

EXCURSUS 1

Vladimir Solovyov on AFGHANISTAN AND THE EVIL OF OPTIMISM

Unlike the recent war in Lebanon, which was televised (albeit somewhat censored), the war in Afghanistan is reported solely by rumor. Even the Western journalists disguised as Afghans in turbans and baggy pantaloons are evoked to supply, by dint of that operatic masquerade, what is lacking in their own reportage: facts and plausibility.

Sometimes these accounts seem entirely fantastic, though editors insist that their reporters have traveled with the partisan caravans along the mountain paths of Afghanistan—trips that last many days, cover many miles, and involve great hardships. If one were to add up the figures reported by various correspondents during the past two years regarding the number of Soviet soldiers killed, wounded, and taken prisoner, as well as the aircraft, tanks, and armored cars destroyed by the Afghan rebels, one would have to conclude that the Red Army no longer possesses either personnel or functioning equipment and that the rebel victory will take place, if not today, then tomorrow at the very latest.

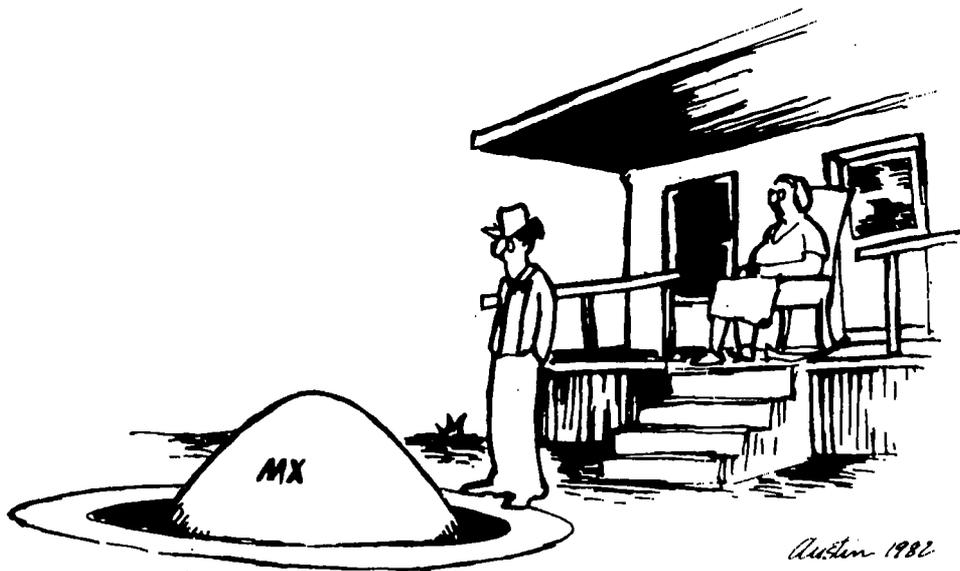
In their reporting on last fall's offensive by Soviet and loyalist Afghan troops in the Panjshir Valley—the biggest military operation since the Soviet invasion in December, 1979—American journalists appeared to be in competition as to who could be most optimistic. One of them, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, compared the heavy losses of the Soviet and government forces (three thousand killed and wounded, hundreds of defectors, dozens of tanks and aircraft destroyed, etc.) to the almost total absence of rebel losses. Another, appearing in *Time* magazine, told of Soviet bombs that do not explode and of how the rebels use the detonators as mines. Even when Soviet bombs do explode, no great harm is done. For example, this same *Time* reporter noted that Soviet planes dropped 223 bombs on the village of Parandeh (one stands in awe of such skill at counting), killing only one peasant and a cow.

As a natural consequence of this wave of optimism, various suggestions have been made as to how the Soviet Union can find a face-saving way out of Afghanistan—the unconditional or stage-by-stage withdrawal of its troops, the Finlandization of Afghanistan, and so forth. Meanwhile the Soviet Union, having driven the local population out of seized territory, is rapidly building large military air bases—one at Shindand in the western part of the country and another in the narrow corridor leading to China. It is also constructing a strategically important railroad from its border to Kabul and a bridge across the Amur-Darya. Judging from appearances, it has no intention of leaving the country it conquered with relative ease.

The implausibility of the reportage from Afghanistan is especially astounding against the background of Israel's defeat of the Palestinian guerrillas, who—unlike the Afghans—enjoyed the active financial and military support of the Arab world and the Soviet Union. If Israel, a nation of three million, could deal successfully with the Palestinians in Lebanon, can we imagine that a superpower like the Soviet Union quails in front of the Afghans? Is this not an aberration of vision, such that people are seeing not what is in front of their eyes but what they want to see?

This aberration leads in turn to the hyperbolic notion that Afghanistan is Russia's Vietnam—this despite the fact that there is little basis for comparison. The war in South Vietnam was carried on by North Vietnam with the aid of two superpowers, China and the USSR, thus assuring a constant supply of weapons. Afghanistan is a single nation occupied by the USSR. Within this nation are ten or a dozen groups of *mujahedin* to whom the West gives enormous moral support—and little else.

Even more important, however, is the difference between the Soviet Union and the United States. In the former there is no public opinion, no free press, no opposition, no pacifists, no draft-dodgers, no liberals—not even a Daniel Ellsberg. It is fear alone that welds together the last empire on earth. Even if, over a ten-year occupation of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union were to lose 55,000 soldiers, as America did in Vietnam, that fact (1) would not become known to the Soviet people, (2) would not provoke mass protests, and (3) would not compel the Soviets to leave Afghanistan.



"The government man said he didn't think your mower could hurt it."

or even to agree to concessions. Totalitarian countries are much less sensitive than are democracies to public opinion, and to losses of human life as well. What are the losses in Afghanistan compared to 20 million Soviet citizens killed in World War II and at least as many under Stalin's terror?

The price in men and matériel for the acquisition of Afghanistan is one the USSR can afford. This is the cost of a network of bases that could be used against China. Afghanistan has no strategic value other than its proximity to China; and the 100,000 Soviet troops stationed there are no other than reinforcements of the million troops on the Sino-Soviet border. The Soviet Union has conceived a need for the territory of Afghanistan, though not for its population. It is a matter not of occupation but of annexation. In addition to those killed, there are three million Afghan refugees—a fifth of the population of Afghanistan. And this latter process is continuing.

As for the optimism in the American press, it benefits no one quite so much as the Soviet Union. Sympathy for Afghan refugees and indignation at Soviet actions now have been completely supplanted by admiration for the fantastic feats of the rebels. Under cover of romanticism and heroics, the leveling of Afghanistan and its people continues unabated.

Vladimir Solovyov, a Russian-born historian and journalist, regularly covers foreign affairs for Worldview and other American publications.

EXCURSUS 2

Thomas Land on AFRICA CONFRONTS ALCOHOLISM

The first working model for research into alcoholism throughout the African continent has been erected by specialists engaged in a long-term study at the University of Lusaka in Zambia. It may well be adapted by many other universities, for most African governments are alarmed by a disastrous increase in alcoholism within their borders in the wake of social upheavals that accompany the growing industrialization of the region.

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), which has assisted the Zambian project, is planning a global campaign against the makers of alcoholic beverages and the marketing of their products in the developing countries, similar in some ways to the recent drive against the marketing of infant formulas. A spokesman for WHO explains that "the evidence of increasing damage in a large number of developing countries suggests that alcohol-related problems constitute an important obstacle to their socio-economic development and are likely to overwhelm their health resources unless appropriate measures are taken."

Specialists now talk in terms of a "worldwide epidemic" of alcoholism in both the rich and the poor countries. The developing regions—including even the Islamic world—are particularly exposed.

Alcoholism is a special health risk for vast populations living in conditions of overcrowding, poverty, and squalor. The current climate of family breakdowns and widespread migration of landless peasants away from the depressed countrysides of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and into the anonymous expanding cities may well exacerbate the problem during coming years.

Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the teetotaling Zambian president,

has been disturbed by the spread of alcoholism in his country for many years. Nevertheless, his administration has been unable to formulate effective prevention, control, and treatment programs in the absence of adequate basic research data. Now a set of reports assembled during years of work at the Lusaka university has been published; and Professor Muyunda Mwanalushi, the former dean of humanities, expects them to lead to rapid reforms at home and a spate of related investigations based on the Zambian model in other African countries.

Beer is traditionally consumed in Zambian society, but drunkenness used to be infrequent. Drinking had a place in ceremonial occasions as an offering to ancestral and other spirits. The availability of drink was restricted to the harvest periods, and the alcohol content of beer was relatively low.

Urban pressures have now created a figure unknown in traditional African society: the lonely drinker setting out to get drunk. Statistics assembled by the Zambian investigators show that heavy drinkers are increasingly those of younger years and are becoming more violent—at a rapidly escalating cost to society. In fact, alcohol is considered a significant contributory factor in 24 per cent of all cases brought before the courts and in more than half of all traffic accidents. The problem is so acute in the entire region that the government of neighboring Zimbabwe recently was forced to order the closing of thousands of drinking establishments in an effort to cut crime.

Professor Mwanalushi proposes a set of immediate reforms that are likely to be considered a matter of urgency in the region. They include the establishment of a legally constituted commission on alcoholism and alcohol abuse to undertake continuing research and to provide advice to government departments and other concerned organizations in a broad context of national development. Significantly, the research workers urge social planners to recognize the reliance of governments on the alcohol industry for raising tax revenues and its indirect effect of encouraging alcoholism. They also seek increased restrictions on the availability of alcoholic drinks, particularly to young people, and the promotion of education and alternative social activities.

Thomas Land writes from Europe on global affairs

EXCURSUS 3

Mitzi M. Brunsdale on PSYCHIATRY AND SAMIZDAT

Evidence of growing human misery under Soviet communism continues to filter through the sad literature of *samizdat*, "self-published" material gathered, written, and circulated in the Soviet Union at a risk unthinkable to most citizens of the West. Since 1968 *A Chronicle of Current Events* has been at the fore of *samizdat* literature, edited by necessarily anonymous members of the loosely organized dissident movement in the USSR. Despite abrupt changes in its leadership—the latest in February, 1981, when the KGB confiscated all copies of *Chronicle* number 59 and arrested its editors—the publication asserts "that its strictly factual style is maintained to the greatest degree possible." Such objectivity is scrupulously preserved in English versions of numbers 1 through 11 available in Peter Reddaway's *Uncensored Russia* (American Heritage Press,