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ARTEM BOROVIK, *The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990). Pp. 288.

VLADIMIR KUZICHKIN, *Inside the KGB: Myth and Reality* (Andrew Deutsch, 1990). Pp. 406.

LOUISE D'ESTRANGE FAWCETT, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Pp. 239.

REVIEWED BY FRED HALLIDAY, Department of International Relations, London School of Economics, U.K.

The first two of these books, although contrasting in style and provenance, combine to give a fascinating and in the main convincing picture of Soviet involvement with two neighboring states in the 1980s, Afghanistan and Iran. Taken together they should form part of the literature on Soviet policy towards what in the West was called "the northern tier" (in Russian *sredni vostok*, or Central East, as distinct from the more remote Arab lands of the *blizhni vostok* or Middle East).

The first book, on Afghanistan, is by a journalist on the weekly *Ogonyok* and is an example of glasnost at work within the former USSR. It took somewhat longer for glasnost to affect Soviet accounts of international, as opposed to domestic topics, but once it happened a great deal was revealed; by 1988 "international glasnost" had arrived in the form of more open, honest, and factual accounts of Soviet foreign policy and of criticism of old ideas and modes of expression, as well as of former allies who had hitherto been treated with care.

The second book, by Vladimir Kuzichkin, is more old fashioned. It contains the memoirs of a KGB agent posted to Iran from 1977 to 1982, before his defection to the West and it too tells us a lot—as much about the workings of the Soviet state as about Iran. As with all defectors, there is evidence of concealment and an element of distortion, but the underlying story rings true.

Borovik's account of Afghanistan has often been compared to Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, and with some justification. It is a vivid, soldier's eye view of the war, with its pain, its maimings, its intolerable waits, its petty gains and losses, its bitter slang. Quarrels abound with officers and soldiers of other ethnic groups, and with busy-bodies sent from home. If there is no repetition of the mutilation of corpses and collections of hewn-off parts of the anatomy as recorded by Herr, it still records many cases of brutality towards the civilian population (one Soviet officer is quoted as praising Lieutenant Calley, the villain of My Lai). A gradual disillusionment of the Soviet soldiers with their leaders develops, but, as with the generation who fought in Vietnam, it is often ambivalent, both questioning the need for the war and its internationalist justifications, and criticizing the officials at home for not doing more to back the military on the ground.

As in Herr's Vietnam, so in Borovik's Afghanistan, the local political protagonists remain shadowy. There is the odd direct account of the mujahedin forces, and there was, on the evidence, a lot more negotiation over truces, prisoners, and food supplies between the Russians in Afghanistan and the guerrillas than there ever was in Vietnam. The Kabul regime's forces make the odd entry: there is little enthusiasm for their cause amongst the Russians, and Borovik, like all other observers, seems to have assumed the regime would collapse immediately after the Russian forces left. That it did not was of little comfort to the Russians, most of whom only wished to forget the place.

To anyone who was in Afghanistan in the early 1980s, before glasnost came about, this book has a particular fascination. In Kabul in late 1980 it was impossible to have any direct contact with Soviet forces: there were no trips to outposts or embattled positions, and even the figures for troop numbers and for casualties were suppressed. Military briefings had a

particularly generic air about them, officials confining themselves to vague assertions that the "bandits" were being overcome. About the only hard fact I could get out of Soviet officials at the embassy was that hepatitis was killing more troops than the war, a discovery that I noticed recurred, after I had reported it, in many U.S. official briefings for years afterwards. Borovik provides no overall analysis of the war, but he does take one to heart, the pained ambivalence of the Soviet soldiers. In the end it was not just their faith in the Afghan intervention and the role of the "limited contingent" within it that was shattered, but also the overall confidence in the secularizing, internationalist, and modernizing project of the Soviet Union. As he himself suggests, Afghanistan had something of the same impact, if less powerful one, on the regime's self-confidence as the Japanese defeat had on the czarist forces in 1905.

Kuzichkin's narrative is altogether less vivid but nonetheless powerful. He has, in essence, two messages. One concerns the Soviet state itself—its pervasive corruption and inefficiency, and the rivalry between the party's Central Committee, which sought to direct all international activity, and the more professional and judicious KGB. For Kuzichkin, the party is the source of corruption in the system, and he classes himself amongst those more educated younger people who initially hoped the system could reform itself. Not implausibly, he says that he attached great importance to the emergence of Solidarity in Poland in the period 1979–81: its crushing in December 1981 destroyed the hopes of his generation, much as the crushing of the Prague Spring had done for an earlier generation in 1968. His decision to defect to the West in 1982, by crossing the land frontier from Iran to Turkey at the post of Bazargan, followed from this disillusion.

On his other topic, Iran, Kuzichkin's account is of considerable atmospheric interest, but it contains little new in substance beyond the claim that the KGB made a secret but fruitless contact with Khomeini when the latter was still in Najaf. Life in the Soviet community in Tehran was obviously preferable to that back home, and there is much discussion of the infighting and corruption between the various individuals and institutions involved. The main Soviet espionage ring, around General Mogarebi, was broken up in 1977 and, by his account, the KGB and the embassy were ill-prepared for the revolution that began in 1978. They were involved in helping the Tudeh party to reestablish itself after decades in exile, but their attempts to establish links with the Mujahedin-i Khalq guerrillas collapsed when Saadati, their contact in the organization, was arrested and subsequently executed by the new regime.

As time passed, the Soviet position became more and more beleaguered: they were terrified that the Islamic radicals would do to them what they had done to the U.S. embassy, and hold the personnel hostage; hostile surveillance, and pass protests, hemmed the embassy in; the Tudeh, despite its attempts to ingratiate itself with Khomeini, was crushed by the regime, and the USSR, for all its protests, was unable to do anything to help them.

Like all defectors' accounts, Kuzichkin's has to be treated with some caution. His memoirs are rather like those of Anatoly Shevchenko, the former U.N. official who published his *Breaking with Moscow* some years ago: probably 80 percent truth, 10 percent exaggeration, 10 percent politically motivated fable. In Kuzichkin's case some points are rather obviously questionable: his claim to provide an account of the decision making behind the 1979 intervention in Afghanistan is hard to believe, since it is improbable that he, a not very senior KGB official, could have known what went on in such detail; his analysis of the Tudeh party's relationship with the Khomeini regime is unsound, since the real repression came in 1983, after Kuzichkin had left. On two issues he is suspiciously silent. One is his own role in the Tudeh's fall—it was reported in the Western press at the time that Kuzichkin had handed lists of Tudeh infiltrators to the British who had then passed them on to the Islamic Republic: while this may have been deliberately misleading, it needed comment. The second

issue on which he is silent is the Soviet role in frustrating the U.S. attempt to free the hostages in April 1980, the Tabas raid. Again, press reports after the event said that Moscow had tipped off then President Bani Sadr about this. No comment is not enough.

These revelations are, of course, accounts of what is now a bygone age. The KGB, the "limited contingent" and indeed the Communist party of the Soviet Union are no more. The Bolshevik revolution's approximately seventy-year interaction with the northern tier is over, and Russia for the first time in centuries no longer has a common frontier with the Middle East. Despite enormous amounts of propaganda on both sides—for and against communism—what is most striking about the overall record is how unsuccessful Soviet forays to the south were. We can only recall the telegrammed message which Victor Serge in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* recalls Lenin sending to Blumkin, the Comintern agent in the Gilan republic in northern Iran, in 1920: "All return home. Revolution in Iran now off."

If the Gilan republic was the first great instance of this, and the Afghani intervention the third, the second was Stalin's foray into Iran, initially in collaboration with the British, in 1941. The postwar crisis this occasioned in 1946, was the first great international episode in the cold war. As part of this story, Louise Fawcett's analysis of the 1946 Azerbayjani crisis is an important and lucid one: basing herself on a wider range of documentary materials than any previous historian, and analyzing the story at both the level of great power conflict and of intra-Iranian politics, she shows how Stalin was outmaneuvered by the Shah and by the Truman administration and was forced to abandon what were, in effect, Azerbayjani and Kurdish safe havens in the north of the country. She is particularly interesting on the complex relations between the Pishevari regime in Tabriz and the Russians, but shows how, whatever the depth of an indigenous Azerbayjani political movement, it was subordinated throughout to great-power considerations.

The Azerbayjani question has been noticeably absent from the more recent Islamic Revolution and its aftermath and there seems, as yet, to be little enthusiasm in southern—i.e., Iranian—Azerbayjan for unification with the now independent republic to the north; this is in contrast to the situation to the east, in the Tajik areas of Afghanistan, where some Tajiks seem to have entertained thoughts of uniting with the new Tajik republic. The contrast between the very real sense of Azerbayjani separateness shown in the 1946 crisis, and the absence of it in and after the revolution in 1978–79, underlines, however, how contingent these expressions of self-determination often are. The reason why Iranian Azerbayjanis seem to prefer to stay as they are is above all because they reckon they are better off in a larger Iran than in a smaller and probably more impoverished independent state. This "Puerto Rican" calculation may not, of course, last forever. The frontier, political and cultural, between Russia and the Muslim south has been fluid for some centuries: in this perspective the Bolshevik revolution may just have frozen for a period of a few decades a process of interaction and change that has been in progress for hundreds of years, and which shows no sign of abating.

DARYUSH SHAYEGAN, *Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution religieuse?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991). Pp. 266.

REVIEWED BY PATRICK D. GAFFNEY, Department of Anthropology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind.

The title of this provocative study poses a topical question in the broadest of terms. But the response that follows is considerably more specific. Although Professor Shayegan frequently generalizes to suggest that his answer has global implications, there is no mistaking