

Churches Urge Restraint on Afghan Crisis

By Religious News Service

America's religious community has sharply condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and most religious leaders have urged the U.S. to follow a policy of restraint in responding to the latest threat to world peace.

Beyond this, however, there are differing views on what to do. Those who had previously supported the SALT II treaty feel the current crisis need not kill the U.S.-Soviet arms agreement. No one seems to want to advocate American military replies to the Soviet incursion in Asia. But the question they are grappling with is over what to do if all peaceful means fail to get the USSR out of Afghanistan.

Dr. Claire Randall, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, deplored "the action of the Soviet Union, which has violated the integrity of the peoples and borders of a sister nation." She warned that "this kind of overt action in an already volatile area of the world increases manifold the risks of war," and urged the U.S. to "act with the same patience and restraint that it has used in dealing with Iran."

While calling it "tragic" that the Afghan situation has required the U.S. to defer debate and action on SALT II, the NCC leader said she felt such a delay was appropriate. At the same time, Dr. Randall affirmed that "disarmament is essential to the future peace and well being of the world," and expressed the hope that the delay "will not contribute to escalation of armaments nor make us forget the necessity of the SALT process."

The Soviet aggression prompted Pope John Paul II to make an unusually specific rebuke. Referring to Afghanistan by name, the pontiff stressed every country's right "to in-

dependence" and "the right of peoples to shape their own destiny in keeping with their patriotic and religious beliefs."

He added that "one cannot refrain from asking oneself about the motives that were able to unleash such grave events, posing such a grave threat to international de...nte."

Sister Dorothy Kinsella of Network, the Catholic social justice lobby, and a leader of the Religious Committee on SALT, asserted that "the Soviet move into Afghanistan should not erode our will for peace and slow our desire for nuclear disarmament." She said she did not think the SALT process is dead, but warned that "we can let it die, though, if our voices are not heard."

Greek Orthodox Bishop Maximos of Pittsburgh, chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the Greek Orthodox Synod of Bishops, took a more pessimistic view. He declared that "the Soviet action proclaims to the world that a major nation cannot be trusted and that ultimately its declarations of peace have been lies and expediency."

According to the Orthodox prelate, the Afghan situation means that "the SALT II treaty becomes a mockery and just one more broken hope of mankind. Treaties require sincerity. Sincerity has been done away with in Afghanistan. It seems that trust and cooperations are no longer possible."

Not everyone would agree with that statement however. Rabbi Arthur Schneider, director of the interreligious Appeal of Conscience Foundation, asserted that "you just can't reverse the clock" on international cooperation that has been made in the past. He held that neither the U.S. nor the Soviet Union is "closing all doors" toward further cooperation, and raised the possibility that

a non-governmental agency like the Appeal of Conscience Foundation could be a "conduit" in pursuing people-to-people exchanges that the two governments cannot at this stage.

The executive committee of the United Methodist Council of Bishops said that the fact that the invasion "occurred in a neighbor of Iran where the United States hostages are being held in defiance of international law and concerning whom our nation is continuing to negotiate intensifies the problem and our relationship to it."

The Methodist bishops advised that "during this time it is important for all Christians to consider prayerfully our responsibilities in regard to our national policy during this international crisis. We should support in every way possible the right of self-determination by the people of Afghanistan and its neighboring nations. We should encourage our nation's pursuit of international diplomacy through the United Nations as well as bilateral consultations."

Some religious commentators have expressed alarm that the United States may use military action in response to the invasion of Afghanistan. The Disarmament Program of New York City's Riverside Church, of which antiwar activist William Sloane Coffin, Jr., is senior pastor, declared that "the world has not seen such a horrendous breach of the peace as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan since the United States invaded Vietnam 15 years ago."

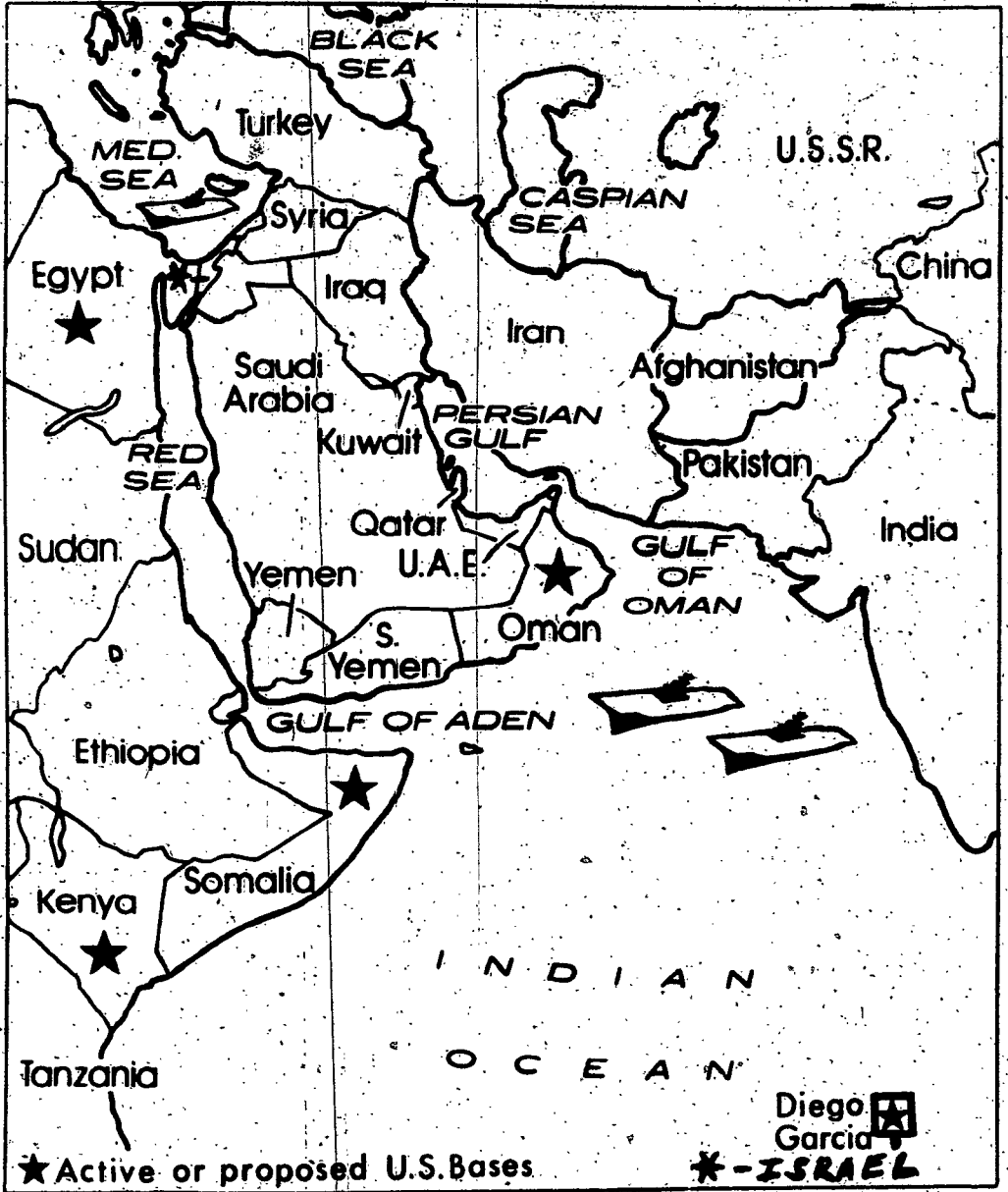
While condemning the Soviet invasion, the Disarmament Program advised that "any form of U.S. intervention, escalation of the military presence, or an increase in the defense budget, are unnecessary and inappropriate. Rather in this overkill world, Russia's challenge continues to demand restraint, study and understanding instead of an impetuous military response that could lead to a nuclear holocaust."

Eight Protestant leaders have criticized President Carter's plan to reinstate draft registration, asserting that the U.S. is "in no immediate danger" as a result of the Afghan crisis.

In a statement drawn up during the adjourned session of the 14th plenary meeting of the Consultation on Church Union (CCU) in Cincinnati, they expressed distress "that the Russian invasion of Afghanistan seems to be stampeding the United States into an ill-considered military buildup."

With regard to the planned reinstatement of draft registration, the Protestant leaders asserted that "there is no reason — beyond political expediency — for us to again impose regimentation on our youth."

Some religious leaders have made general appeals to the United Nations to do something. Others, like Bishop Maximos, held that the United States has been given "no other choice but either to change the site of this year's Olympic Games or else to withdraw."



The Soviet move into Afghanistan has led the U.S. to re-examine its presence in the Middle East and consider giving some permanency to America's already expanded naval force in the Indian Ocean. Active or proposed U.S. bases in Egypt, Oman, Somalia and Kenya, are indicated on this map provided by United Press International. (RNS)

But what if none of the peaceful means work? This question was addressed by Our Sunday Visitor, a national Catholic weekly, in an editorial entitled, "Paralyzing Dilemma." The paper commented that "in a world where violence and aggression have again become prominent means of settling disputes, we have ruled out the military alternative. We attempt to rely on reason in an unreasonable world. We have made peace our ultimate value in a world where ideology and aggrandizement are considered far more important."

Asking if there is a way out of this dilemma, the editorial concluded that "until that time when all the world regains a love for peace, or we as a nation are drawn into

tantalizing barbarism and abandon our commitment to peace, there is no solution."

The challenge posed by the Afghanistan crisis and the neighboring situation in Iran has been articulated by Albert Vorspan, social action director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

While declaring himself still to be a supporter of the SALT II treaty, Vorspan said, "the religious community has also got to face the question of what (to) do with hostage-taking and running roughshod over borders."

For the moment, perhaps the one answer that all religious groups can agree upon is the admonition of the

United Methodist Bishops in their statement:

"Above all, we must not relinquish our faith that God has ways of working with us for the accomplishment of His will in world affairs when we prayerfully seek to know what God desires and to be instruments for its fulfillment."



Visit to Washington

Congressman Frank Horton, Republican from Rochester, welcomes to the Nation's Capital Father Richard C. Kinsky, the superintendent of Catholic schools for the Rochester Diocese. Father Kinsky was in Washington for a day long visit and stopped in to see Congressman Horton to talk about several issues of mutual concern.

Registration In Webster

Registration for the 1980-81 school year is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m., Feb. 4 and 5 at Holy Trinity School in Webster.

Registration is for the kindergarten through the eighth grade. A child must be five years old before Nov. 30, 1980, to qualify for kindergarten. Registrants are asked to bring birth or baptismal certificates to the school.

Celebration Set

Twenty past presidents of the Holy Name Society at St. Andrew's Parish are expected to attend a celebration in their honor Feb. 2. Dinner will be served in the school cafeteria at 6:30 p.m., after a 5 p.m. Mass in the church.

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