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## Country Policy Statement--Afghanistan

### Background

Afghanistan remained outside the mainstream of international events as a backward and isolated buffer state between British and Russian power for over a hundred years. This power relationship changed significantly in 1947; component elements were the withdrawal of British power from the subcontinent, the creation of two relatively fragile independent nations out of British India, the rise of the Soviet Union as a major world power and the assumption by the United States of far-flung security and assistance responsibilities in the face of Soviet ambitions and pressures. In the early 1950's, the RGA decided to end its historic isolation and requested U.S. military assistance on the condition that some form of territorial guarantees would be extended by the U.S. This request was rejected by U.S. policy makers, who reasoned that American security guarantees were impracticable for isolated, land-locked Afghanistan and that, in view of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1926 (Neutrality and Non-aggression), a military and security relationship with Afghanistan might be considered provocative and result in a confrontation with the Soviet Union in an area in which Soviet power was strong and U.S. power vulnerable.

Rebuffed in this approach to the U.S. and concerned over Pakistan's increased military strength, as well as Pakistan's adherence to CENTO and SEATO, the Afghans responded to the Soviet Union's offers of large-scale military and economic assistance.

### Assessment

A. Afghanistan's proximity to the Soviet Union and its vulnerability to pressures from its northern neighbor make close relations with the Soviets imperative. This fact, plus the Afghans' continuing conviction that massive economic assistance - both from the Soviet Union and the West - is essential to Afghanistan's development, requires that the RGA pursue a carefully-structured non-aligned foreign policy. While the Afghans have recognized Communist China, seek close association with the neutralist camp of India, Yugoslavia and the UAR and are active members of the Afro-Asian bloc in the United Nations, they at the same time seek close and cordial relations with the United States, West Germany and other western states.

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B. The Afghans display an intense desire to maintain their national independence and territorial integrity and to develop their institutions and economy in directions and at a pace of their own choosing.

C. Although Soviet propaganda and non-aligned rhetoric against imperialism have some psychological impact on Afghans, their leaders traditionally have been inclined toward Western institutions, culture and ideals rather than to Soviet models. The decision to institute the experiment in parliamentary democracy which commenced in 1963 is clear evidence of this bias of the Afghan leadership, which in large part is due to the training in the West of a substantial portion of its members.

D. The Afghans' shrewd appreciation of the dangers inherent in overly-close ties with the Soviet Union have led them to consider an important American presence in Afghanistan indispensable to help them balance Soviet influence. Therefore, our economic and technical assistance has considerable political importance and assures us a significant level of influence without having to match Soviet economic assistance on a dollar for ruble basis. At the same time, the very considerable Soviet leverage in Afghanistan has established limits to U.S. influence.

E. Moscow has given its relations with Afghanistan a high priority - over a billion dollars in economic and military aid. The Soviets probably are reasonably satisfied with present conditions in Afghanistan where, using the methods available to any great power rather than direct intervention or active subversion, they have obtained the preponderant foreign influence and the potential of further expanding it. Through massive economic assistance, a virtual monopoly in training and equipping the Afghan armed forces, a favored position in Afghan trade, the careful dissemination of propaganda and the education in the Soviet Union of hundreds of Afghans, the Soviets can pursue a number of objectives: the limiting of U.S. influence and the prevention of any sort of Western alignment; obtaining Afghan support for their position on various international issues; and the use of Soviet foreign aid for the promotion of the state sector of the Afghan economy, so as to draw Afghanistan gradually into the "non-capitalist path of development".

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Given present conditions, the establishment of control over Afghanistan by means of direct intervention or by a major attempt at subversion to achieve an Afghan communist regime would not appear to be in the Soviet interest. Such action would cause serious damage to Soviet interests in other Afro-Asian areas where Soviet policy objectives currently have a higher priority than Afghanistan. For example, in its dealings with other neighboring states, such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, Moscow can represent the Soviet posture toward Afghanistan as a prototype of the kind of relationship it would like to establish with those states.

Parallel, however, with this policy of coexistence, the U.S.S.R. is also attempting to establish clandestine intelligence gathering and subversive assets which could be used in the event that: (1) new policy directions for the area were decided upon; (2) grave instability in Afghanistan appeared to threaten Soviet interests; (3) new Afghan leadership attempted to decrease substantially Afghanistan's current relationship with the U.S.S.R.; or (4) the struggle with Communist China demanded in Soviet eyes more direct control of this country.

F. Internally, Afghanistan is going through a difficult period of political and social reform. Since he emerged in 1963 as the principal power in the country, the King has attempted to lead his subjects from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy, while at the same time continuing the forced pace of economic development commenced in the mid-1950's under the authoritarian regime of Prince Daud. Political reforms, which have been essentially imposed from above, moved cautiously forward during 1963-64, but their progress since has been less even. The inability of the present Government (and its predecessor) to work effectively with an inefficient but assertive parliament, recurrent student unrest over the past year, a stagnant economy and the growing strength and organization of disruptive, leftist factions have combined to raise questions as to the durability of Afghan democracy and its capacity for satisfying the demands of a slowly modernizing society. But the inevitable stresses caused by rapid social and political change in a traditional society still appear to be manageable. The king, whose role is of course crucial to the future course of political events, appears determined to proceed with the parliamentary experiment. This will require that he retain the backing of the principal power centers - the military, bureaucracy and the major tribes - and by and large he still has their support.

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### G. Special Problems

1. "Pushtunistan" - The "Pushtunistan" issue poses a continuing threat to favorable Afghan-Pakistan relations. This controversy, which concerns the question of self-determination for the four to five million Pushtu-speaking tribesmen living in the northwest frontier area of Pakistan, poses a dilemma for the RGA in satisfying vocal, pro-"Pushtunistan" politicians and at the same time not creating serious tensions with Pakistan. (40 to 50 percent of the population of Afghanistan is Pushtun.) A severe deterioration of Afghan-Pak relations over this intractable dispute - with another closure of the border - would seriously obstruct Afghan economic progress, create additional pressures toward Afghan dependence on the Soviet Union, especially in respect to foreign trade, and seriously impede our own activities in Afghanistan.

2. Afghan Defense Expenditures - The Afghans' determination to obtain greater security against a larger and militarily more powerful Pakistan, and to bolster the Government's control over a largely tribal and frequently unruly population, brought about a thorough-going modernization and expansion of Afghan military forces beginning in the mid-1950's. With Soviet assistance, the Afghan military have accumulated a variety of sophisticated weaponry, including MIG-21's, and defense expenditures have consistently hovered at about 20 percent of the national budget or roughly 1.1 percent of GNP over recent years. As the military have obtained the capability of defending the regime against any coalition of tribal and ultra-conservative religious elements and as acute tensions with Pakistan have diminished, deliveries of sophisticated weapons from the Soviet Union seem to have slowed. We have no knowledge of any supplemental arms agreements which might have been negotiated since January 1968, although some items may still be in the pipeline from earlier agreements. We have impressed upon Afghan officials the potential problem that their defense expenditures, or further acquisitions of sophisticated weapons, could cause us in terms of the Conte and Symington amendments, and counseled them to hold down defense expenditures. We have reason

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to hope that the RGA's awareness of this potential problem, plus the intense fiscal constraints it is under in its effort to find the domestic resources to sustain its development effort, will cause it to hold the line on defense spending and, possibly, in due course even reduce them.

H. The next five to ten years may be critical for Afghanistan. Externally, a growing Soviet presence in both Iran and Pakistan could affect our interest in keeping a neutral balance in Afghan policy. The same period could also set the pattern for Afghanistan's posture towards greater regional involvement. Internally, this period will likely see the evolution of political parties and of new political leaders, with a consequent sharpening of political differences, particularly between extreme left and right. Also, there will be a doubling or trebling of Afghanistan's university graduates, many of whom will face difficulty in finding a productive life in society, an increasingly informed public with rapidly increasing demands, and a weakening of the traditional institutions which in the past have given some security. At the same time, the new institutions will probably still be weak.

#### U.S. Objectives

The chief significance of Afghanistan for the United States is in the effect developments there could have on the area as a whole. We have long recognized that we have an important interest in this country in the sense that Afghanistan cannot be viewed in isolation from our overall area interests; historically, developments in Afghanistan have had a direct impact on neighboring countries and this is still the case. Excessive Soviet influence in Afghan affairs would materially increase the psychological and subversive vulnerability of Iran, Pakistan and, to a lesser degree, India—countries to whose security the U.S. has given a high priority.

Our objectives in Afghanistan are:

1. An independent and non-aligned Afghanistan, willing and able to impose limitations on Soviet influence in its affairs. Following from this:

a. The maintenance of internal security and political stability;

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b. The development of governmental institutions conducive to political stability in a traditional society which is undergoing rapid social change;

c. Afghanistan's economic development at a rate to meet the rising expectations of a more politically conscious people.

2. The development of closer Afghan regional ties through the improvement of relations with Pakistan and Iran.

### Strategy

Our strategic aim is to maintain a substantial U.S. presence in Afghanistan to enable us to continue developing offsetting influences to the Soviet presence in the country. It would not be realistic for us to seek the exclusion of Soviet influence, nor would our interests be served by competing with the U.S.S.R. for preeminence in the country. We do not want Afghanistan to become a serious friction point in U.S.-Soviet relations and, it would appear, the Soviets share our view.

Our presence in Afghanistan takes the form of economic aid programs, diplomatic representation, modest assistance in military training, a Peace Corps program and informational activities.

Our strategy will be to exert influence on Afghan policy through building on the base of the cordial diplomatic relations we now enjoy with Afghanistan. The Afghans appreciate the manner in which the U.S. has respected Afghan non-alignment. Our general posture should be maintained but combined, as in the past, with firmness when the RGA strays from neutrality on issues important to us. We should seek opportunities to coordinate actions and policies, to explain our positions on key issues even though we know the RGA will not agree or change its public position, and to seek Afghan views on issues important to it. This posture can effectively, and relatively inexpensively, be strengthened through periodic visits of high-level U.S. officials to Afghanistan.

A. Specifically, we can maintain a significant presence in Afghanistan and, barring major new Soviet initiatives, maintain over the next five years roughly the present balance between U.S. and Soviet influence, through the following lines of action:

1. A vigorous and selective economic assistance program - The U.S. has had a varied and active aid program over the last

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decade or more. The USAID Mission through its activities provides the bulk of the American presence in Afghanistan. (AID employees currently account for about 220 of the total of approximately 450 in the official American community.) Over time, our assistance has been a mixture of infrastructure projects (roads, airfields, irrigation and reclamation, etc.) and technical assistance (including participant training in the U.S.). At this point, our activities are almost entirely confined to technical assistance, largely concentrated in the key areas of education and agriculture. While we have no further developmental loans planned at the moment, we should be prepared to examine worthwhile project proposals as they occur and to consider periodic commodity assistance as a supplement to our technical assistance. To the extent it is compatible with our other aid objectives, selection of future projects and/or eligible commodity lists should serve the objectives of the U.S. export expansion program. Our program effort should be continued at roughly its present level; substantial cuts below this level could lead both the Afghans and the Soviets to conclude that we are "pulling our chips out".

Alternatively, we could retrench, cutting our economic support and reducing our presence substantially. But Afghanistan is far from capable of doing without external economic assistance, and for us to retrench significantly would in effect be a recognition of unchallenged Soviet influence on Afghan actions. This would adversely affect our area interests. On the other extreme, we could greatly increase our economic role in the country. But limitations on our resources, the inability of the RGA to handle massive new aid infusions and the danger that such a policy would be misconstrued by the Soviets make this line impractical and unwarranted.

a. Increased Involvement of Other Donors - While continuing our own assistance, we should at the same time attempt to increase the involvement of other Western countries and such institutions as the IBRD and the Asian Development Bank in the Afghan development process.

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b. "Self-Help" - We should urge the RGA to maximize Afghanistan's own contribution to the development process. The RGA's economic "self-help" performance has not been fully satisfactory and the Mission has been obliged to press top officials of the RGA to make greater efforts to mobilize domestic resources for development. We should continue to use the leverage which we derive from our assistance to induce the RGA to improve its performance and we should also remain alert to possibilities for coordinating our demarches with those of other present and potential aid donors - the IMF, the World Bank, West Germany, the U.N. Development program and possibly the Asian Development Bank.

c. Afghan Defense Expenditures - We should continue to impress upon Afghan officials the necessity to restrict expenditures in the military field, including those for sophisticated equipment, in order not to jeopardize the continuation of our economic assistance through the imposition of penalties under the Conte/Long and Symington amendments.

d. Encourage more private-sector activity, domestic and foreign - Afghanistan's investment climate is improving, opening up more opportunities for an effective boost to Afghan development through private initiative and investment. We should continue encouraging improvements in investment legislation and administration and the creation of needed credit facilities. We should also encourage useful private investment in Afghanistan from various western countries, including the United States, as the opportunities for viable investments increase.

2. Maintain an active, multi-pronged USIS Program - U.S. information, cultural and English teaching programs can contribute much to a better Afghan understanding of the United States, its people, its history and its policies. Also, by fostering a better understanding of Western approaches to national development, sovereignty and independence over the next ten years, our informational activities can contribute indirectly to the evolution of representative government in Afghanistan, which we consider desirable. The small (three officers) but effective USIS unit is now adequate to our needs. Increased emphasis on target group programming, improved methods of communications and the maintenance of active international visitor and student exchange programs are required to effectively promote understanding of U.S. policies. The information and cultural efforts of the Mission will be primarily directed toward the future leadership of the country, particularly university students and the academic community.

3. Continue the sizeable Peace Corps Program - Our large Peace Corps Program, which emphasizes close keying to projects to which the RGA gives real priority, is a significant part of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. The Volunteers' activities and the close contact they have with their Afghan counterparts are a very useful leaven in the process of social change. While the number of Volunteers in the country at any given time fluctuates, the present contingent of about 220 represents about the optimum figure.

4. Continue our MAP - We should continue to bring a few selected Afghan military officers to the U.S. for training each year. The officers we have selected in the past under our military assistance (training only) program provide our only entry into the politically-important Afghan military establishment, which is extremely vulnerable to Soviet influence. Moreover, a few (e.g., the Chief of Staff of the Afghan Air Force) have already risen to high command positions and more can be expected to do so over the next few years. The present program level, which allows us to train between 20 to 30 officers a year for \$0.2 million, is about right. Significant increases in our military assistance would probably be imprudent because of Afghan reluctance to provoke an adverse Soviet reaction and the danger of upsetting the delicate foothold we now hold in the Afghan military. On the other hand, slight increases in program funding may be in order to keep the number of officers trained at the present level.

B. Encourage and assist Afghanistan to closer regional ties - The promotion of closer ties between Afghanistan and its free-world neighbors, particularly Pakistan and Iran, can contribute to diminishing Afghan dependence on the U.S.S.R. and to regional stability. In Afghan-Pak relations, we must recognize that our influence with either Government in respect to the chronic "Pushtunistan" issue is very limited, as we found out in the 1961-63 crisis, but we must be alert to the danger signals and stand prepared to use whatever influence we have should a crisis develop. In the long run, probably the best that can be hoped for is a continuing low heat issue while both countries gradually integrate their tribes into their national societies and develop greater economic and commercial ties. Meanwhile, the U.S. should do what it can to encourage closer economic ties between the two countries and greater cooperation on such matters as transit trade.

The climate may be the best in many years for efforts to develop Afghan-Iranian relations and we should investigate carefully areas of possible cooperation to ascertain whether we can play an unobtrusive, useful role. The Afghan and Iranian positions on the long-standing Helmand Waters dispute are now sufficiently close to make a settlement possible. We should consider offering technical advice, should both sides request it, and possibly encourage the World Bank or some similar multi-lateral group to extend its good offices to help resolve the remaining outstanding problems. We should be careful, however, in offering assistance, not to provide opportunities to either party to defer decisions among themselves.

C. Encourage Afghans in the continuation of the "experiment in democracy" - Although we are in no way the authors of the movement toward representative government now underway in Afghanistan, the U.S. and the West are associated with it in the minds of many educated Afghans and its demise might reflect adversely on our position in the country. So long as the parliamentary experiment continues to be wisely directed, the new trend is clearly in our interest because, over the long run, representative government offers the greatest flexibility and the best prospects that Afghanistan can successfully cope with the social stresses arising from rapid modernization of a traditional society. Moreover, a politically free Afghan society should be the most resistant to the cumulative effects of continued Soviet propaganda and any future, major attempt at subversion .

All our programs, and particularly our information and cultural activities, can indirectly make an important contribution in discretely encouraging Afghans in their demonstrated preference for patterning their political institutions on western models.

It is not in our interest to become directly involved in any way in Afghan domestic political affairs, however, and in this subtle and sensitive area our efforts to promote support of the experiment in democracy through personal contacts should be closely controlled. The brunt of this effort should fall on the Ambassador and selected high-ranking Mission officers who, in their contacts with Afghan decision-makers, particularly the King and those members of the Royal Family who support the reform movement, can express our moral support of the experiment.

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We should recognize that the sudden loss of the King or a decision by him to sharply slow down or even suspend the parliamentary experiment would create serious tensions and possibly produce a reversion to the strict authoritarian rule Afghanistan previously experienced. We should be prepared to maintain essentially the same posture in our relations with Afghanistan in such a situation, provided that any successor regime shows the same determination to preserve the country's independence, its freedom from excessive Soviet influence and its non-aligned policy.

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