

NNNNVV LEA342RJ0695  
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DE RUSLKA #3626/1 1291355  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O R 091510Z MAY 79  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3759  
INFO RUMJPG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 522  
RUSQD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMAEBAD 5729  
RUMKRA/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 207  
RUDTC/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1562  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1624  
RUSBAZ/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 6796  
RUFNPS/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3225  
RUGHR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 164  
RUMHQA/CINCPAC  
RUSNAAA/CINCEUR

*Incoming*  
*POL JAGL*  
*CHG*  
*RF*  
*CHRON*

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O I D N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 3626

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD  
CINCEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

REF: 12065: GDS 5/9/75 (FLATIN, BRUCE A.) OR-M  
CLASS: PEPR, MASS, PINS, AF, UR  
SUBJECT: (LOU) THE CURRENT SOVIET ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: STATE 113474 (NOTAL)

1. (LOU) SUMMARY: SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN HAS INCREASED PERCEPTIBLY IN RECENT WEEKS, BUT HAS NOT YET REACHED THE EXAGGERATED LEVELS SO OFTEN REPORTED IN THE WORLD'S PRESS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS MIGHT INTERVENE IN THE DOMESTIC CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN, OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT THE USSR WILL PROBABLY TRY TO AVOID PLUNGING INTO WHAT COULD WELL BECOME A VIETNAM-TYPE TRAP. END OF SUMMARY.

2. (C) MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT SELECTED ELEMENTS OF THIS REPORT WILL BE USED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN ANSWERING PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL QUERIES (REFTEL, THE EMBASSY PRESENT BELOW DATA ON THE CURRENT SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN THE RELEASE OF WHICH WOULD NOT PREJUDICE SERIOUSLY OUR OPERATIONS HERE, NOR ENDANGER OUR SOURCES.

3. (LOU) QUANTITATIVELY, THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN HAS NOT INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY DURING RECENT MONTHS, IN SPITE OF THE DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS REMAINS SLIGHTLY OVER 1,000 -- AND THERE ARE PROBABLY STILL ABOUT 500 CIVILIAN ADVISORS FROM THE USSR IN THE COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THE SOVIET EMBASSY DENIES IT, WE BELIEVE THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF THEIR DEPENDENTS HAVE BEEN EVACUATED TO THE USSR.

(LOU) QUALITATIVELY, THE INFLUENCE OF SOVIET ADVISORS APPEARS TO HAVE BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED IN RECENT WEEKS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE VISIT OF THE USSR'S GENERAL G.A. YEPISHEV, CHIEF OF THE MAIN POLITICAL DIRECTORATE OF THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES, EARLY IN APRIL. ALTHOUGH THE ANNOUNCED REASON FOR YEPISHEV'S VISIT WAS TO UPGRADE THE "POLITICAL EDUCATION" OF THE AFGHAN FORCES, HE CAME WITH A LARGE STAFF OF SOVIET OFFICIALS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LOOKED INTO SEVERAL ASPECTS OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE AFGHAN ARMY AND AIR FORCE. WE ARE ALSO AWARE OF INCREASED SOVIET GUIDANCE IN VARIOUS CIVILIAN MINISTRIES.

5. (LOU) THE BEST QUALITY EQUIPMENT WHICH THE USSR HAS PROVIDED TO AFGHANISTAN THUS FAR HAVE BEEN MIG-21 AND SU-7 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MI-24 HIND-TYPE HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS AND T-62 TANKS. IN SPITE OF FREQUENT RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, THE AFGHANS HAVE NOT BEEN SUPPLIED WITH MIG-23 AIRCRAFT.

6. (LOU) THE EMBASSY HAS WEIGHED THE WIDESPREAD RUMORS THAT SOVIET PILOTS FLY SOME OF THE OPERATIONAL MISSION OF AFGHAN AIRCRAFT AGAINST GUERRILLA TARGETS. WE HAVE NO SOLID EVIDENCE RULING OUT THIS POSSIBILITY, BUT, UNTIL SUCH AN AIRCRAFT CRASHES WITH SOVIET PERSONNEL ON BOARD, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SUBSTANTIATE THESE RUMORS. BECAUSE SOME OF THE NEW EQUIPMENT, SUCH AS THE MI-24 GUNSHIP, IS MORE SOPHISTICATED THAN THE OLDER AFGHAN ARMAMENT, SOVIET PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO BE ENGAGED IN INTENSIVE TRAINING ACTIVITY. THERE ARE SEVERAL REPORTS THAT THE MI-24S HAVE BEEN USED OPERATIONALLY AGAINST THE INSURGENTS. BECAUSE THIS IS A SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEM, WE DOUBT THERE HAS BEEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO TRAIN AFGHANS TO FLY THESE ALONE. THEREFORE, IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT SOVIETS COULD BE HELPING TO FLY THOSE MI-24S BEING USED OPERATIONALLY, AS WELL AS PROVIDING TRAINING TO AFGHAN PILOTS.

7. (LOU) BECAUSE THERE ARE SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS ASSIGNED THROUGHOUT THE AFGHAN GROUND FORCES -- IN ALL CASES DOWN TO THE BATTALION LEVEL, AND ALSO WITH SEVERAL SMALL SPECIALIZED UNITS, IT WOULD BE UNUSUAL IF SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE NOT CAUGHT UP IN MILITARY OPERATIONS FROM TIME TO TIME.

8. (LOU) THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IS: CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS ENTER AFGHAN CONFLICT? WE CAN ONLY OBSERVE THAT THAT POSSIBILITY CANNOT BE EXCLUDED.

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