

Letters to The Times

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The Times welcomes expressions of all views from readers. Letters should be kept as brief as possible and are subject to condensation. They must include signature, valid mailing address and telephone number, if any. Pseudonyms and initials will not be used. Because of the volume of mail received, unpublished individual letters cannot be acknowledged. Send to:

Letters to the Editor, Los Angeles Times,
Times Mirror Square, Los Angeles, CA 90053

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Regarding Graham Allison's observation about the "common wisdom" that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a "calculated step" in a plan to obtain a warm-water port ("A Remarkable Realism on Afghanistan," Op-Ed Page, Feb. 17), the evidence is that the late shah of Iran, with U.S. knowledge and approval, began the series of events that culminated in the carnage that followed the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Toward the end of creating a modern Persian empire, in 1974 the shah initiated an aggressive program to persuade the Afghans to abandon their Soviet-tilted neutrality in favor of a Tehran-centered dependence. The shah's offensive included a \$2-billion aid program, heavy broadcast and print propaganda, and a very active branch of the CIA-trained Iranian secret police, SAVAK, operating out of Kabul.

Although President Mohammed Daud acknowledged the unpleasant history of Iran-Afghan relations,

he felt compelled to "adapt to the new realities." This adaptation led to the dismissal, at SAVAK's behest, of Soviet-trained military officers, and plans to ban all political activity in Afghanistan except for that led by Daud.

The Soviets, who had treated the two rival Afghan communist parties with benign neglect, woke up to the implications of an Iran-dominated Afghanistan and engineered the unification of the two parties. The new communist movement, and other opposition elements, suffered intensified repression under the hard-line interior minister, Abdul Qadir Nuristani.

In April, 1978, coinciding with disconcerting visits (in Soviet eyes) by Daud to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Afghan communist leader Mir Akbar Khaiber was assassinated, with all the evidence pointing to Nuristani. This was followed by massive arrests and purges of communists.

In the face of a planned visit by the shah of Iran to Afghanistan, and Daud's plan to meet President Carter in Washington, Daud himself was assassinated on April 28. Afghan communist leader Nur Mohammed Taraki took control of a pro-Soviet regime, and the rest is history.

There can be no excuse for the Soviet Union's murderous efforts to control a people who rebelled against its initial heavy-handed methods. But neither is there evidence that the Soviets would have embarked on a violent program to acquire more influence in Afghanistan if Washington had restrained its megalomaniac client from interfering with a fragile, 30-year-old neutrality.

Containment of the Soviet Union has been the dominant strategy of Washington's foreign policy establishment for three decades. In Afghanistan, peaceful competition instead of Cold-War aggression would have saved thousands of lives and untold anguish for the Afghan people.

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