

Afghanistan slides toward civil war

by Ramtanu Maitra

On Feb. 17, New Delhi witnessed yet another well-choreographed sideshow from the pin-striped Yuli Vorontsov, scion of the pre-Bolshevik noble family and Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan. While Vorontsov was telling the media in New Delhi about the Kabul government's ongoing "secret negotiations" with the Afghan rebels for "national reconciliation," Afghan President Najibullah, by his friends known as "Bull," dismantled the last vestiges of "democracy" by removing the seven non-Communist members from the cabinet and installing a 20-member Supreme Military Council. Vorontsov's show was acclaimed as a "diplomatic move," while Najibullah's was retailed as "consolidating the ruling party's power."

Vorontsov came to India to apprise New Delhi of Soviet initiatives following the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although India has declined to play any decisive role in the issue, the Soviets obviously want India to continue its support for the Kabul regime, condemn any overt Pakistani involvement inside Afghanistan, and voice displeasure at Washington's continuing supply of arms to the Afghan mujahideen. In the press conference at the end of his two-day visit, Vorontsov strongly criticized the U.S. President for continuing with arms supply to the mujahideen and complained that the United States "has lost touch with reality."

Mixing complaints with threats, Vorontsov said the Pakistani armed forces have sent artillery units into the Jalalabad area, though the guns have not yet been fired. He said that the Pakistanis are inside Afghanistan—a Soviet allegation which has been refuted by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto from Beijing. Vorontsov said the charge was confirmed by satellite intelligence photos. "They will get a surprise if they fire," he warned, adding that the Afghan troops now had the most modern weapons, many of which had so far never been

used in the Afghan conflict.

Throughout the press conference, Vorontsov harped on the theme that the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) is strong enough to hold on to power while negotiating with others, including the deposed Afghan King Zahir Shah, to form a broad-based coalition government in Afghanistan. He insisted that Kabul's initiative was primarily to stop the ensuing bloodbath that threatens Afghanistan, and not to hang on to power as is generally believed. During Vorontsov's suave performance, however, such "details" as the PDPA's role in the killing of 1.3 million Afghans, driving 5 million more Afghans out to Iran and Pakistan, and the outright rejection of the PDPA by all Afghans who are not entrapped inside the fortified towns under the party's control, remained unmentioned.

Doublespeak

But Vorontsov's sideshow was only one of many going on in the region. In Kabul, Najibullah, while preaching "national reconciliation," is further tightening the cordon to protect himself. On Feb. 20, he appointed a 20-member Supreme Military Council which includes three top-serving military officers—Kabul garrison commander Mohammad Afzal Ludin; chief of the General Staff Gen. Asif Dilawar, and Air Force Commander Abdul Qadur Aka. Four Central Committee members—Kabul party chief Daoud Razemiyar, Najibullah's chief aide Eshaq Tukhi, senior military representative to the party Lt. Gen. Abdul Haq Ullumi, and party operative Mir Sahib Karwal—have also been included in the council. The Soviet news agency TASS also reported that 30,000 weapons have been distributed among the people in Kabul. The story about ongoing "secret negotiations" with the Afghan rebels is trotted out for public consumption.

In Pakistan, the sideshows are almost farcical. The Peshawar-based mujahideen are continuing with their inner-party quibbles, fighting over imaginary loot. The Iran-based Shia-mujahideen, who were promised 100 seats on the Afghan *Shoora* (council) by mujahideen leader Sibghatullah Mujadeddi, could not wrangle out more than 70 seats, in spite of Iranian Deputy Prime Minister Ali Raza Moayyeri's constant presence in Islamabad. In despair, the Shia-mujahideen left for Teheran on Feb. 21.

On the same day, 200 of the 440 members of the *Shoora*, selected from guerrilla commanders, clergy, and tribal elders, meeting secretly in Rawalpindi, staged a walkout protesting the failure of the mujahideen leaders to come up with an acceptable list of ministers. Subsequently, a 14-member council, apparently self-appointed, confronted the seven mujahideen leaders, demanded and obtained the policymaking authority for the mujahideen government. The 14-member council represents the field commanders, and each one of them is linked to one or the other of the mujahideen leaders. It is highly unlikely that the situation has come to a stable state. More arm-twisting, power-brokerage, and undisciplined outbursts are expected to follow.

Meanwhile, reports from Afghanistan indicate that two important rebel commanders, Ahmad Shah Massoud of Panjshir Valley and Abdul Haq from southern Afghanistan, are heading independently toward Kabul for a showdown. Almost every day, Kabul is experiencing five or six rocket attacks which are killing innocents and laying to rubble a not-too-well-built city.

Dangerous game

The scenario that hangs heavy is that of an all-out civil war. While the Soviets, who have armed the Kabul regime to its teeth, are on a propaganda-rampage to stop the arms inflow to the mujahideen, they are also aware that the "Bull" will not be able to hold on forever. But the process of removing Najibullah will cost many, many lives. Meanwhile, the Soviets have littered the countryside with millions of anti-tank, anti-personnel landmines. Civil war or not, these mines are going to take a heavy toll of Afghan lives.

So, what is it all about? It is evident that the Soviet Union would like to see a bloodbath. While the Geneva Accord provided the Kremlin with the advantage of arming the Kabul regime, the Soviets put up a show of attempting to find a political solution to the Afghan problem. But even when they put up a show, it became apparent that it was more for the purpose of dividing than uniting. Vorontsov's role, while shuttling between Moscow, Taif, Kabul, Teheran, Rome, and Islamabad, was to play one against the other—a game which the fellow players of the Great Game, the British, had taught them so well. The attempt all the while was to weaken the Afghan resistance so that the PDPA, an urban minority party, can stay in power—no matter how bloody the fallout is. One may surmise that the Soviets are paying their dues to

If the shoe fits . . .

Sergei Khrushchov, son of the late Soviet leader, received an unexpected welcome at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government on Feb. 15. He was there to participate in an "I Love Gorby" lovefest, attended by some 500 academics, media, and politicians reminiscing about the good old days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Suddenly, a young man walked up to the podium and began to bang a shoe on it, as he announced, "My name is Bill Ferguson. I have been on a hunger strike for two weeks to protest the Soviet-style justice ordered by the Russians against Lyndon LaRouche. This meeting is part of a Soviet strategic deception, as Gorbachov prepares for war. And this shoe is the shoe your Daddy banged on the table at the U.N.! Remember Khrushchov's shoe! Remember Khrushchov's shoe!"

As the stunned panelists looked on in horror, Ferguson began to chant in Russian: "Gorbachov Sukeen Syn; Nam Nyee Noozhin Tretyee Rim." ("Gorbachov is a Son-of-a-Bitch; We don't need a new Third Rome.")

Khrushchov tried to begin his talk, saying, "We didn't come here to talk about shoes, but we'll have to now." He tried to extol the wonders of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, but another young man rose from the audience, brandishing a shoe, and declared, "I'm Ukrainian. This is all a fake. There's more repression today in Russia than in Khrushchov's day." As he was ejected from the hall, another shouted, "What about the Jews? What about the Armenians? You're nothing but a bunch of Nazis!"

Harvard security personnel scurried about, saying, "They're all over the place! They're all over the place!"

the PDPA.

But there is more to it. It is the threats that the Soviets issue from time to time that show their intention. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze threatened continuance of aerial bombings by aircraft based inside Soviet territory in support of the Kabul regime's campaign against the rebels. While he was in Pakistan, he did not even meet the mujahideen.

In spite of Gorbachov's much-propagandized proclamation at the 27th CPSU Congress that "Afghanistan was a bleeding wound," it is becoming more evident day-by-day that the Soviets want a bloody civil war. The design is to prove that Afghans cannot live together and that the only solution is the partition of the country.