

## Statement on the Observance of the Afghan New Year

March 20, 1982

The Afghan New Year, which begins today, dawns on a nation in turmoil. The traditional celebration on March 21, 1982, will be stifled by the stark reality of the suffering of a people under occupation or in exile from the intolerable conditions in their homeland. The year ahead appears to offer the prospect of a continuing bitter struggle and even wider devastation, rather than the blessings of peace and prosperity, which are the natural right of the Afghan people. Our heart goes out to the Afghan people in these terrible times.

We cannot accept the transparent Soviet rationale for their invasion of Afghanistan, namely, that they were invited in by the Afghan Government. How can the Soviets explain the mysterious death of the President who supposedly invited them in and his replacement by a Soviet nominee who had conveniently been living in Eastern Europe? Nor can we accept the Soviet claim that the cause of the conflict in Afghanistan is external interference on the part of powers other than the Soviet Union itself. There has, indeed, been external interference in Afghanistan. But that interference has been committed by the Soviet Union itself, which, utterly without provocation, invaded that free and nonaligned nation and imposed its will on an independent people.

Nevertheless, let me make clear that, to the extent that legitimate Soviet security interests may be engaged along the Soviet border with Afghanistan, we are confident that these interests can be adequately protected through negotiated understandings. Virtually the entire community of nations is already on record as supporting the concept of a return to the previous status quo, in which Afghanistan was a nonaligned nation threatening no one.

The war against Soviet aggression is a hard and lonely struggle. It is waged in remote mountain valleys far from the reach of international media. We want to penetrate that wall of silence with the powerful Voice of America. Therefore, I have decided the Voice will begin broadcasting as soon as possible in Pushtu, complementing the broadcasting we are already doing in Dari. The brave men and women most directly involved in the fighting need to know we are with them. We will now be communicating with them in the two major languages of Afghanistan.

On this solemn occasion, I would like to appeal directly to President Brezhnev to join with us and other like-minded nations in a genuine and intensive search for a peaceful resolution of the tragic conflict in Afghanistan. A sensible and creative proposal was put forward last year by the European Community for a two-stage international conference on Afghanistan. Obviously, the principal purpose of such a conference—or of any realistic negotiations—would be to engage the Soviet Union in a serious discussion of a settlement involving the prompt withdrawal of their occupation force from Afghanistan. For this reason, we and others were particularly disappointed that the Soviet Union rejected this proposal. Today I call on Mr. Brezhnev to reconsider that rejection.

The tragedy of Afghanistan must not be allowed to drag on endlessly. This conflict imperils the stability of the region. It has seriously poisoned the international environment. Afghanistan itself is being brutalized. The suffering of the Afghan people is immense. I earnestly hope that the Soviet Union will join with us in an urgent effort to bring a swift withdrawal of its forces to end this needless conflict.

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