

The KGB's calling card

The enormous explosion at a Pakistani weapons depot last Sunday that killed more than 100 and wounded at least 1,100 was a jolting reminder that the Soviet Union is not about to cut and run from Afghanistan.

According to Pakistani military sources, three incendiary devices were planted in the large munitions dump lying in the heart of the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad—the latter Pakistan's capital. Inside the dump, which was controlled by Inter-Service Intelligence, Pakistan's national intelligence agency, were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of tons of munitions destined for the anti-communist resistance forces in Afghanistan.

Either Afghan or Soviet agents set off the blast that devastated Pakistan's capital and left some 6,500 unexploded bombs and missiles littering the streets. Initial reports that the disaster was accidental were an attempt by Pakistani authorities to play down the gravity of the event.

When smaller explosions occurred in a munitions factory near Lahore that was supplying the mujahedin with ammunition and the Islamabad office of the Saudi national airlines, the truth became painfully obvious.

In the week before the blasts, the Soviets had reluctantly agreed to allow the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to keep supplying the mujahedin with arms so they could keep their own military pipeline open to the communist regime in Kabul.

Great quantities of specialized munitions were being stockpiled for the muj in the Islamabad depot, probably enough for three months of sustained combat. Much of the munitions that blew up were probably allocated for an attack on Kabul once the Soviet troops had been withdrawn.

Worse yet, some of the munitions, such as Italian anti-tank mines, British anti-armor mortar shells and new 120 mm mortars, will not be easily or quickly replaced. Also reportedly destroyed were a quantity of precious Stinger missiles and anti-aircraft guns. This loss will most likely delay any muj offensive by many months.

Why so many vital weapons were stored in one place, and how communist agents managed to

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



evade usually vigilant Pakistani guards is a mystery. It may be that the blasts were caused by Afghan communist agents, acting independently of their KGB masters. But this is highly unlikely.

Chances are that either Soviet KGB or military GRU agents caused the blasts, which were neatly and professionally done. Besides hamstringing the mujahedin, the bombings were clearly meant to convey a pointed message to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China—all suppliers of arms to the Afghan resistance: Don't keep arming the muj.

The Soviets probably feel confident they can pressure a detente-hungry Reagan administration into closing down its arms pipeline to the muj. But the Pakistanis, Saudis and Chinese are far more mistrustful of the Soviets and are loath to abandon the muj—particularly when it is now becoming apparent that the communist regime in Kabul will receive strong Soviet and East Bloc support after the Geneva accords are signed.

The Afghan communists, contrary to initial expectations, are not about to collapse and Dr. Najibullah will not soon depart Kabul clinging to the struts of a Soviet helicopter.

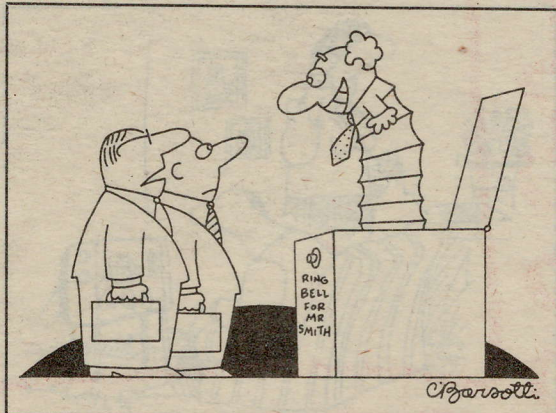
Moscow has now put Islamabad, Beijing and Riyadh on notice—and Tehran, too—that they can expect further sabotage attacks, or perhaps even conventional force assaults—unless they stop openly backing the Afghan resistance. At the same time, reports are coming out of Washington that the Reagan administration, in spite of its public commitment to keep arming the muj, will begin throttling back on arms deliveries to them as the Moscow summit draws near. All this spells bad news for the anti-communist coalition.

It is also clear that once Washington's protective mantle is withdrawn from the region, the smaller powers now supporting the muj, like Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, will become vulnerable to Soviet threats. Russian troops may pull out of Afghanistan, but Soviet power in the region will still command respect, or even obedience.

Those who are euphoric over the impending Soviet pullout should ponder these interesting developments. Soviet diplomats and commandos appear to be accomplishing what the Red Army has failed to do. We might also recall with unease John Kennedy's Cuban missile "triumph."

The world was told that the Soviets had backed down and agreed to pull their missiles out of Cuba. Only later did it emerge that the U.S. had secretly promised not to invade Cuba and to pull its intermediate range missiles out of Italy and Turkey. Some triumph. Will history repeat itself in Afghanistan? Whatever the case, the Soviet "peace offensive" has certainly gotten off with a bang.

Punch



"That's not Smith. Smith's not that tall."