by a member of the committee. This may range anywhere from the status of the resources, assets, or capabilities at a portfolio's command to the action taken by that portfolio in accordance with its remit in previous conflicts or events.

Rules for Directives for an OFFLINE conference

All delegates will use a handwritten medium of writing directives. NO ONLINE DIRECTIVES will be entertained. The limitations on the number of directives allowed per delegate will be intimated during the committee sessions.

Delegates are allowed to bring in any number of pre-written directives as they wish. The metric for judging the same will be intimated to you during committee sessions.

Note

NOTE: Covert and Overt Joint Directives must bear the physical signature of the parties involved.

Format for directives:

- **From** (COMPULSORY)
- **Covert/Overt Directive / Portfolio Request / Communiqué** (COMPULSORY)
- **Primary Objective:** (COMPULSORY)
- **Secondary Objective** (*Optional*)
- **Mission Briefings** (Rough Outline)
- **Plan of Action** (As intricate and crisp as possible)
- **Parties/Departments Involved/ Additional Information** (*if any*)
- **Signatures** (Compulsory for joint directives of all parties involved)

If anything, that is mentioned as COMPULSORY in the format is missing the directive would have to be scrapped due to basic lack of clarity.

Pre-Written Directives: There will be no rules against Pre-Written Directives. They will be allowed.

Joint Directives (Overt/Covert): The working of Joint Directives with respect to the signatures and everything will be further explained to you on the day of the conference.

All forms of communication to the EB, unless stated otherwise to be provided in either verbally or via email, shall be via CHIT.

Accelerated Timeframe: in case you are not familiar with the term “accelerated time frame” it will be explained in the room. The Council will not be having an accelerated timeframe at all points of time.

4. Introduction to Afghanistan

The land and why it matters

Afghanistan lies at the seam where Central Asia, the Iranian world, and the Indian subcontinent meet. It is landlocked and surrounded by larger neighbours, and this position shapes almost everything about its politics. Along its long northern border sit three Soviet republics, the Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik republics . To the west lies Iran. To the east and south lies Pakistan. In the far northeast a thin finger of territory

called the Wakhan reaches out until it meets China, a strange shape on the map left over from the days when the country was kept as a cushion between empires, and one that gives China only the narrowest of windows onto Afghan affairs.

The interior is dominated by the Hindu Kush, a great mountain range that runs across the country and divides the north from the south. The mountains break Afghanistan into separated valleys and basins and make movement between regions slow and difficult. This geography carries a lesson that every government in Kabul has had to absorb. A ruler may hold the cities and the main highways, but the valleys and the countryside are far harder to command, and the terrain rewards those who resist central authority far more than those who try to impose it.

For more than a century the country has been valued chiefly for where it sits rather than for what it contains. It once stood as a buffer between the Russian and British empires, courted by both and owned by neither, and that same logic holds now. A friendly Afghanistan guards the soft southern edge of the Soviet Union and the Muslim populations that live along it. An Afghanistan that drifts towards the rival camp unsettles Pakistan and opens a path towards the Gulf and the routes beyond it. A poor and remote country therefore draws the close attention of powers far greater than itself.

The places that matter

A handful of cities and routes carry most of the country's strategic weight. Kabul is the political prize, the seat of government and the centre of whatever authority the state can project. A short distance to its north lies Bagram, the country's principal military airfield. In the west, near the Iranian border, sits Herat, an old city and a major garrison, with the large airbase at Shindand to its south. Kandahar anchors the Pashtun south and sits astride the roads towards both Pakistan and Iran. Mazar-i-Sharif commands the northern plains close to the Soviet frontier, and Jalalabad guards the eastern road that runs down towards the Khyber Pass and into Pakistan.

These places are tied together by a thin web of roads and very little else, since the country has almost no railways to speak of. The main artery is the ring of highway that loops between Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and the north. The single most important link of all is the route through the Salang, the tunnel and pass that carry traffic across the Hindu Kush between the northern provinces and Kabul. Any force moving south from the Soviet border towards the capital depends on it, which makes it both a lifeline and a chokepoint that a determined enemy could threaten. The northern boundary itself is marked for much of its length by the Amu Darya

river, with the natural crossing points clustered near the Soviet town of Termez. Winter shapes all of

this. Snow closes the high passes for months at a time, and the season in which the country now finds itself is the harshest of the year for moving men and supplies through the mountains.

A country of many peoples

Afghanistan is less a single nation than a collection of peoples gathered under one state. The largest are the Pashtuns, settled mainly in the south and east and organised around tribe and a strong code of custom and honour. They have supplied most of the country's rulers, the former royal house among them, and the men who govern in Kabul now are Pashtun as well. To the north, and in the western city of Herat, live the Tajiks, who speak Persian and lean towards the towns and settled life. In the central highlands are the Hazaras, who follow Shia Islam and have long been pushed to the margins of Afghan society. Across the northern plains are the Uzbeks and Turkmen, Turkic in language and closely tied by kinship to the peoples living just over the Soviet border.

Religion runs beneath all of it. The great majority of Afghans are Muslim, most of them Sunni, with a Shia minority concentrated among the Hazaras. For a population this devout, a government seen as hostile to Islam can lose its standing with remarkable speed, and faith offers one of the few banners under which otherwise divided communities will stand together.

A rural country and a thin state

To understand Afghan politics, one must understand how little of the country the government in Kabul truly governs. The overwhelming majority of Afghans, perhaps four in every five, live in the countryside, in villages scattered through the valleys and across the plains. The real authority in these places does not come from the capital. It rests with the local landowners and tribal chiefs, the khans and maliks, with the village council or jirga that settles disputes, and above all with the religious figures, the village mullah and the Sufi pir, whose word carries weight that no official from Kabul can match.

The state, by contrast, is a thin urban layer. Its reach extends with confidence over the cities and the main roads and grows weaker the further it travels from them. This is the central fact of governing Afghanistan. A policy drawn up in Kabul and pushed out into the villages is reaching into territory the state does not really control, and the

men whose power it threatens, the landowners and the clergy, are precisely the people who can raise the countryside against it. Any ruler who forgets this learns quickly that the writ of the capital ends where the mountains begin.

The Durand Line, the Pashtuns, and Pakistan

One feature of the map deserves particular attention. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, known as the Durand Line, was drawn in the last century by British India and has never been fully accepted in Kabul. It runs straight through Pashtun lands and leaves large Pashtun populations on the Pakistani side. Afghan governments have repeatedly raised the cause of Pashtunistan, the idea that the Pashtuns across the line should be joined to

Afghanistan or granted a state of their own. Few questions have poisoned relations between Kabul and Islamabad more reliably.

Pakistan's anxiety does not end with the Pashtuns. To the south lies Baluchistan, where Pakistan has long feared a restless Baluch population with separatist leanings of its own, and where the land runs down at last to the open sea. A Kabul that stirred up either the Pashtuns or the Baluch would strike at Pakistan where it is most fragile, and the same lands that worry Islamabad represent, to anyone dreaming of a route towards warm water, the closest that a power planted in Afghanistan could come to the coast. The frontier itself remains tribal, porous, and beyond the firm reach of either capital, a fact of obvious importance to anyone thinking about refugees, smuggling, or the movement of armed men across the border.

Iran to the west

The western neighbour brings its own set of interests. Herat and the western provinces sit within an old Persian cultural and linguistic orbit, and the language of much of northern and western Afghanistan is a form of Persian. The Shia Hazaras, for their part, look naturally towards the great centres of Shia learning across the border. Iran is now in the hands of a revolutionary Islamic government with strong convictions about the place of faith in public life, which gives it both sympathy for Afghan Muslims who resent a godless government in Kabul and an interest in what becomes of them.

Alignment in the Cold War

Afghanistan has long presented itself as a neutral state, balancing the great powers and accepting help from both while committing itself to neither. In practice that balance has tilted. From the middle of the 1950s, when the United States chose to

arm Pakistan and declined to supply weapons to Kabul, Afghanistan turned increasingly to the Soviet Union for military support. The results are visible throughout the Afghan armed forces, which are equipped largely with Soviet weapons, trained along Soviet lines, and led in many cases by officers who studied in the Soviet Union. That training carried more than technique, for it also opened a channel through which Soviet ideas and loyalties reached a generation of Afghan officers.

The United States has not been absent. American funds have gone into roads, dams, and development, and Kabul has taken care never to shut the door on Washington completely. But the deeper relationship, and the military one above all, runs north. As 1979 draws to a close, Afghanistan stands formally independent and nonaligned, yet bound to Moscow by ties of supply, training, and advice that reach into the core of its army and its government. It is a dependence that hands the Soviet Union real leverage over events in Kabul, along with a settled conviction that what happens in Afghanistan is very much its own concern.

5. Historical Background (1919 to 1973)

Independence and an early friendship with Moscow

Modern Afghan statehood begins in 1919, when a short war with British India ended the long arrangement under which Britain had controlled Afghanistan's dealings with the outside world. The new ruler, Amanullah Khan, Emir of Afghanistan and later its King, emerged from that conflict, the Third Anglo-Afghan War, having won full control over the country's foreign affairs at last, and he is remembered still as the man who won Afghanistan its full independence. Among the first powers to recognize him was the new Soviet government to the north, and in 1921 the two states signed a treaty of friendship. The relationship that now binds Kabul so closely to Moscow is not a recent invention. It has roots that reach back to the very birth of both modern states.

Amanullah and the lesson of reform

Amanullah did not stop at independence. Inspired by the modernizing rulers of his age, he set out to drag his country swiftly into the modern world. He pressed for schools, including schools for girls, encouraged Western dress, curbed the privileges of the tribes and the clergy, and granted the country a written constitution. His queen appeared in public unveiled. To a small circle in Kabul this was progress. To

the tribes and the religious establishment, it was an assault on faith and custom by a king who had forgotten what his people were.

The reaction broke him. Revolts spread through the country, the capital itself fell to a rebellion, and in 1929 Amanullah abandoned his throne and went into exile. The memory of his fall has weighed on every Afghan ruler since. It stands as the clearest possible warning of what happens to a government that reaches too far, too fast, into the lives of a deeply traditional and devout people, and it is a lesson that the men who govern in Kabul cannot afford to ignore.

A cautious crown

The order that followed was built on the opposite instinct. Mohammad Nadir Khan restored the monarchy and took the throne himself as Nadir Shah, quietly rolling back the reforms that had provoked such fury and making his peace with the clergy and the tribes. After his death the throne passed in 1933 to the young Zahir Shah, who held it for the next forty years. For much of that long reign the real work of government lay with his uncles and later his cousin, and the guiding principle throughout was caution. Afghanistan stayed out of the Second World War, held to its tradition of neutrality, and changed slowly when it changed at all.

The birth of Pakistan in 1947 introduced a quarrel that has never since been settled. Kabul objected to the new border and to the division of the Pashtun lands, and relations between the two neighbours were poisoned from the start. That dispute would soon push Afghanistan into decisions that shaped its place in the wider world.

Daoud, Soviet arms, and the contest for influence

In 1953 Mohammed Daoud Khan, a cousin of the king, became Prime Minister, and with him came a more forceful style of rule. Daoud was a moderniser and a Pashtun nationalist, determined to strengthen the state and to press the Pashtunistan cause against Pakistan. To do either he needed a stronger army, and so he went looking for weapons.

Washington turned him down. The United States had cast its lot with Pakistan and was unwilling to arm a rival that was agitating against its new partner. Moscow saw the opening and took it. From the middle of the 1950s the Soviet Union became Afghanistan's chief source of arms, training, and military advice. Afghan officers travelled north to study, the army was rebuilt on the Soviet model, and a generation of soldiers formed its professional habits, and in some cases its political sympathies, under Soviet instruction.

Money followed the guns. The two superpowers fell into a quiet contest of generosity, the Soviets building roads and infrastructure that knit the north to the capital, the Americans pouring funds into great development schemes in the south. Afghanistan took from both and bound itself formally to neither. Yet the balance was no longer even. In the one field that decides who holds power, the making and equipping of armies, the country had become dependent on the Soviet Union, and that dependence has only deepened in the years since. Daoud himself left office in 1963, eased out by the king after his confrontations with Pakistan had closed the border and damaged the economy, but the tie he forged with Moscow remained.

The constitutional decade and the rise of new forces

The years that followed were the most open in the country's history. A new constitution in 1964 turned Afghanistan into a constitutional monarchy, with an elected parliament, a freer press, and room for political life that had never existed before. The experiment was fragile and often ineffective. Parliament quarrelled and achieved little, governments came and went, the economy struggled, and a severe famine in the early 1970s exposed how poorly the state could care for its own people. Disappointment with the whole arrangement spread widely.

What the openness did allow was the organising of new political movements, and it is here that the forces now contesting Afghanistan's future first took shape. On the left, a Marxist party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, was founded in the mid-1960s, drawing in teachers, officials, and officers, though it soon divided into rival camps that distrusted one another almost as much as they distrusted the crown. On the other side, a religious movement grew up among students and teachers, especially at the university in Kabul, alarmed by the spread of communist ideas and determined to answer them in the name of Islam. The campuses became a battleground between the two, and the educated young split into hostile camps that carried their quarrels out into the country.

By the early 1970s the monarchy stood weary and exposed. It had loosened its grip without satisfying anyone, the economy was faltering, and ambitious men on both the left and the right had begun to look beyond the constitution for the answers it had failed to provide. The cautious order built after Amanullah's fall was running out of time.

6. The Rise of Political Instability (1973 to 1978)

The end of the monarchy

In July 1973, while the king was abroad for medical treatment, his cousin Mohammed Daoud Khan seized power in Kabul. The coup was swift and almost bloodless. Daoud abolished the monarchy that had stood for more than two centuries, declared Afghanistan a republic, and made himself its President. Zahir Shah, unwilling to plunge the country into civil war over his throne, gave up his crown from exile and settled into a quiet life abroad, where he remains.

Daoud did not take power alone. He leaned on sympathetic officers in the army, and many of those officers belonged to the Parcham wing of the communist movement, which had drawn close to him and saw in his ambitions a vehicle for their own. Their help mattered, and it carried a lesson that no one in Kabul has forgotten since. It was a plain demonstration that power in Afghanistan could be seized in a single night by a determined faction within the armed forces.

Power gathered into one man's hands

Daoud was no communist. He was a Pashtun nationalist and an autocrat who wanted a strong state under his own command, and once secure he had little further use for the leftists who had helped him rise. Over the following years he eased the Parchamis out of his government, posting some abroad as ambassadors and stripping others of influence. In 1977 he gave the country a new constitution that made Afghanistan a one-party state with himself firmly at its head, leaving no real room for rivals of any kind. In gathering all authority to himself, he also gathered all blame, for there was now no one else who could be held responsible when things went wrong.

A turn away from Moscow

Daoud also set about loosening his country's heavy dependence on the Soviet Union. He reached out to Iran, whose ruler at the time offered generous aid to pull Afghanistan westward, and to Saudi Arabia, to Pakistan, and to the wider Muslim world, looking for partners who might balance the weight of Moscow. The Soviets watched this drift with growing displeasure. On a visit to Moscow in 1977, Daoud is said to have answered Brezhnev's complaints about Western advisers in Afghanistan by reminding him, in blunt terms, that Afghanistan alone would decide whom it employed and how it governed itself. Whatever the precise words, the meaning was

clear enough. The client was straining at the leash, and a relationship Moscow had spent twenty years building no longer ran in one direction.

The communists draw together

While Daoud pushed the left out of his offices, the communists were busy elsewhere. The People's Democratic Party had long been split into its two wings, the Khalq and the Parcham, which mistrusted one another deeply. Under steady pressure from Moscow, which had no patience for a movement that wasted its strength fighting itself, the two wings agreed in 1977 to

reunite, at least on paper. Far more important than the paper was the quiet work that had been going on for years inside the army. The party, and the Khalq wing above all, had built a network of sympathisers among the officers, the very men who held the weapons on which Daoud's republic rested. The President had turned against the left in his cabinet without ever rooting it out of his barracks.

The religious opposition driven out

Daoud's enemies did not all stand on the left. The religious movement that had grown up in the universities saw in his republic, and in the communists gathered around it, a direct threat to Islam and to the whole inherited order of Afghan life. In 1975 these men attempted risings in several provinces, hoping to set off a wider revolt. The attempt failed and was crushed without mercy. Its leaders escaped across the border into Pakistan, where a government nursing its own quarrel with Daoud was glad to shelter and encourage them. From that point onward the most committed religious opposition to Kabul has worked from Pakistani soil, gathering arms, recruits, and foreign sympathy beyond the reach of the Afghan state. The shape of the present struggle, with an armed opposition based outside the country, was first set in these years.

A government without allies

By the opening of 1978 Daoud stood remarkably alone. He had broken with the leftists who had raised him up, driven the religious right into exile, strained his oldest foreign friendship, and drawn every lever of power into his own hands. His rule rested on an army whose loyalty he had taken for granted and whose officer corps was threaded through with men who answered to another cause entirely. A government that has made enemies in every direction, and has left its weapons in the keeping of men devoted to a rival creed, has very little solid ground left beneath it.

7. The Saur Revolution (1978)

The spark

The fire caught in April 1978. A leading figure of the Parcham wing, Mir Akbar Khyber, was shot dead in Kabul, and the communists laid the killing at the door of Daoud's government. His funeral became something far larger than a burial. Thousands marched through the capital behind the coffin, and the procession turned into an open demonstration of communist strength in the heart of the city. Daoud, alarmed by the size of the crowd and what it revealed, ordered the arrest of the party's leaders.

The order proved a grave miscalculation. Taraki and Karmal were taken, but Hafizullah Amin, the man who had spent years cultivating the party's friends in the army, was only placed under loose guard at first. In the hours before his detention closed in, he was able to send word to his officers. The government had reached for the heads of the party and left untouched the one man who could turn the army against it.

The seizure of power

On 27 April, a date in the Afghan month of Saur that has given the revolution its name, military units loyal to the People's Democratic Party rose against the state. Armoured columns moved on the centre of Kabul and aircraft from the airbase to the north struck the presidential palace. Daoud, true to his nature, refused to surrender. He and almost his entire family were killed in the fighting that engulfed the palace. The republic he had built in 1973 lasted not quite five years before the very army he relied upon turned its guns on him.

In the aftermath the party proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Nur Muhammad Taraki, the elder figure and chief ideologue of the movement, took the leadership of the new state and the party alike. Babrak Karmal of the Parcham wing stood as his deputy, and Hafizullah Amin, the architect of the army's rising, took charge of foreign affairs and held the true threads of power in his hands. On its face it was a government of the whole party. Beneath the surface it was nothing of the kind.

A party of two halves

To understand what followed, one must understand that the People's Democratic Party has never truly been one party. Its two wings differ not only in doctrine but in the kind of men they draw and the country they imagine.

The Khalq wing, whose name means the Masses, is the larger and the harder. Its strength lies among Pashtuns of modest background from the rural districts and the small towns, men who came up through the teaching colleges and above all through the army. It is impatient and doctrinaire, convinced that Afghanistan can be remade into a socialist society quickly and by force if need be, and it carries a streak of Pashtun assertiveness beneath its Marxist language. Taraki and Amin are its leading men, and it was Khalq officers who carried out the revolution.

The Parcham wing, whose name means the Banner, is smaller, more urban, and more refined. It draws on the educated families of Kabul, leans toward those who speak Persian, and counts more of the country's minorities among its ranks. It favours a slower path, one that would build alliances with other progressive forces rather than crush everything in its way, which is precisely why it had once been willing to work with Daoud. To the Khalqis this caution looks like cowardice and class betrayal. To the Parchamis the Khalqi appetite for speed looks like reckless adventurism that will wreck the revolution by turning the whole country against it. The reunion of 1977 had healed none of this. It had merely placed two enemies under one roof.

The coalition breaks

The shared government did not survive the year. Holding the army and the will to use it, the Khalqis moved to drive their partners out. Within months the leading Parchamis found themselves removed from any real authority. Karmal and others were sent abroad as ambassadors, a polite form of exile, and were soon accused of plotting against the state. Some were recalled to face the consequences, and many chose not to return, scattering into exile rather than place themselves in Khalqi hands. By the latter part of 1978 the Parcham wing had been broken as a force within the government, and power rested wholly with the Khalq, and increasingly with the strong men at its core.

Revolution from above

With the party purged of rivals, the new rulers set about transforming the country at a furious pace. They cancelled the debts that bound poor farmers to the moneylenders, moved to break up the great landholdings and redistribute the land, and issued decrees on marriage and dowry meant to loosen old customs. They launched compulsory literacy classes and pressed them upon women as well as men. They even gave the republic a new red banner in place of the old flag, a change that to many eyes announced plainly where the government's true loyalties lay.

The intentions could be dressed in the language of progress, but the manner was something else. The reforms were forced upon the countryside from above, at speed, by young cadres with little patience for the people they were meant to be helping and less respect for their faith and their customs. To demand that village women sit in classrooms beside strangers, to humiliate the landowners and elders who had always held local authority, and to raise a red flag over a deeply Muslim land was to strike at everything the rural population held sacred.

The country recoils

The result was the very disaster the more cautious voices had warned of. The same lesson that had broken Amanullah half a century earlier returned with full force. A government seen as godless and foreign in spirit, reaching into the most intimate corners of village life, could not be borne. Across the provinces, resentment hardened into open defiance, and the first revolts began to flare against the men in Kabul. The revolution that had seized the capital in a single day was discovering that the country beyond it would not be seized so easily.

A Note on the Afghan Factions in This Committee

Three of the seats in this committee belong to the rival camps fighting over the future of Afghanistan itself.

Khalq Faction, PDPA. The larger and harder wing of the ruling People's Democratic Party, drawn from rural Pashtuns and rooted deep in the officer corps of the army. It was the Khalq that carried out the revolution, and it holds the commanding position in the state.

Parcham Faction, PDPA. The rival wing to the Khalq, the more urban and educated of the two, drawn from the families of Kabul and favouring a slower, more cautious path. At present it sits driven out of government, its leading figures stripped of authority and scattered, many of them abroad.

The Peshawar-based Resistance Parties. The armed religious opposition to the government in Kabul, represented here as the bloc of resistance leaders operating out of Pakistan, the parties later known collectively as the Peshawar Seven. These are the men who fled across the border in the years of repression and who now gather arms, fighters, and foreign support beyond the reach of the Afghan state. They speak for the rebellion rising across the provinces, though they are far from united among themselves.

8. Afghanistan in Crisis (1978 to 1979)

The countryside rises

What began as scattered resentment in the months after the revolution has grown into a revolt that now spans the country. Province after province has slipped from the government's grasp, beginning in the remote valleys and spreading until whole regions answer to Kabul in name only. The risings owe little to any single plan. They are local affairs, raised by tribe, village, and clan, and bound together less by organization than by a shared conviction that a godless government has declared war on Islam and on the Afghan way of life. The reforms struck at faith, land, and family all at once, and the countryside has answered in the oldest language it knows, the call to defend the faith against an enemy within. By the closing weeks of 1979 the writ of the state, never strong beyond the cities, has shrunk to the towns and the roads between them.

The army comes apart

Nothing has frightened the men in Kabul more than the state of their own army. The soldiers are largely peasant conscripts, drawn from the same villages now in revolt, and they have proven unwilling to fire on their own people in the name of a cause they do not share. Whole units have melted away through desertion, and others have turned their guns the other way. The gravest of these mutinies came in March 1979 at Herat, where an army division joined a popular rising and the city fell briefly out of government hands. A number of Soviet advisers, and in some accounts members of their families, were killed in the streets, though estimates vary and the true figure may have been no more than a handful. The government retook Herat only by turning its aircraft and artillery on the city itself, at a cost in lives that ran into the thousands. Further mutinies have flared since, reaching even into garrisons within the capital. An army that cannot be relied upon to fight, and that bleeds men and weapons to the very rebellion it is meant to crush, is no longer a sure foundation for any government.

The resistance and its sanctuary

The fighters who carry on the war call themselves mujahideen, holy warriors, and they fight in the name of a jihad against an unbelieving state. Many operate as local bands defending their own districts. Behind them stand the political parties that took root across the border in Pakistan during the years of repression, which claim to lead the struggle and compete to channel recruits, weapons, and money into it. That

rivalry runs deep, and the resistance remains a quarrelsome collection of movements rather than a single front. Yet its cause draws growing sympathy abroad, among governments that see in the Afghan revolt either a blow against communism, a defense of Islam, or simply a useful thorn in Soviet flesh, and the first streams of foreign support have begun to find their way to the men in the mountains.

The reign of fear

Faced with enemies on every side, the government has ruled by terror. Its secret police reach into every corner of the cities, and suspicion alone is enough to condemn a man. Religious scholars, teachers, former officials, tribal notables, and anyone thought to harbour disloyal thoughts have been seized in their thousands. The great prison outside Kabul has filled beyond capacity, and many of those taken into it are never seen again. Stories of mass executions and of bodies buried in unmarked ground pass quietly from family to family. Rather than cow the population into obedience, this campaign of fear has driven still more Afghans into the arms of the resistance and stripped the government of what little loyalty it might once have commanded among the educated classes.

Flight and ruin

The country is emptying and breaking at the same time. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have already fled across the borders into Pakistan and Iran, carrying with them word of the violence at home and forming a vast pool from which the resistance can draw. Those with skills and learning have left in great numbers, gutting the very class a modern state depends upon. Within the country the economy is in disarray, with farming disrupted by war, trade strangled by insecurity, and the reforms having shattered the old web of rural credit without putting anything workable in its place. The government, unable to feed and finance itself, has come to lean ever more heavily on the money, fuel, and grain that flow south from the Soviet Union.

Moscow drawn deeper in

That dependence has bound the two states more tightly with every month of crisis. At the end of 1978 the Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation, a twenty- year pact that pledged the two to stand together and opened the door to military assistance. Soviet advisers have since poured into the country in their thousands, embedding themselves throughout the army, the ministries, the security services, and the economy, until the Afghan state can scarcely function without them. As the rebellion has worsened, the leaders in Kabul have begged

Moscow not merely for guns and counsel but for soldiers, pressing again and again for direct Soviet forces to save their failing revolution. Through 1979 Moscow answered with aid, advice, and equipment while resisting these repeated demands for its own troops. How long that restraint can hold, with a friendly government sliding towards collapse on its southern border, is the question that now hangs over everything.

9. The Power Struggle in Afghanistan

The figurehead and the strongman

From the first days of the revolution, real power within the government rested in two very different men. Nur Muhammad Taraki, the elder of the two, was the party's founder and its great name, a writer turned revolutionary who was raised after the seizure of power into an object of near worship. The state press called him the Great Leader and the genius of the East, and his portrait hung in every office and schoolroom. Yet for all the adulation, Taraki was more a symbol than a ruler. The daily business of governing, and above all the command of the security services and the army, fell increasingly to his deputy.

That deputy was Hafizullah Amin, and he was a man of a wholly different sort. Where Taraki was the dreamer, Amin was the organiser, hard, tireless, and without scruple. It was Amin who had built the party's following among the officers and Amin who had set the revolution in motion when the moment came. He had studied abroad in his younger years, including a spell in the United States, a detail that some would later turn over in their minds with suspicion. After the revolution he gathered office after office into his hands until little of consequence happened in Kabul without his approval.

The rivalry comes to a head

Power so unevenly shared could not stay peaceful for long. As Amin grew stronger, a circle of senior Khalqis around Taraki came to fear him and to plot the trimming of his wings. They found a sympathetic ear in Moscow, where the Soviets had grown deeply uneasy at Amin's conduct, blaming his brutality and his headlong pace for much of the revolt now consuming the country. They would have preferred him restrained and Taraki kept at the centre.

The reckoning came in September. Returning from travels abroad, with a stop in Moscow along the way, Taraki moved against his deputy. Amin was summoned to

the presidential palace, and in the confrontation that followed shots were fired and one of Amin's close companions was killed. Amin himself escaped. Within days he had turned the tables completely, stripping Taraki of his offices, placing him under guard, and taking the leadership of party and state into his own hands. The official word was that the Great Leader had stepped aside on account of poor health.

The death of Taraki

Taraki did not long survive his fall. In October it was announced that the former leader had died after a grave illness. Few in Kabul believe the story. It is widely understood that Taraki was killed while in detention, smothered on the orders of the man who had displaced him. The genius of the East, whose face still lingered on walls across the capital, had been quietly

disposed of by his own protégé, and the manner of his going told everyone watching exactly what kind of ruler had taken his place.

Amin alone at the summit

Hafizullah Amin now holds every great office in the land. He is head of state, head of government, leader of the party, and master of its armies and its secret police all at once. No rival of any standing remains beside him. Yet his triumph has left him perilously exposed. The rebellion burns hotter than ever, the army remains unreliable, and the terror by which he governs has won him few friends and many enemies.

Most dangerous of all is the state of his relations with Moscow. The Soviets have lost in Taraki the man they trusted, and they regard his killer with open coldness. Amin, for his part, came out of the September affair convinced that Soviet hands had been at work in the attempt to destroy him, and he no longer trusts the patron on whom his survival depends. Each side now watches the other with suspicion. Amin presses Moscow for the soldiers that might save his revolution, and the Soviets suspect him of seeking quietly to widen his foreign contacts beyond it, a suspicion that deepens the doubt with which they regard him. The bond between Kabul and Moscow, built over a quarter of a century, has never been so strained as it is in these final weeks of the year.

How the factions see it

To the Khalqis who remain loyal, Amin is the strong hand the revolution needs, the only man ruthless enough to hold the state together against all who would tear it down. To the supporters of Taraki he is a murderer who slew the father of the party,

and several of their leading men have fled into Soviet keeping rather than face his vengeance. The Parchamis, scattered in exile, look on the whole Khalqi adventure as the ruin of everything the party once stood for, and they wait abroad in the certain expectation that it will end in disaster. The Soviet Union, which built and armed this state, surveys the wreckage of its hopes with deepening alarm, uncertain that the man now in charge can be trusted or that the cause can be saved with him at its head. And the resistance in the mountains reads the bloodletting in Kabul for what it is, a sign that the enemy is devouring itself.

10. The Soviet Question

Why Afghanistan matters to Moscow

For the Soviet Union, what happens in Afghanistan is not a distant concern but a matter touching its own frontier. The two countries share a long border, and just across it lie the Soviet republics of Central Asia, home to millions of Muslims who are kin in faith, and often in language and blood, to the peoples now in revolt. A successful Islamic rising against a communist government on the far side of the river is precisely the example Moscow least wishes its own Muslims to see. Beyond this lies the matter of prestige and principle. Afghanistan declared itself a socialist state and threw in its lot with Moscow, and the Soviet leadership has long held that a country once brought into the socialist camp cannot be allowed to slip back out of it. To lose Afghanistan to an Islamic revolt, or worse to watch it drift towards the West, would be a defeat felt far beyond its borders, a sign that the tide of history could be turned back after all. Against this stands the plain fact that the friendly government Moscow has armed and bankrolled for a generation is now failing before its eyes.

The shape of Soviet power

To understand how Moscow will answer this, one must understand where power in the Soviet state actually sits. In form and in truth, everything rests with the Communist Party, and at the Party's summit sits the Politburo, the small body in which all great decisions are made. Leonid Brezhnev presides over it as General Secretary and stands as head of state besides, the first among its members. Around him sit the men who run the chief instruments of the state, each commanding his own domain.

Alexei Kosygin heads the government as Chairman of the Council of Ministers and carries the weight of the economy. Andrei Gromyko, foreign minister for more than

twenty years, speaks for Soviet diplomacy and watches the world beyond the bloc. Dmitriy Ustinov, a man of the Party and the arms industry raised to Minister of Defense, commands the armed forces, though the professional direction of those forces falls to the General Staff under Marshal Ogarkov, who sits a clear step below the Politburo and advises rather than decides. Yuri Andropov runs the Committee for State Security, the KGB, and through it the intelligence and the secret reach of the state, at home and abroad alike. Mikhail Suslov guards the purity of doctrine, and the Party's dealings with foreign communist movements, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan among them, run through the International Department of the Central Committee. Each of these men holds real power over his own machine. None of them, save through the Politburo, holds power over the others.

A leadership in question

This structure rests on a leader whose strength is no longer what it was. Brezhnev has aged visibly, and his grip on the daily affairs of state has loosened. More and more, the men around him act in his name and shape what reaches his ear, and the unspoken question of who will follow him hangs over every calculation in the Kremlin. A system built to project the serene unanimity of a single will now turns on the fading energies of one man and the ambitions of those who would inherit his place. When the leader at the center is weak, the lieutenants who control what he sees and hears, and who speak with his borrowed authority, grow correspondingly strong. This is the quiet truth beneath the marble calm of Soviet politics, and it bears directly on how a decision of this magnitude will be reached and by whom.

Where the lines of tension run

The Soviet state presents one face to the world, but it is not one mind. Each of its great organs looks upon the Afghan problem through the lens of its own purpose, and those lenses do not show the same picture.

The security service, whose business is threat and opportunity, gathers its own intelligence in Kabul through its own people and forms its own judgement of Amin and of what must be done. The professional soldiers of the General Staff weigh the same question in the hard currency of their trade, in divisions and supply lines and the long years a war in such country might demand, and a soldier who must answer for the outcome counts the cost more soberly than a politician who must only order the deed. The diplomats reckon the price in ruined relations abroad, in the labour of détente undone. The guardians of doctrine ask what the faithful around the world will make of it. These are not idle differences of opinion. They flow from the very roles

these men occupy, and a course that looks bold and necessary from one chair can look reckless and ruinous from another.

What binds them, and what conceals these differences from outside eyes, is the iron habit of unanimity. Once a matter is settled at the top, it is presented as the single will of the whole leadership, and dissent is neither aired nor admitted. Beneath that surface, information itself becomes a kind of power. Each organ holds knowledge the others lack, gathered through its own channels and shared only as far as suits its interest. A handful of men at the centre may decide a thing while the wider leadership learns of it only once it is done. Those who control what is reported, and to whom, can steer an outcome as surely as those who cast a vote. In a state that prizes secrecy as a first principle, the withholding of what one knows is not an aberration. It is the ordinary working of the machine.

Moscow and Amin

Over all of this falls the shadow of the man now ruling in Kabul. The Soviet Union has bound itself to Afghanistan by treaty, by arms, by money, and by thousands of its own advisers woven into every limb of the Afghan state. Yet the leader it must work through is one it has come to distrust deeply. Moscow blames Amin's cruelty and his haste for much of the rebellion, it has not forgiven him the fate of Taraki, the man it favoured, and it cannot be sure where his loyalties

truly lie. Amin, for his part, suspects Soviet hands in the attempt that nearly destroyed him, and he guards his own counsel accordingly.

The result is a partnership in which neither side fully trusts the other, and in which each shows the other only what it chooses. Amin presses Moscow for soldiers to save him, and Moscow suspects him of quietly testing whether other doors might open. Moscow keeps its true assessment of Amin to itself while continuing, in public, to call him a comrade. The advisers who fill Kabul serve Moscow's eyes as much as Afghan needs, and what they report does not always pass through Amin's hands. Two allies watch each other across a widening gulf of suspicion, each dependent on the other and each concealing from the other what matters most.

The choice and its costs

So, the leadership faces a decision it would dearly rather not face. To commit Soviet force to Afghanistan would carry grave costs. It would put at risk the whole edifice of détente, and with it the arms agreement signed only this year and still awaiting the assent of the American Senate. It would hand Washington and Peking a propaganda

gift and a cause around which to rally. It would enrage the Muslim world against a power seen to be crushing a Muslim people, with all the danger that carries so near the Soviet Union's own Muslim lands. And it would mean wading into the very kind of war, fought in mountains against an enemy that melts into the population, that soldiers everywhere have learned to dread. Any serious planning must reckon with the terrain, the few roads, the crossings of the river, and the question that has no easy answer of how large a force such a country would swallow and for how long.

Yet to do nothing carries costs of its own. It would mean watching a socialist government collapse on the Soviet border and accepting whatever rose in its place, whether an Islamic state hostile to Moscow or a chaos that drew in others. It would call into question the principle that the Soviet Union does not abandon those it has brought into its camp, and it would announce to friend and foe alike that there are limits to what Moscow will do to keep what it has gained. Between these two paths, each lined with danger, the men in the Kremlin must now choose, and they must do so through the divided, secretive, and uncertain machinery described above, with a fading leader at its head and the whole world waiting to see which way they turn.

Three centres, one decision

The Soviet seats in this committee are not three versions of the same voice. They are three different centres of power, each holding something the others need, each seeing the Afghan question from its own ground, and each guarding its own knowledge. The decision that must be reached has to pass through all three, and they do not begin from the same place.

The Politburo holds the decision, but not the full picture. This is the body where the matter will finally be settled, the only place with the authority to commit the Soviet state to a course of action. Yet its power is the power to choose, not the power to act or to know. It depends on others to carry out whatever it decides and on others to tell it what is true. Within it sit men with very different burdens. Those who answer for the economy and for relations with the outside

world feel the price of a foreign adventure most keenly, while others fear far more the shame of losing a socialist country on the border. Out of these competing pulls the Politburo must forge a single decision and then present it as the united will of all, whatever quarrels lie behind it. Its great weakness is that it sees only what reaches it, through a leader whose strength is failing and through subordinates who decide what he and his colleagues need to hear.

The KGB holds the knowledge and the quiet means. The security service commands the one resource the Politburo cannot do without, which is reliable knowledge of what is actually happening in Kabul. Its people are on the ground, its networks reach where others cannot, and its chief sits in the Politburo itself, giving it a voice at the very table where the choice will be made. It has watched Amin more closely than anyone and harbours the deepest doubts about him. It thinks naturally in terms of what can be accomplished swiftly and out of sight. Herein lies its leverage and the friction it breeds. By choosing what to report and what to hold back, it can shape the very picture on which the Politburo decides, and a body that controls the flow of information can steer an outcome as surely as a body that casts the deciding vote. The soldiers who would have to fight, and the diplomats who would have to explain it all afterwards, are right to wonder how much they are being told.

The Central Asian republics hold the ground and bear the exposure. These are the Soviet lands that share the border, and they are at once the rear base for anything done in the south and the region most directly threatened by what is happening across the river. Every road, airfield, and crossing that an effort in Afghanistan would rely upon lies in their keeping, and so does much of the manpower it would draw upon, including soldiers who share the faith, the language, and the blood of the very people now in revolt. Their vantage is the vantage of the exposed frontier. The fire next door is on their own doorstep, the kinship between their Muslims and the Afghans is a standing worry, and they carry a quiet doubt about how their own Central Asian sons would behave if ordered to fight fellow Muslims on the far bank. They see dangers up close that the distant centre can afford to weigh more lightly, and yet theirs is the least of the three voices in the room, for they provide the ground and the men while the decision is made far above them. In truth the decisive choices of this crisis lie not with them but with Moscow, with the Politburo, the Defence Ministry, the General Staff, and the KGB. Theirs is the weight of a heavy stakeholder rather than a decision-maker, felt through their hold on the ground, the manpower, and the knowledge of the borderland. It is precisely because so much of the matter falls upon them that this committee grants them a voice they would not formally have held in reality.

Set these three side by side and the tensions are plain. The Politburo decides but cannot see without the KGB and cannot act without the borderlands. The KGB knows the most and shares the least, and through that imbalance it pulls on a decision that is not formally its to make. The Central Asians carry the heaviest practical load and the sharpest exposure, yet command the smallest share of the

choice. Knowledge, authority, and burden are held by three different hands, and none of the three sees the whole, which is precisely the ground on which their interests divide.

11. The International Dimension

The struggle inside Afghanistan does not stay inside Afghanistan. It sits at the crossing point of three great contests at once, the global rivalry of the superpowers, the older quarrels of the region, and the loyalties of the Islamic world, and so it draws the eyes of states far and near. They do not all want the same thing. Some would see Soviet influence checked, some would see a Muslim land defended, some fear above all a wider war, and a few have reasons to wish the Soviet Union ill that have nothing to do with Afghanistan at all. The camps are real, but they are crossed by many currents.

The United States. Washington watches the Soviet grip on Afghanistan tighten at the worst possible moment for itself. This year has already cost the United States its great ally in Iran, where a friendly monarch has fallen and American diplomats are now held hostage by a revolutionary government. To see the Soviet Union entrench itself on the far side of that same region, within reach of the Gulf and the oil on which the West depends, alarms the Carter administration deeply, though it is divided between those who counsel firmness and those who fear wrecking what remains of détente. The arms treaty signed with Moscow only this year still awaits the consent of the Senate, and relations between the two powers are already cooling. American sympathy lies plainly with those resisting the communist government in Kabul, and the question in Washington is how far it is prepared to go to make that sympathy felt.

Pakistan. No country has more at stake than Pakistan, which shares the long border, shelters the resistance parties on its soil, and now holds hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees within its territory. General Zia, whose military government has been isolated and out of favour with the West, suddenly finds himself astride events of the first importance. Pakistan fears a hostile Kabul that could stir its Pashtuns and its Baluch against it, yet it also sees in the Afghan revolt a chance to win the backing, the arms, and the standing it has lacked. Whatever support flows to the fighters in the mountains must pass through Pakistani hands, and that fact alone makes Islamabad a player far larger than its strength would otherwise allow.

Iran. Revolutionary Iran stands apart from every camp. Its new Islamic government loathes the godless regime in Kabul and feels the pull of solidarity with Afghanistan's Muslims, the Shia among them especially, yet it is locked in open confrontation with the United States and will take no part in any cause that smells of Washington. Consumed by its own revolution and its quarrel

with America, Iran is at once deeply concerned with Afghanistan and ill placed to act there. It is hostile to Moscow and to Washington both, a pole unto itself.

China. Peking views the Soviet Union as its foremost enemy and reads every Soviet advance as another link in a chain of encirclement. Having drawn closer to the United States and recently come to blows with Moscow's ally in Vietnam, China is firmly set against Soviet expansion and stands close to Pakistan, its old friend, in opposing it. A Soviet entanglement on China's western approaches suits Peking's argument to the world that Moscow is a power bent on domination, and China will lose no chance to press that case.

India. Among the powers of the region, India leans the other way. Bound to the Soviet Union by a treaty of friendship and long reliant on Soviet arms and support, and ever watchful of its rival Pakistan, India views with unease any alignment that would gather Washington, Peking, and Islamabad into a single bloc on its doorstep. As a leading voice of the non-aligned world it must speak for principle, yet its sympathies and its interests pull it towards understanding with Moscow rather than condemnation of it. India embodies the awkward truth that the non-aligned movement does not move as one.

Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, rich and devout and guardian of Islam's holiest places, regards a communist war upon a Muslim people as an offence against the faith itself, all the more after the shock of seeing its own holy city seized by zealots only weeks ago. It is the natural paymaster of an Islamic resistance and a firm friend of Washington. The wider Arab world is no single thing. Egypt, having made its peace with Israel and cast its lot with the United States, sits isolated among its neighbours yet holds large stocks of Soviet pattern arms that could find their way to the Afghan fighters. Iraq and Syria, rival Baathist states both armed by Moscow, pursue their own ambitions and trust neither superpower fully. Jordan keeps to its pro-Western course. What unites them, if anything does, is that a Soviet assault on a Muslim land would stir Islamic feeling across the whole region in ways no government could easily ignore.

The Western allies. The friends of the United States share its broad alarm but not its every instinct. Britain, under a new and staunchly anti-Soviet government, stands closest to Washington's harder line. France guards its independence and its stake in détente. The Federal Republic of Germany, which has built its prosperity and its security on the easing of tensions in Europe, dreads above all a return to the deep freeze of the Cold War. Turkey, a member of the Western alliance that borders the Soviet Union directly and counts a Muslim population of its own, is pulled in more directions than most. Japan, tied to the United States and dependent on the same distant oil, would follow the Western lead while counting the economic cost. They are allies, but their appetites for confrontation differ widely.

The non-aligned and the watchers. Beyond the great camps sit states with their own peculiar vantages. Yugoslavia, an independent communist country and a founder of the non-aligned cause, holds the principle of non-interference sacred and would view any great power trampling a smaller neighbour with real fear for itself. Cuba occupies the strangest seat of all, a devoted ally of Moscow that also holds the chair of the non-aligned movement, a position that would

become acutely uncomfortable should its patron act against a fellow non-aligned state. Nigeria, populous and partly Muslim, carries weight in the African and Islamic worlds and would weigh both solidarity and principle. Israel, aligned with the West and burdened by none of these loyalties, watches the regional balance with cool interest, for a Soviet Union mired in a Muslim war is not a prospect it has any reason to lament.

12. The Situation as of 25 December 1979

The government

Power in Kabul rests, for now, in a single pair of hands. Hafizullah Amin holds the leadership of the state, the government, and the party all at once, and commands the armed forces and the secret police besides. The Revolutionary Council and the ministries beneath him are instruments of his will rather than checks upon it, staffed by Khalqis loyal to him or too frightened to be otherwise. The Parcham wing has been driven out and scattered, the followers of Taraki broken or fled, and no rival of any weight stands beside him. Yet this is a government that rules by fear over a narrow base, propped up at every level by the thousands of Soviet advisers woven through its army, its ministries, and its security organs, without whom it could

scarcely function at all. Its authority is real in the cities and thin to the point of vanishing beyond them.

The military situation

The Afghan army, on paper the shield of the state, has become its gravest weakness. Conscripts desert in droves, whole units have mutinied, and the soldiers who remain cannot be relied upon to march against their own people. What was once a force of considerable size has shrunk and hollowed, bleeding men and weapons into the very rebellion it is meant to crush. Government control reaches along the main roads and into the towns and falters everywhere else.

Against this background a striking development has unfolded in recent days. Soviet military forces have been entering the country in growing numbers, arriving in stages over past weeks and now, in just these last days, by a great airlift of transport aircraft landing at Kabul and at the airbase to the north. The government in Kabul has welcomed their coming, understanding it as the assistance it has so long and so desperately demanded, fresh soldiers to stiffen a failing army and hold the line against the rebels. The full scale of this movement, and the precise purpose behind it, are not entirely clear even to those it is meant to help.

The resistance

Ranged against the government is not one enemy but many. The most organised of them are the Islamist parties that have taken root across the border in Pakistan, among them the hardline

followers of Hekmatyar and the broader movement led by Rabbani, which draws strength in the north. Alongside these stand more traditional figures, tribal chiefs and religious notables who have raised their own districts, and in the central highlands the Shia communities look towards Iran for sympathy and support. Within the country itself the fighting is carried on largely by local bands defending their own valleys. What they share is faith and a hatred of the godless state. What they lack is unity. The resistance remains a quarrelling patchwork of rivals, strong in spirit and in numbers but without a single command or a common plan, and that division is at present its chief limitation.

What remains uncertain

A great deal hangs unresolved over the country as the year ends. The first and largest question is what the Soviet Union now intends, for the meaning of its gathering forces is read one way in Kabul and may be meant in quite another. Whether Amin

can hold his government together, distrusted by his patron and hated by his people, is far from settled. Whether the army can be made to fight at all, or will dissolve entirely, no one can say. Whether the scattered resistance can ever combine into a single force remains an open matter, as does the response of the watching powers abroad, who have not yet had to choose between words and deeds. Every one of these questions presses for an answer, and events may force them all at once.

Where the ground is weakest

Beneath these uncertainties lie the fault lines along which everything could give way. The deepest runs between Kabul and Moscow, two allies bound together by necessity yet divided by suspicion, each concealing its true mind from the other. Within the ruling party, Amin's grip rests on terror rather than loyalty, and the enemies he has made, the avengers of Taraki and the exiles of Parcham, have not forgotten him. The army's unreliability could turn a setback into a collapse. The rebellion gathers strength with every reform forced and every village bombed. And all of this sits within a region already aflame, with revolution in Iran, a frontline Pakistan, and a wider Cold War in which the easing of tensions between the great powers has grown fragile. It is a structure under strain at every joint, and the smallest shock could bring much of it down.

The committee opens here, on the morning of 25 December 1979, with a failing government, a gathering of foreign arms whose purpose is not yet plain, and a country and a region poised on the edge of events that no one in the room can yet foresee.