

Statement on the Third Anniversary of the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

December 26, 1982

At this holiday season when most Americans are warmed and comforted by their family relationships and the blessings of this country, it is hard for us to realize that far away in a remote and mountainous land a valiant people is putting up a fight for freedom that affects us all. No matter how far removed from our daily lives, Afghanistan is a struggle we must not forget.

Afghanistan is important to the world, because the Afghan people are resisting Soviet imperialism. Three years ago on December 27, 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and installed a new Communist leader to head the Marxist regime that had taken power in 1978. For the first time since the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Soviets used a large-scale military force outside their borders and Eastern Europe to try to impose their will. If this aggression should succeed, it will have dangerous impact on the safety of free men everywhere.

Three years after the invasion, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan is not a success. Even with the augmentation of their forces to close to 105,000 men this year, the Soviets, with the puppet Karmal regime, have not been able to control the countryside or secure many cities. They have failed to rebuild the Communist-controlled Afghan Army and to create an effective government.

This is due to the spirit and will of the majority of the Afghan people and to the mujahedin, the freedom-fighters, who continue to resist the Soviet invaders. In the face of repeated offensive campaigns during the spring and summer of 1982, the mujahedin were able to drop back and then regain their positions once the Soviet forces had withdrawn. Their forces and their will remain intact.

We must recognize that the human costs of this struggle are immense. With the more intense fighting of 1982, casualties on both sides rose, and the civilian population suffered more than ever before. Crops and fields were destroyed by the Soviets, trying to deny to the mujahedin the support of the local population. Homes, and even entire villages, were leveled. We have convincing proof chemical weapons have been used by the Soviets against the Afghans. The refugee population has continued to grow, both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, as peasants flee the destruction of war. It is a sad but inspiring story.

The United States does not intend to forget these brave people and their struggle. We have said repeatedly that we support a negotiated settlement for Afghanistan predicated on the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops. We joined the vast majority of the world community at the United Nations again in November in support of a resolution calling for a settlement along these lines. Just a few weeks ago, during his visit to the United States, I discussed with President Zia of Pakistan the need for a solution to the Afghanistan problem. We are both committed to a negotiated settlement that will return Afghanistan to the ranks of independent, nonaligned nations.

We in the United States sincerely hope that the new leadership of the Soviet Union will take advantage of the opportunities the new year will no doubt offer to achieve a solution for Afghanistan. The American people do not want to see the suffering and deprivation of the Afghan people continue, but we will not grow weary or abandon them and their cause of freedom.

It is our hope for 1983 that a free, independent Afghan nation will again find its place in the world community. We will not cease to support Afghan efforts to that end.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/122682a.htm>