

Statement on the Ninth Anniversary of the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

December 27, 1988

This has been an historic year for Afghanistan. For the Afghan people, years of determination in the face of great adversity have been rewarded by the promise of peace. On April 14 in Geneva, the Soviet Union formally agreed to withdraw all of its troops from Afghanistan by February 15, 1989. The agreement required that in the first stage the U.S.S.R. remove half of its forces from Afghanistan within 90 days—a task they met. I fully expect them to honor their obligation to withdraw completely by February 15.

Nine years ago today, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in a brutal attempt to prop up an unpopular and authoritarian regime. Today we all know the outcome of this tragic mistake. Rather than achieving its aim, the Soviet action resulted only in destruction and continued suffering for the Afghan people. More than 1 million people are thought to have died or been injured, while at least one-third of the population was forced to take refuge in neighboring Pakistan and Iran or to flee to the large cities of Afghanistan to escape the carnage in the countryside. Even today, as February 15 approaches, the Soviets continue offensive military operations in Afghanistan. The introduction of new weapons and the escalation in the use of Soviet warplanes in bombing raids against Afghanistan call into question the Soviet commitment to a peaceful solution.

At every turn, it is the determination of the Afghan people and the valiant freedom fighters, the Mujahidin, that stays the advance of tyranny in Afghanistan. We are proud to have supported their brave struggle to regain their freedom, and our support for this noble cause will continue as long as it is needed.

Self-determination, the right to freely choose one's own destiny, has been the central point of the Afghan struggle. The Afghan people have clearly demonstrated that they will resist any effort by outsiders to impose a leadership on them. We have held that any decision about the government in a free Afghanistan will be—must be—the free choice of the Afghan people alone. With the end of foreign occupation, I am confident that the Afghan people will be able to take charge of their own affairs and get on with the formidable task of rebuilding their country.

This will be my last statement as President marking the occasion of the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the date will long be remembered not as yet another anniversary in a continuing occupation but, God willing, as a reminder that the Afghan people are determined to be free, regardless of the odds. The men and women of Afghanistan are an example to those anywhere in the world who would call themselves free. If liberty comes with a price, the Afghan people have more than paid it for themselves and for the future generations. In the name of the free people of the United States, I again salute the resolute people of Afghanistan and wish them Godspeed on the tasks still before them.

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