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(b)(3)-50 USC 403
(b)(3)-18 USC 798
(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

(U) CRYPTOLOGIC ALMANAC

(U) The Soviet Union's Invasion of Afghanistan, 25 December 1979

(U) When the USSR sent troops to prop up a shaky communist revolutionary government in neighboring Afghanistan in December 1979, it could not foresee that it was entering into a decade-long struggle that would cost (an admitted) 15,000 dead and much treasure. The airlift of Soviet soldiers began in the early hours of 25 December 1979; the last of an estimated 115,000 troops withdrew from Afghanistan on 15 February 1989.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The U.S. SIGINT System, led by NSA, followed the progress of dramatic events in the region,

(U) Although Afghanistan's location gave it considerable importance to the Soviet Union and to Iran, the country was largely ignored by the United States after World War II. A circa-1950 study for the Joint Chiefs of Staff flatly reported, "Afghanistan is of little or no strategic importance to the United States."

(U) Afghanistan's extended period of crisis began in 1973. King Nazir Shah left the country on 25 June for eye treatments. On 17 July, while he enjoyed the medicinal mud baths at Ischia, Italy, Afghan troops seized the palace in downtown Kabul and other key positions; the coup-makers ended Afghanistan's 40-year-old monarchy. The following day it was announced that a "Central Committee" had named Muhammad Daoud Khan, former prime minister and the king's first cousin, as founder, president, and prime minister of the Republic of Afghanistan, with personal control of the defense and foreign ministries. The country then suffered a five-year struggle fought by three main factions: the ineffective but well-intentioned Daoud administration, Muslim traditionalists who resented Daoud's attempts at modernization and centralization of authority, and the communists. Daoud initiated a series of progressively harsh and repressive sanctions.

(U) In April 1978, after a funeral for victims of a political assassination, Daoud ordered the arrests of leftist leaders. Rioting and demonstrations, followed by more arrests, broke out in Kabul. On 27 April, a

Approved for Release by NSA on 06-18-2010, FOIA Case # 57527

coup led by a small number of military officers began; within a day the communist leadership had been freed from incarceration, and Muhammad Daoud Khan and his family were dead. Diplomats in Kabul reported the "official" account of the coup -- the Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan had elected a new prime minister.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] At the end of May, open radio broadcasts from Moscow warned that the Soviet Union would intervene directly if a crisis arose in Afghanistan. The two countries signed a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation.

[redacted]

[redacted]

(U) News events during 1979 reflected turmoil in one of Afghanistan's neighbors. In January 1979 revolutionaries ousted the ailing Shah of Iran, and in February the Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to implement his Islamic revolution. A month later, a group of about 100 men attacked and entered the U.S. embassy compound in Tehran, Iran. Iranian authorities restored order about five hours after the attack began. Another invasion of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, this time in October by students, resulted in permanent Iranian control of the building and the capture of embassy personnel as hostages.

(U) The surprising cascade of unfavorable events in Iran meant that timely information on the region, including Afghanistan, would be even more important to U.S. decision-makers.

(U) The internal security situation in Afghanistan steadily deteriorated during 1979. On 14 February U.S. Ambassador to Kabul Adolph "Spike" Dubs was snatched off the street by four terrorists and kept hostage at the Hotel Kabul; he was killed during a botched rescue attempt. In mid-March a rebellion broke out in Herat; reportedly, thousands of people were slaughtered, including Soviet advisors and their families. Large numbers of Afghan Army personnel deserted. A network of guerrilla training camps began to develop across Afghanistan's border with Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Iran. In June an army mutiny in Jalalabad was suppressed.

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(U) While the leaders of the Soviet Union and Afghanistan displayed amity in public and sought to show the friendship between their peoples, the presence of a large number of Soviet advisors sparked armed resistance in the Afghan villages. By about mid-year the USSR started thinking about replacing the prime minister, and probably at this time began planning for a wholesale invasion of Afghanistan to preserve its new communist status.

[redacted]

~~(C)~~ The invasion started on Christmas morning. On 26 December the U.S. embassy in Kabul reported "Massive Soviet air operations into Kabul began on Christmas morning and have not stopped yet ... total flights may now exceed 150-200."

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~~(S)~~ In the afternoon of 27 December, [redacted] heavy fighting had broken out in the southwest section of the city, where the government had moved. At the same time, heavy weapons and small arms firing was reported in the vicinity of the Radio Afghanistan building adjacent to the embassy. At about 1615, Radio Afghanistan announced that Babrak Kamal, who had been prime minister under a former president, had carried out a coup.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] As it turned out, Soviet soldiers were now fighting the local citizens as well as insurgents, and were suffering casualties.

(U) By the end of the year the Soviets had 43,000 troops in the country. Tenuous control of the capital, however, did not mean control of the nation.

(U) Russia's intervention in Afghanistan was to last for ten years. In a convergence with the American experience in Vietnam, the long casualty lists, the inability to achieve decisive victory despite

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overwhelming military force, and the seeming inability of the leadership to resolve the stalemate led to dissent and considerable social/political turmoil in the USSR. Unlike the U.S. experience of the 1960s and 1970s, however, this turmoil loosened the communist system of control and hastened the end of the Soviet system.

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DRV FM: NSA/CSSM 123-2
Dated: 24 Feb 98
DECL ON: X1

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