

Foreign Media Analysis

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WORLD PRESS ASSAILS SOVIETS ON SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF AFGHANISTAN INVASION

"Seven years ago, the Soviet Union rolled across its borders into Afghanistan and set off a barbarism that continues to this day." -- Canada's Toronto Star

This paper is based on USIS Post-reported commentaries and editorials in selected newspapers from December 19, 1986 through January 8, 1987.

In tone and extent press commentary closely resembled that surrounding last year's sixth anniversary. Immediately before and after the December 27th anniversary of the invasion, newspapers of varying ideological stripe from numerous countries sharply criticized the Soviets for their occupation of Afghanistan. But in early January commentary began to focus more closely on the purported Soviet desire for a political settlement in Afghanistan.

A quantitative analysis of about 100 editorials and commentaries on Afghanistan in selected papers indicates:

- o Almost 50 editorials, from China to Zaire, condemned the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.
- o Support for the Soviet occupation was limited to editorials in two Communist papers (L'Humanite in France and The Patriot in India).
- o 30 commentaries focused chiefly on whether recent Soviet overtures for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan were genuine. Half of the 30 called the overtures mere propaganda while the other half called them encouraging.
- o The remaining 18 editorials could not be easily categorized.

Gorbachev Wants Out...But How Badly? Press Split Over Soviet Intentions

A series of Soviet actions regarding Afghanistan received widespread coverage during the examined time period. These actions included:

- o The release of dissident physicist Andrey Sakharov, who had been exiled following his criticism of many Soviet policies, including the occupation of Afghanistan.

- o A cease-fire proposal by Afghan leader Najibullah to begin January 15, 1987.
- o Visit to Kabul by Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and Party Secretary Dobrynin in early January to endorse the cease-fire proposal.

A variety of papers agreed that after seven years of costly intervention the Soviets were anxious to find a way out of Afghanistan. But the press was divided as to whether the recent Soviet initiatives were genuine. About half considered recent Soviet overtures as mere propaganda aimed at influencing world public opinion. These papers felt the Soviets would withdraw only on their own terms, with a pro-Soviet regime left in power. Italy's centrist Corriere della Sera summed up this position: "...Gorbachev is impatient and wants to get rid of the Afghanistan ball and chain -- an obstacle to his international policy, especially in Asia...[But] one thing is clear: the Soviet Union has given up on a military success in Afghanistan but is not willing to suffer a political defeat. The Red Army will leave only when rebels lay down their arms..."

Others contended that nothing short of a total Soviet withdrawal would be acceptable. For example, Japan's liberal Mainichi said "if the Soviet Union truly desires this [peaceful settlement] it should carry out a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan."

Conversely, about 15 commentaries welcomed the Soviet initiatives as encouraging and asked the U.S., Pakistan and the Afghan rebels to cooperate in a political settlement. Several papers noted Gorbachev's reported design to improve relations with Asian countries through a political settlement in Afghanistan. Pakistan's Nation -- traditionally critical of the Soviet occupation -- wrote, "the fact that the Soviet Union has persisted in its efforts to find a way out of the deadlock on Afghanistan does offer a glimmer of hope."

Press Calls for Pressure on Soviets

Several papers across the political spectrum called on the world community to do more to bring about a Soviet withdrawal. Brazil's conservative La Prensa said "as long as the free world fails to take a more severe stance, the situation of Afghanistan under aggression will hardly change." But these commentaries did not propose concrete actions.

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Press Sources

Western Papers

Australia

The Australian, independent
Sydney Morning Herald, independent
Melbourne Age, independent

Britain

Times, conservative
Daily Telegraph, conservative
Guardian, liberal
Independent, centrist
Financial Times, independent

Canada

Ottawa Citizen
Toronto Star, independent

France

Quotidien, right-of-center
Figaro, conservative
Les Echos, economic
Liberation, left-of-center
Le Matin, socialist
Humanite, communist

Italy

Il Giornale, conservative
Il Tempo, conservative
La Stampa, centrist
Corriere della Sera, centrist
La Repubblica, left-of-center

Holland

Algemeen Dagblad, conservative

Spain

El Pais, liberal

Switzerland

Journal de Geneve, conservative
Basler Zeitung, middle-of-the-road

West Germany

Die Welt, conservative
Frankfurter Allgemeine, conservative
Stuttgarter Zeitung, liberal

Other Papers

Argentina

La Prensa, conservative
La Nacion, moderate
La Razon, pro-government

Bangladesh

Dainik Bangla, government-managed
Ittefaq, largest circulation
Sangram, Islamically-oriented

Brazil

O Estado de Sao Paulo, conservative
Jornal de Tarde, conservative

China

People's Daily, Communist Party organ

Egypt

al-Ahram, semi-official
al-Akhbar, government-affiliated
al-Gumhurriya, government-affiliated

Hong Kong

New Evening Post, pro-PRC
Hong Kong Daily News, independent

India

The Statesman, English language daily
Hindustan Times, independent
Indian Express, independent
Patriot, pro-Moscow

Israel

Ha'aretz, independent

Japan

Sankei, conservative
Mainichi, liberal

Pakistan

Muslim, leftist
Jang, largest daily
The Nation, major English language daily
Pakistan Times, government-supporting
Nawa-I-Waqt, independent
Morning News, government-supporting

South Korea

Chosun Ilbo, conservative
Dong-a-ilbo, liberal

Thailand

Bangkok Post, independent
Nation, independent

Zaire

Elima, major Kinshasa daily