

Radio Address to the Nation on the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan

December 28, 1985

My fellow Americans:

Today I'd like to talk to you about a matter of vital importance to our country and the world: the struggle for a free Afghanistan. It's been 6 years since the Soviet Union invaded that nation, 6 years of utter hell for the Afghan people who still fight on in the name of the ideals upon which our own nation was founded: freedom and independence. To demoralize and defeat the Afghans, the Soviets have unleashed the full force of their modern weaponry. Poison gas has been rained down from the air upon Afghan settlements. Massive attack helicopters have been used against mere villages. Hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians have been injured or killed, and countless tiny mines have been strewn across the countryside to maim and blind Afghan children.

Today Soviet troops inside Afghanistan number nearly 120,000. And in the face of this brutal onslaught, the Afghan people still refuse to surrender -- is surely a miracle. And in this holiday season of renewed faith in miracles, it is surely fitting for us to honor and pray for those brave men and women. These courageous people have shown the world that the Soviets can never achieve the outright subjugation of the Afghan mind and spirit that they seek. The Afghan people are too proud, too fiercely determined to fight on. The Soviets understand this. They know that, in a sense, the battle for Afghanistan has shifted from the mountains of Afghanistan itself to the wider field of world opinion. So it is that the Soviets are prolonging the war and blacking out news about the daily atrocities which they're committing. They're waiting for world attention to slip, for our outrage to wane. Then, they believe the support which the free world has been providing to the freedom fighters will dwindle. The Soviets at that point will have effectively cut off the freedom fighters' lifelines, and although the mujahidin may never surrender, the Soviets will have achieved indisputable control of the country. An entire nation will have been strangled.

My friends, in the name of human freedom, we cannot, we must not, allow that to happen. From the first, the United States has insisted on a settlement of the Afghan conflict that ensures the complete withdrawal of all Soviet troops. We're doing all that we can to see that a settlement comes about. Indeed, in my discussions with Mr. Gorbachev in Geneva, I made it clear that the presence of Soviet forces in Afghanistan represent an obstacle to the improvement of American-Soviet relations. As long as the Soviets insist upon a policy of aggression, they must face the fact that free men will oppose them. The Soviet Union has always presented itself as a champion of anticolonialism and national liberation; history presents a different picture.

But if, at any time, the Soviets choose to withdraw from Afghanistan, we will place no barriers in their way. The sixth round of United Nations negotiations aimed at achieving a political settlement in Afghanistan has just come to an end with no significant change. If the Soviets want progress, they must simply put forward a timetable for the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan and for the restoration of the rights of the Afghan people. As I said, the United States will do everything in its power to make this the course which the Soviets choose. Indeed, we're prepared to serve as a guarantor of a comprehensive Afghan settlement so long as it includes the complete withdrawal of foreign forces within a fixed timetable; ensures genuine independence, not de facto Soviet control over the Afghan people and their government; and allows the millions of Afghan refugees to return to their homeland in safety. Only then can the process of national reconciliation and rebuilding Afghanistan begin and the killing of Russians and Afghans alike come to an end.

My friends, I want to ask for your help to make sure that those who struggle in Afghanistan receive effective support from us. Indeed, such support is a compelling, moral responsibility of all free people. What takes place in that far-off land is of vital importance to our country and the world. Certainly the struggle in Afghanistan is of great strategic military importance. Yet the most important battle involves not guns, but the human spirit -- the longing to be free and the duty to help the oppressed. If the free world were to turn its back on Afghanistan, then, in a sense, the free world would become less free and less humane. But when we support the Afghan people, we become caught up in and ennobled by their struggle for freedom. Isn't that what America is always -- what it has always stood for and what we should stand for in 1986 and beyond?

Until next week, thanks for listening. God bless you in the coming new year.

Note: The President spoke at 9:06 a.m. from the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, CA.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/122885a.htm>