

The Continuing Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan

Remarks by Senator Robert Dole in the Senate of the United States

Mr. President, on Sunday, March 21, all across the United States, Americans will be observing "Afghanistan Day" as a way of honoring the resistance of the Afghan people to intolerable aggression.

As Co-Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitors and encourages compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords, I must emphasize that the invasion and continued occupation of Afghanistan is a blatant violation of all ten of the Principles guiding relations between states which signed the Helsinki Final Act. Most blatantly violated are principles dealing with respect for sovereign equality, refraining from the threat or use of force, the inviolability of frontiers, the territorial integrity of states, non-intervention in internal affairs and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples. The Soviet invasion and occupation of a formerly independent and non-aligned state has severely damaged the international climate, has done great harm to East-West relations and has severely reduced the level of trust and security among all states.

Repeated efforts by the Soviet Union and others to justify this invasion and continued occupation--which has sent one-fifth of the entire nation into exile--have been rejected by virtually all objective observers. No one can seriously believe that a small, neutral, non-aligned country in any way threatened the security of the Soviet Union. The fictitious Soviet claim that its forces were invited into Afghanistan by the Afghan government pursuant to the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1978 was ironically lighted by the murder of the Afghan Chief of State shortly thereafter.

THIRD WORLD JOINS IN CONDEMNATION OF USSR

Efforts to defend the Soviet invasion and occupation are as hollow and unconvincing today as they were in January and November, 1980 and November, 1981 when the United Nations General Assembly approved three resolutions calling for the immediate withdrawal of foreign -- that is to say, Soviet -- troops from Afghanistan, the restoration of Afghanistan's non-aligned status and respect for Afghanistan's right to self-determination.

Widespread and spontaneous resistance by the Afghan people continues, vividly demonstrating the hatred and defiance which the Soviet occupation and the Babrak Karmal regime have evoked. Mass defections from the Afghan Army, the persistent inability of the Babrak regime to develop viable political support and the continued activity of Muslim freedom fighter units, leave the unmistakable impression of the disintegration of political and social stability.

GAS WARFARE ON CIVILIANS

Attempting to counter this instability, the Soviet occupation forces have resorted to increasing violence. Tactics including the bombing of villages, the destruction of crops, and helicopter gunship attacks on innocent civilians have been used from the start of the invasion and are well-documented. There are recent reports that such tactics have escalated and there is increasing evidence of other forms of warfare being used -- forms of warfare banned for years by international law.

This new expanded Soviet policy of repression has caused widespread misery among the Afghan people. Villages and mountain valleys have been denuded of their populations. Whole villages have been reduced to rubble and their populations subjected to reprisals for allegedly aiding or harboring Freedom Fighter units.

The world has been shocked by reports of the use of chemical and biological warfare in Afghanistan. On March 8, the United States announced that it had firm evidence that at least 3,000 people in Afghanistan had been killed by poison gas and other chemical weapons in 47 separate incidents between the summer of 1979 and the summer of 1981. The possession and use of toxins is a violation of both the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention as well as the rules of customary international law of armed conflict -- and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan can be characterized as nothing but armed conflict.

From the Afghan Freedom Fighters themselves comes evidence that weaponry utilized by Soviet occupation forces has been devastating. Reports of the use of immobilizing gas bombs, incendiary bombs and camouflaged bombs in the form of toys and pens are proliferating. These weapons are being employed by the Soviet Union in direct contravention of agreed provisions of a convention, now awaiting ratification, which prohibits the use of land mines, booby traps and incendiary bombs against civilians. Reliable reports have been received of the use of a variety of gas bombs and napalm-like substances which have caused continual crying, nausea, temporary paralysis, loss of consciousness and death.

In the more that two years since the invasion, the Soviet Union has not taken even the first step towards disengagement and, in fact, has increased its presence and the level of violence it has employed in total disregard for its obligations under international law and the Helsinki Final Act. Thousands of political prisoners have apparently died while in the custody of the Babrak regime and many thousands more have simply "disappeared". Torture and arbitrary arrests and imprisonment continue unabated, while about three million Afghans, nearly one-fifth of the pre-invasion population, have fled the country.

The United States continues to favor a political settlement which would lead to restoration of a genuinely independent, neutral non-aligned Afghanistan with a government acceptable and responsible to its people. I emphasize that this can only be accomplished by putting an end to the massive violence and terrorism now being employed against the Afghan people and by the prompt and total withdrawal of all Soviet troops. Otherwise, the Soviet Government makes a mockery of its international obligations and, indeed, of the Helsinki process itself.

Mr. President, I urge my colleagues and fellow citizens to remember the brave resistance of the Afghan people, whose struggle against their Russian invaders is now well into the third year. This Sunday has been set aside as a day to mark and honor their struggle by President Reagan and the Congress, and is being observed by other nations all over the world. Let the day serve as a reminder to those who cherish liberty of its fragility, and as a warning to those who have tried to crush it.