

# Afghan political labyrinth

**I**t was, as the Soviets would say, another peaceful, democratic change of government. On May 2, Russian tanks and armored infantry surrounded Afghan army barracks in Kabul, the national radio and the ministry of the interior. From hilltops overlooking Kabul, dug-in Soviet tanks pointed their guns at key civil and military targets.

For the Soviets, the latest change in Kabul came easier than in 1979 when their special force *Spetnaz* troops had to go in and execute President Hafizullah Amin, the puppet Afghan leader who had fallen out of the Kremlin's favor. This time, the old leader, Babarak Karmal, went quietly. In came his replacement as Moscow's new *Gauleiter* of Afghanistan, Dr. Mohammed Najibullah.

The change in regime is significant. Karmal was booted out primarily because he failed to unite an Afghan Communist party bitterly divided by the feuding Parcham and Khalq factions. Other factors causing Karmal's ouster were continued defections from the Afghan puppet army and the apparent Soviet belief that he was not prosecuting the war with adequate vigor or ruthlessness.

Najibullah should prove more pleasing to his Soviet patrons. Najibullah, a medical doctor, rose to prominence — or infamy — running the *Khad*, Afghanistan's dreaded secret police. The *Khad* is staffed at senior levels by Russian officers and reports directly to KGB Moscow Central rather than to the Afghan puppet regime in Kabul. Even in a cruel nation, the *Khad* has established a frightful reputation for widespread torture, brutality and mass murder.

The Soviets are clearly hoping that Najibullah will bring to the scene a blend of renewed ferocity and subtle diplomacy. As the palace coup was taking place, Soviet and Afghan troops were just finishing the largest offensive in years against the southern guerrilla base complex at Zawar.

## Punch



"Thank you for making me realize that I made the right choice in life."

## ERIC MARGOLIS



After savage fighting, in which many hundreds of Afghan *moujihadin* died, communist forces overran the important supply bases, capturing great quantities of munitions and arms.

Elated by this success, the Soviets are hoping that Najibullah will manage to somehow make the dispirited, press-ganged Afghan army into a viable fighting force. At the same time, they must also hope that Najibullah will end the deadly tribal and political enmity between the Khalq and Parcham factions.

The Khalqis come mainly from the Pushtun tribes while the Parchemis are largely from the Pathan tribes. Najibullah is a Pushtun but a member of the Parchemi faction. (If you have trouble understanding this, do not feel badly — few can follow Afghan tribal politics.) He may thus be an ideal mediator to end the fighting between communist factions that have undermined the government and army.

The war, under more vigorous leadership, may be expected to intensify, with increasing use of terror bombing and wholesale destruction of the rural population in non-communist areas. Desultory, UN-sponsored peace talks between Pakistan and the communists show no sign at all of progress. They are likely no more than a Soviet propaganda smokescreen designed to mask the genocide now occurring in the mountains of Afghanistan.

Najibullah has promised to eradicate "counter-revolutionaries" and "feudalists." This means anyone opposed to the Red Terror in Kabul. The *Khad*'s execution and torture squads will be working overtime to fulfil Najibullah's production quotas. There is even talk that communist forces may move against Afghan guerrilla bases in Pakistan.

Officials in Pakistan are deeply worried. As one told me recently, last month's American bombing of Libya seems to have created an unfortunate precedent. Moscow calls the Afghan resistance fighters "terrorists." The Soviets, fear the Pakistanis, will cite the same reasons and rationale as Washington did in Libya, bombing Afghan bases inside Pakistan as an "anti-terrorist" mission.

Tension along the Pakistani-Afghan border is high. Nor has the point been lost on Pakistanis that their own frequently rebellious Pushtun tribesmen in the Northwest Frontier Province (or Pushtunistan) are looking northward to their fellow Pushtun in Kabul, Najibullah.

Very bad news indeed for the five million Afghan refugees outside of the country and the millions more trapped inside the war-torn nation who are being slowly exterminated by Soviet bombs, mines, booby traps and poison gas. But no one seems to be doing anything about this, the world's supreme act of terrorism.