

|| CHAPTER TWELVE

TAR BABY WARS: THE RUSSIANS IN AFGHANISTAN

YOU LEAVE the two-lane tarmac somewhere in western Afghanistan, and slog several miles down a muddy, rutted dirt road toward the village of some newly made friends. You climb to the top of a 3-foot mud wall, and watch carefully where you jump on the other side—there are scattered piles of something you don't want to jump into. Like many such piles in Afghanistan, they were left by two-, as well as four-legged, animals.

According to the United Nations, there isn't a single sanitary sewerage system in the country, not even in the capital of Kabul, where open sewers follow the sidewalks, as they do in many African capitals.

In the village, two dozen farmers and some donkeys crowd around a reporter and his interpreter and the two villagers who brought them. Questions are asked and everyone shouts answers at once. Obviously, these farmers are filled with emotion and impatient to express it.

The mullah, the village preacher, steps forward and the others hush. He speaks for them. His black beard quiver, he says it is by his command that the others have gone to their roofs every night since the Soviet invasion and chanted the name of Allah. Such is the teaching of his religion. Then he shouts, "I want to tell to the Russian people, they don't come to my house, they don't come to my mosque, they don't come to my country. If the Russian people don't come here, I have no business with them. If they do, I fight them to the last drop of blood."

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AT a large and beautifully ornate tiled mosque in one of Afghanistan's large cities, another black-bearded mullah, a major religious leader, squats to talk with an American reporter and a British colleague who speaks Farsi. The mullah nervously eyes the Afghan military officers nearby, who are eyeing him. In the background, hundreds are filing into and out of the mosque for evening prayers.

What does the mullah think of the Russians? "Nobody likes the Russians," he whispers. The government? He mumbles. When the first communist regime took over in Afghanistan in April 1978, he says, he had asked the government whether it was closer to Islam or to the Russians. He says he is still waiting for an answer.

Is the city calm? "Not calm, still *shalugh*," he says, using a Farsi word meaning anything from unhappiness to open rioting.

Are the people prepared to fight? "Look at their faces. Can't you see?"

Then he borrows a pen and writes in Farsi on the pad: "Now isn't a good time for your questions."

Is he afraid? "Yes, I'm afraid," he says, returning the pen and pad.

As he draws away, however, he sends another man, more nondescript, over to talk to the reporters in his stead. This man, an airport technician, is rabidly antigovernment and anti-Soviet. He describes recent skirmishes in detail. "If they try to come to the bazaar, we will kill them," he says.

IN a small hotel room in Herat, Hassim sits on his bed. He examines three photographs of a man who wants to be smuggled across the border into Iran. He looks up at the go-between who brought them. He studies the pictures and the go-between some more. He accepts.

In three days, the man in the photographs, who is already on his way to Herat from Kabul, will join four other emigrés and an underground resistance fighter on a minibus to a town on the Afghan side of the border. Anyone else wishing to go to that town will be told that his particular bus is full.

The emigrés will stay in the town one night and all the next day. Then, in darkness, they will be walked to another town, on the Iranian side. Hassim charges 5,010 Afghanis per person (about \$116.51 or 70 percent of the average person's annual income in good times). The fee is 5,000 Afghanis. The other 10-Afghani note will be torn in two. Hassim will keep one half. The emigré will keep the other, and send it back when he's in Iran. If the serial numbers match, Hassim will know everything is all right.

Hassim isn't greedy. If an emigré has only 3,000 or 4,000 afs, he'll take it. There are discounts for families. About half the fee goes to confederates in Iran to care for the emigré. Hassim acknowledges that many emigrés are leaving to get jobs in Iran because the living is better. But he likes to think

most of them are leaving to join guerrilla bands, and will slip back into and out of Afghanistan, as quietly as they left, to fight the foe.

"I don't know why America, France, and Germany people don't help the Moslem people with tanks," Hassim says. "With just a gun it is very difficult fighting the Russian people."

THIS hostility was not expected by the soldiers who poured south out of the Soviet Union on December 27, 1979, in civilian trucks commandeered for the military so suddenly that you could still see the cotton lint sticking to their slatted sides (cotton is the main crop on the plains north of the Afghan border).

Russians tend to accept Moscow's propaganda as Americans tend to accept Washington's. Both sides raise willing armies of men who are convinced that they know, and can impose, the kind of government that some other country wants to have. The Russians apparently believed that Afghans would receive them as protectors and liberators. Soviet officers wandered into Afghan cities as their men did, in search of recreation, but found instead quick death or narrow escape.

Even after the popular hostility became so evident that the Soviets had to retreat to camp and hunker down, they continued to delude themselves. Who can accept being hated by everybody? Who can accept that everything his leaders have said is wrong? They rationalized that the opposition was coming from a minority of Afghans, who were merely extraordinarily active. The U.S. Army had the same delusion in Vietnam.

The tiny band of native Afghan communists had kept their own, similar delusion alive even long after their coup d'état of April 1978 had fallen under widening siege. In reality, the Afghan communists were like the Diem family that ruled Vietnam in the Eisenhower-Kennedy years, or like any number of other U.S. clients overseas: heroes to the blind foreign giant that put them in power, and enemies of their own people.

IN 1970, Gholan Dustagher, age eleven, had a teacher in his village of Ghaarkali, near Kandahar, who was a member of the Khalq—the Afghan Communist party. At the time, Afghanistan was a monarchy. Since World War II, Afghan governments had tried to walk a narrow neutral path between the superpowers, taking aid from whoever offered it.

The teacher didn't like young Gholan's name, which meant "slave of the prophet." So the teacher began calling him Meerwise, or "commander," the name of an old Afghan hero. Other members of the class were similarly renamed.

Now, a decade later, the teacher is a senior party official in Kabul, and a candidate for the ruling central committee. His swift rise wasn't due to

good fortune or exceptional skill; there are just very few communists to go around. Back in Kandahar, Meerwise calls himself a student. But he works for the party, and for the government, which the party controls. He is the personal message-bearer and errand-runner for the provincial governor. He doesn't like to acknowledge his original name. "It will not be good for me," he says. "Our fathers give us religious names. When we become conscious, we don't like it."

The governor summons Meerwise to this office and asks him to guide a visiting American reporter around in a chauffeur-driven car to see how good things are.* It quickly becomes apparent that the governor has few people he can trust with such chores.

Anytime the reporter asks to stray from the assigned tour, Meerwise refuses. He says it is too dangerous for the reporter to leave main roads, or stop at unscheduled spots, because the people don't understand foreigners. "Villages are very dangerous," he says. "The people are uneducated. They are poor. They do not know what is going on. They have been given the impression that every person for the revolution is a *kafir* [nonbeliever]." What Meerwise means, of course, is that it is dangerous for *him* to travel away from a few well-guarded spots. A visiting American is welcome anywhere.

Shanawaz† Shanwany is the governor of Kandahar province, who assigned Meerwise to escort the reporter around. At thirty-eight years of age, Shanawaz is the highest-ranking government official in the south of the country. He was appointed by the party's central committee in Kabul, a week after the Soviet invasion. Before that he had been governor of Kabul province for six months, and before that governor of Konar, a less-populated province in the northeast. Before that, he had been an army officer. There's a very fast track for the rare reliable communist.

Shanawaz proved his reliability on April 20, 1979, eight months before the Soviet invasion, at Kerala, a village of about 4,000 people in Konar province. Shanawaz arrived on the outskirts of Kerala accompanied by Afghan troops, tanks, and Soviet advisors.

They were chasing some *mujahadeen* guerrillas who had run into the village for protection. Refugees interviewed by Australian journalist Philip Cornford said that a door-to-door search was made, and all male occupants

*It is a commentary on communications in Afghanistan that at the time this happened, none of us knew that my presence there was illegal, all Western reporters having been banned from the country. I traveled around for another week, well-marked with American flags and messages in Farsi that I was an American journalist, to keep from being mistaken for a Russian. Finally, chance led me to have lunch in a teahouse also being patronized by a police official who was aware of the ban on U.S. journalists, and of a mind to enforce it. Only then was I arrested and after two days marched out of the country at gunpoint.

†Also translatable as "Shah Nawaz."

were ordered to assemble at a bridge on the road into town to be talked to by Governor Shanawaz. From his perch on a jeep, Shanawaz is said to have waved a pistol at the assemblage and yelled, "Where are your American and Chinese friends now?" Then, it's said, he laughed, went to the side of a Soviet colonel, and together they ordered a junior Afghan officer to have his troops shoot every man and boy in the village.

Cornford was told that 1,200 people died. Such figures are usually much exaggerated in Afghanistan, but from other hearsay stories the toll apparently was well into the hundreds. The junior officer who carried out the order was later appointed to a high defense ministry job. According to those who escaped, the shooting was done by Soviet advisors as well as Afghan troops, and the Soviets were barking orders. After the shooting, a bulldozer buried the victims, many of whom were still writhing.

Shanawaz says he was born and raised in a village near Farah, about 235 miles west of Kandahar. He says he was appointed governor because he is "a specialist in this culture," meaning that of Kandahar. Asked what the population of Kandahar is, even roughly, he says he doesn't know.

Asked how many people in the province were affected by the communists' land reform program, or how many were ordered to leave their traditional homes in the provinces to take land assigned to them in other regions of the country, he says he also doesn't know. And he is unable to find anyone who *does* know. Asked the major items of trade between his province and the bordering province of Baluchistan in Pakistan, he says he doesn't have any idea. But he's sure the trade is continuing as normal. (It obviously isn't.)

"Now every member of Afghanistan is very happy," he says. "We have not seen any person around the city or around our villages who is against the government."

How many Soviets are in Kandahar province? "As a governor, I have never seen any Russians here," Shanawaz says.

AJIBNUR lives in a village between Kabul and Kandahar. Most young men from the village left after it was bombed and strafed by MIGs and helicopter gunships in May 1979. Many were killed in the attacks. Scores climbed into the mountains to become guerrillas. In November, when the snows came, they went to refugee camps in Pakistan. With spring, Ajibnur is sure, they will return to Afghanistan, freshly equipped, to mount a new campaign. Ajibnur would like to fight now, but says he hasn't got a gun; the government confiscated it. On the other hand, government guns are being made available by deserting soldiers, with whole outposts sometimes quitting and joining the rebellion in unison.

Every Afghan male must enter the army for two years at about age twenty-two. The government intentionally stations soldiers in sections of the country far from their homes, so they will have minimal understanding of local dialects, customs, and grievances. Many citizens seem to hold nothing against

the soldiers, and chat in friendly fashion. But hostility frequently erupts, and soldiers obviously are under great pressure from the civilian population and their own consciences, as evidenced by the 50 percent-or-more desertion rates.

Soldiers frequently sit alone in restaurants, ostracized. On a bus from Kabul to Kandahar, a soldier tries to bum a free ride, offering to protect the other passengers. He is hooted off, and several people call out, "Go back to your Russian friends." Many who stay in the army are merely playing out a role, afraid of the consequences to themselves or their families if they desert, but in no way loyal to the government they serve.

The Soviets don't help their cause with the Afghan soldiers. They treat them and other Afghans with the same haughty colonialist disdain that generally characterizes the Soviet presence abroad, which has alienated potential allies from Cuba to Indonesia. A jeep-like vehicle carrying two Soviet officers veers around a Kabul streetcorner, sideswiping a car carrying five Afghan soldiers, and sending it to the curb. The Russians drive on, not even looking back at the dented car and its disgusted-looking occupants.

AN easily discernible Quisling class arose quickly after the communist takeover—young men in Western dress who occupy senior positions in the communist government and support it. Mouths close when they are around. They are resented and joked about. Some are encountered in hotels and government ministries. On a bus, passengers whisper that the driver, who fits the description of this group, is a government spy.

In Jallalabad, a large city east of Kabul, the bank manager is just such a young man. He announces that business couldn't be better, and jokingly tries to talk an American reporter into taking out a loan. During an hour-long interview in midmorning, the only customers who come into the bank are exchanging currency, mostly Pakistani rupees. (Both Pakistan and Afghanistan tightly restrict the amount of money that can leave their countries.)

The road between Jallalabad and Kabul has just been cut off by a massive guerrilla ambush of some Soviet troop trucks. The bank manager displays easy telephone access to provincial government officials, and repeatedly asserts that nothing is wrong, that civilian traffic was just delayed so the military could move some big equipment. As soon as he leaves the room, though, some men who came in to change money and have been sitting around stiffly, suddenly loosen up and begin discussing the attack on Soviet troops. They obviously do not disapprove.

Merchants from the bazaar sit on rugs and cushions in their mud homes, drinking tea and complaining that business is bad, that all the money has dried up. They tune their radios to Farsi broadcasts of Voice of America or the British Broadcasting Corporation, though the Soviets often jam those frequencies. They contribute substantial portions of their income to a secret

committee that smuggles the money to Pakistan for arms. Asked what kind of government they would like to have in Afghanistan, they say the kind the Ayatollah Khomeini has installed in Iran. The world is certainly not as simple as Americans would like to have it.

Guerrillas attack convoys along the highways. In forested areas they set up roadblocks with felled trees, and open fire on Soviet soldiers who get out of their armored cars to clear the way. They also stop civilian vehicles. Bus passengers are checked, and government officials or Communist party members removed and shot. Others are allowed on. Some Robin Hooding occurs if substantial money is found, but the loot is obviously used for revolutionary purposes.

Those who want to rationalize what is going on in Afghanistan now say that it's simple banditry—that Afghans have a centuries-old predisposition for stealing. You can hear that from leftists, and you can hear it from some of the more cynical of the journalists who travel the international crisis circuit. Yet throughout Afghanistan, bicycles are parked unlocked by the dozen outside stores and offices, and though most Afghans are dirt poor no one takes them. Waiters and taxi drivers will chase after you to refund any overpayment, even money that was intended as a tip. Before the reaction to the April 1978 revolution, you could hitchhike safely all over the country, and not be molested, robbed, or put in fear.*

Another theory you can hear is that Afghans have always reacted unpleasantly to foreigners. This is said to account for the fierceness of their attacks on Soviets. But an American reporter traveling outside Kabul in 1980 couldn't ride a bus without being offered oranges, candy, bread, or whatever else was handy, by fellow passengers. He couldn't walk down a street without shopkeepers bidding him in for pots of tea. Strangers constantly offered friendly greetings.

The Afghans' reputation for hostility probably derives from the frequency with which foreigners have invaded their land, shot their officials, and taken over their government—and the success with which Afghans have resisted these intrusions. The Russians are just getting what the British got a hundred years ago in Afghanistan. It's the same way the Iranians felt about us.

THE per capita gross national product in Afghanistan is recorded as \$168 a year, which has to be a wild guess since most people are subsistence farmers. To say this places Afghanistan among the poorest countries in the world is misleadingly sanguine. In most other poor countries, the weather is warm and people can live comfortably on less money.

Health conditions are a human low. In the countryside, almost anywhere you look, you are apt to see people squatting and spreading their robes. The results may make good fertilizer, but feces also gets into the drinking water.

*The author did so in 1967.

Everywhere, people of all ages are wheezing and coughing up phlegm. Much of the year it is simply too cold to bathe, and few do. Half the children die before they reach the age of five—worse even than in Zaire, where there is less to eat, but more concern with cleanliness.

"I know a family and they had eleven kids and they all died," says a Western-educated doctor. "They were all respiratory and gastrointestinal infections. They all could have been cured or prevented. You need a dependable clean water supply that the people will use and rely on. Seal the wells with concrete so the manure doesn't fall into them."

It is utterly incredible how little was accomplished here when for thirty years the two superpowers supposedly tried to outdo each other in impressing Afghanistan with their aid capabilities. The most visible results are that one good U-shaped road, and the airports (some American, some Soviet), which have now become a mechanism for the invasion and conquest of the country.

Where Western-style toilets have been installed, many Afghans simply climb up on the seat and squat, spewing feces in all the wrong places. The resulting conditions are less sanitary than the ones previously existing.

The literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated at 20 percent, perhaps the world's lowest—and we're talking about the ability to read a simple signboard, not the works of Kierkegaard. At a conservative minimum, 80 percent of the people live off the food they grow and the animals they raise.

This appalling poverty and ill health is the excuse, if there could be one, for the brutal upheaval the communists have caused. Yet the communists themselves aren't addressing the problems; most won't admit there are any. Fateh Mohammed Tarin, deputy minister of planning since the April 1978 coup (and designated by the government to describe its program for a reporter), acknowledges that public health, water projects, schools, and family guidance programs aren't among the party's priorities. Tarin associates such things with Western aid.

He insists that development can't begin until there's a basic change in the social system. So the party's ten-year program is silent on the country's desperate health needs. The program frees farmers from all mortgages and other debts to what Tarin calls "the feudals and big farmers." It declares equal rights for women (the most talked about practical effect of this is abolition of the bride price, by which fathers "sell" their daughters to husbands-to-be). And it also decrees land reform. Holdings are legally limited to about 5 to 60 acres, depending on the kind of land. The land confiscated from people who had more than the maximum was to be distributed in lots of about 5 acres each (less for good land, more for bad) to tenant farmers. Ironically, in light of decree number seven (sexual equality), decree number eight awarded land only to *males* over eighteen.

Tarin says land was actually distributed under this plan to 300,000 households; Shanawaz says 248,000 households. Yet one could travel two weeks in the Afghan countryside and never encounter a single person farming land acquired under this program.

A large but uncertain number of land grants called upon the recipients to move to other regions of the country, as much as 500 miles from traditional homelands. Much of the fiercest rebel activity has been in areas affected by the relocation plan, indicating either that the plan was a major irritant to the people, or that the government designed the plan with the ulterior motive of breaking up known guerrilla strongholds.

At any rate, these three major decrees were hardly carried out as planned. The problem wasn't so much that the decrees attempted to change long-established national policies. The problem was that they attempted to *establish* national policies—and strange ones at that—for the first time among peoples accustomed to self-rule.

THE land that is Afghanistan has long been inhabited by many tribes that jealously guard their independence. In past centuries, whole tribes have been slaughtered or forcefully relocated, but they have never been peacefully persuaded. Two attempts by England in the nineteenth century to conquer the land that is now Afghanistan collapsed in complete routs of the British army.

What today passes for a nation was largely the creation of one chieftain, Abdur Rahman Khan. Before his death in 1901, Abdur Rahman managed to defeat enough rivals in battle that Russia on one frontier and Britain on the other agreed to recognize his territory as a loosely defined buffer zone between their own expansionist-minded empires.

Abdur Rahman's eldest son peacefully succeeded him as head of state in 1901. *It was the last peaceful succession in Afghan history.* The son, Habibullah, was shot to death, as have been most of his successors. A few have fled. So Babrak Karmal, the man the Soviets flew in from Czechoslovakia in December 1979 to be president of Afghanistan, may have had the most dangerous job on earth. His three predecessors had all been shot to death within the previous 20 months.

THE communists, with their social reform decrees, received an obstinate, violent reception. But it was the same reception accorded to every other emissary from Kabul who had ever tried to tell folks in the countryside what to do.

The bride price remained accepted practice. (The mullahs and laymen who support it even offer a modern rationalization: the bride's father normally holds the money as a kind of prepaid alimony to care for his daughter if her husband ever runs off.) Women are being equalized only very slowly, at about the same rate they have been for many years. Almost all still wear the traditional veil, or *chadri*, and most don't venture out of their houses into public.

In villages, tenants still split their crops with the landlord 50-50. But

landlord holdings are only about 50 acres each, unchanged from before the revolution. Afghanistan wasn't a country of large, Latin American-style plantations run by an ostentatiously wealthy upper class. Afghan landlords tend to hold recognized places in the tribal or religious structure. Many are mullahs. That may be why tenants in Afghanistan are angrier at the government than they are at the landlords.

One predictable result of the land reform program has been a substantial shortfall in wheat production. The main staple of most Afghan diets is a thin, brown wheat bread called *nan*, baked in the shape of a snowshoe. Non-communist diplomats in Kabul estimated that the 1979 Afghan wheat crop was down by at least 20 percent from the crop of 1978. Filling bellies required big imports from the Soviet Union, which itself was importing wheat from the United States.

Five-acre plots are less efficient than larger ones. So the government tried to increase plot sizes by encouraging cooperatives, offering them discount prices for seed and fertilizer. But seed and fertilizer often weren't available at any price.

Two other changes decreed by the original communist government were also evaporating in nonenforcement. One was the confiscation of houses, trucks, and other property from middle-class businessmen. Many refugees in Pakistan complained bitterly about the early confiscations. Apparently, after the Soviets invaded, the confiscations stopped.

A second decree ordered all foreign trade to be monopolized by state-run import-export corporations. This created an enormous black market. It also shifted economic reliance to camels, which can sneak anything—up to the size of a refrigerator—through unmonitored mountain passes to Pakistan, and away from trucks, which have to pass through monitored checkpoints. After the Soviet invasion, the decree was changed so that only basic staples were controlled. But by that time, the government was generally helpless to enforce anything it said, except by on-the-spot deployment of troops.

ALL this points to the notion that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan not to create a communist revolution, but to end one—or at least postpone it for many years.

The critical decision for the Soviets really came with the original communist coup of April 1978, when they suddenly encouraged their communist allies south of the border to end more than thirty years of carefully balanced Afghan neutrality. Why they did that is a wonderful question, still without certain answer. Selig S. Harrison, a former *Washington Post* correspondent now with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has compiled an impressive case that the Soviets did *not* make the first move to tip that careful balance, but, rather, that our side did.

The Carnegie Endowment is a think tank that tends to attract State De-

partment types from the Democratic party mainstream. It certainly is no hotbed of radicalism. Harrison, a specialist in West Asia and frequent visitor to the region, first argued his case in a *Washington Post* "Outlook" article on May 13, 1979—before the Soviets actually invaded.

He argued that the U.S.—or its ally-at-the-time, Iran—made the first move against the neutralist tradition by trying to swing the Afghan government toward an anti-Soviet alliance. That suggests that the Soviets reacted defensively. Harrison calls the 1978 communist coup in Kabul "one of the more disastrous legacies of the shah's ambitious effort . . . encouraged by the United States . . . to roll back Soviet influence in surrounding countries and create a modern version of the ancient Persian empire."

Harrison relates* discussions he had with Iranian foreign ministry officials from 1974 to 1977 in which they told him of their plans to bring Iran and Afghanistan closer together. This would begin with a \$2 billion aid program through which Iran would supersede the Soviet Union as Afghanistan's major benefactor. An Iranian-funded rail and highway network would open Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, supplanting Soviet trade routes.

In return, Iran was exercising considerable influence over the Afghan government. Harrison says he was told that the SAVAK (Iranian secret police) office in Kabul was as strong as the KGB office, and was helping Prime Minister Mohammed Daud identify and eliminate communists with high government or military jobs. Daud had maintained good relations with the local communists, but at Iran's urging he broke off this liaison. In 1975, at Iran's urging, forty Soviet-trained officers were removed from senior army posts, and replaced with officers trained under new agreements with Egypt, India, and Pakistan.

Harrison says Daud told him that Afghanistan "must adapt to the new realities" of Iran's oil wealth and desire to dominate the region with U.S. weapons. In March 1978, encouraged by the shah, Daud signed a treaty with Pakistan in which he guaranteed not to help the Baluch or Pashtun separatist movements. Daud then visited Egypt and Saudi Arabia, invited the shah to Kabul in June, and accepted an invitation to visit President Carter in Washington in September. This was not a schedule evincing a carefully balanced neutrality.

On April 17, 1978, Mir Akbar Khaiber, an Afghan communist leader, was murdered. Harrison suggests that Daud's interior minister arranged the murder. A week later, seven top communist leaders were arrested. Two days after that, April 26, a purge swept hundreds of perceived communist sympathizers out of government jobs. And two days after that came the coup, now hyperbolized as the "Saur [April] Revolution," in which Daud was murdered, and Noor Mohammed Taraki, the communist leader, took over.

*In the article and in an interview.

It is hard to believe he did so without assurance of Soviet backing; in any event he quickly got such backing.

Conceivably, the Kremlin had grown alarmed over the threat of a string of Islamic states with U.S. military alliances all along the Soviets' southern border. The string, from Turkey to Pakistan, linked up to the Chinese enemy on the east. That is the picture Harrison draws, and rather compellingly. On the other hand, how much of a true threat little Afghanistan could ever be to the Soviet Union is a fair question.

But one way or another, the Soviets in 1978 made the same mistake Washington had made so often. They surrendered to temptation and took a poke at the tar baby, never realizing what they were getting themselves into. Less than two years later, Afghanistan was in turmoil. If Moslem rebels overthrew the Soviet puppet government, they might produce a militant anti-Soviet state, just as Iran had become a militant anti-American state by fighting and defeating a U.S. puppet. And Afghanistan is on the Soviets' own border. So the Soviets swung the other fist at the tar baby.

THE map of the world that is commonly used in Europe and its former colonies in the Eastern Hemisphere is one that Americans are unaccustomed to seeing. The "world" consists of Europe and Asia, with northern Africa and Australia thrown in, but the Western Hemisphere excluded, as if it didn't exist. On a map that could be seen on many Afghan walls, each country was a different color. The Soviet Union was purple.

From 15 feet away, the world appeared to be one big purple blob, surrounded by little dots of yellow, pink, orange, and green. China, in red, had a definite presence, as, to a lesser degree, did Saudi Arabia in yellow. The only other country on that huge land mass that looked like anything at all worth bothering about was India, which was also purple.

How must events look to one who lives in the middle of that huge purple Soviet blob that stands in the middle of the whole world? What was Afghanistan? Was it one of the little yellow dots, or little red ones, or little pink ones? What was Italy? Switzerland? Pakistan? Thailand? Japan? If one of those little dots started to cause trouble, wouldn't the easiest thing be to just color it purple, too?

But the paint wouldn't stick, and the Soviets couldn't get it back in the tube. Almost nobody in Afghanistan wanted communism. They rebelled. And the more they were repressed, the *more* they rebelled. The Soviets invested tremendous armed power in the hands of Afghan soldiers with Soviet advisors. But this force on loan didn't work. So the Soviet army came down—not to heat things up, as it appeared to Americans, but to try to cool things off.

The land reform program was immediately declared a success—and cancelled, or at least "phase one" of it, the redistribution, was. "Phase two,"

the allotment of seed and fertilizer, was promised. The confiscation of private property was stopped, and compensation was promised for property already confiscated. Promises were immediately made that the import-export business would be returned to private hands, except for a few staples. "In the next ten years, the private sector will have a more important role," an official declared. "We won't make everything public."

All attempts to go out to the villages, where at least 80 percent of the people lived, were called off. The villages were visited only by helicopter gunships and dive bombers, which were in no position to inquire into the enforcement of female equality laws. The new president, Karmal, was from the Parcham, or "flag" wing of the Communist party, as opposed to the Khalq, or "people's" wing, which had produced the other two communist presidents. The Parcham was traditionally more moderate. Obviously, the whole revolution was being called off.

The Soviets had all kinds of plans to industrialize Afghanistan. The main exports had been natural gas (which went to the Soviet Union in exchange for cheap, refined gasoline) and agricultural products, mostly fruit and nuts. What little industry Afghanistan had—metal work, cement, plastic shoes, and textiles—was for local use. (Sadly, some of the industries were owned by Uzbeks from Soviet Central Asia, who had fled south to Afghanistan to escape Soviet rule in the 1920s; after fifty years it caught up with them.) The Soviets planned to revive the economy with fertilizer factories, factories to process cotton into exportable textiles and cottonseed oil, and even a petroleum refinery.

But it was too late for all that. The Soviet intervention in 1978 had touched off a revolution that was only going to get worse as the Soviets intervened more. Tight Soviet information control prevented anyone from fairly reporting on how the war was going and how high Soviet casualties had risen, but certainly they were well up in the thousands. Probably no one in the Kremlin had guessed how big a commitment it would take to subdue this little country, if indeed it could be subdued at all. With another can of worms open in Poland, the whole Soviet military apparatus was in danger of being tied down. From all evidence, it had been a giant miscalculation.

THE United States had an opportunity to make its own miscalculation in 1980, but apparently avoided it. In the months after the invasion, when the situation was still a front-page "crisis," Pakistani president Zia ul-Haq made a pitch for enormous U.S. military aid. What he proposed, in essence, was that he replace the now-deposed shah of Iran as America's "main man" in western Asia, on a scale no smaller than the shah's. The U.S. wisely turned him down.

The U.S. did offer \$400 million in aid, plus help in recruiting Saudi Arabia and West Germany to supply additional aid. That would seem pretty

significant. But General Zia called it "peanuts." He wanted to at least double the size and strength of his 450,000-man army.

Zia's spokesmen made clear that his first order of business would be to tighten his grip on Baluchistan by deploying far more forces there and buying a lot of high-tech radar and communications gear. Even the civilian aid in the package he wanted was to build roads, airports, and other infrastructure in Baluchistan. To the extent these were nonmilitary, they would have been a good thing. But in context, the improvements were clearly part of a military program.

As for Pakistan's planned military buildup, of course, it wasn't the Russians who were worried, but the Baluchs, the Indians, and the Pakistanis. Things hadn't been going well domestically under Zia, the American ally. Only Saudi Arabian aid had prevented Pakistan from defaulting on its foreign debt. Prices of commonly used goods were controlled, so a black market dominated commerce, and merchants were shaken down by soldiers demanding "protection" money to avoid prosecution under the myriad trade restrictions.

Meanwhile, the wife of former president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who herself probably would have won an election for president simply because her husband had fallen martyr to Zia, was held under house arrest. Even though cancer was diagnosed, she continued to be held there for many months without treatment until finally she was allowed to fly to Europe, perhaps too late to contain the malignancy. A prominent journalist, his newspaper banned, was also held in solitary confinement in jail while a series of severe illnesses progressed untreated until they threatened his life.

Doing nothing is a thankless way for a national leader to win political popularity or even historical recognition. It gets no publicity. Most people are never aware of what it is the leader hasn't done. Yet it is often the correct course to follow in international affairs. Brezhnev may have gone to his grave wishing he had followed it in Afghanistan. Certainly it was the correct course when Jimmy Carter refused to bestow on Zia ul-Haq, as he had on Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, all the benefits of membership in the "free" world.