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TEXT OF SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TOMMY KOH, SINGAPORE'S PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE  
ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN, 6 JANUARY 1980

As in December the Security Council is again fortunate to have as its President this month a man of your enormous ability and vast experience. My delegation is confident that you will be able to provide the Council with the wise and strong leadership which it so clearly needs during the month of January.

Very outset of my statement, I wish to recall that ever since my country became independent, my government has consistently pursued a foreign policy of non-alignment. We are not aligned with any of the great powers. We are not a party to their competing military alliances and political blocs. We have studiously avoided involvement in the rivalries between the great powers. The position which my government takes on specific issues such as the situation in Afghanistan, is based upon the principles of the UN Charter, the generally accepted principles of international law, the principles of non-alignment and our judgement of the merits of each case. Relations between small nations and great powers are at best of times difficult. But when a great power defies the basic principles of the UN Charter by openly invading and occupying weaker and smaller nations, then association between it and smaller nations carries obvious dangers. The Soviet action in Afghanistan will certainly be viewed in this light by many small nations.

Let me review briefly the salient facts concerning the situation in Afghanistan.

On the 25 and 26 December 1979 a massive Soviet airlift into Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, took place. In over 200 flights approximately 10,000 Soviet troops were transported into Afghanistan. On the evening of the 27 December Soviet troops were involved in a coup

against President Hafizullah Amin who was killed. Immediately after the coup, two Soviet motorised rifle divisions entered Afghanistan by land. The Soviet Union is now said to have about 50,000 combat troops in Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union has argued that its troops are in Afghanistan at the invitation of the Afghan government. The Soviet Union claims that the massive Soviet airlift which occurred on the 25 and 26 December had taken place at the invitation of the government of Afghanistan. Unless we assume that the late President Amin had suicidal tendencies, it is reasonable to infer that he would not have invited Soviet troops to enter Afghanistan in order to depose and kill him.

After the coup against President Amin, the Soviet Union brought from exile in Eastern Europe, an Afghan, Babrak Karmal, and made him the new President of Afghanistan. The important fact is that at the time of the Soviet intervention, Babrak Karmal was not part of the government of Afghanistan and therefore had no authority to request the intervention by Soviet troops. If small nations accept this basis for intervention, then they are setting a precedent to justify great power interventions on this basis in the affairs of all small nations in the future.

Have the actions of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan violated any of the principles of the UN Charter and the generally accepted principles of international law? The answer is yes. In the first place, the use of Soviet troops to depose one ruler and substitute another is clearly in violation of the principle on non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and of the principle of non-use of force against the political independence of other states. The actions of the Soviet Union also violate some of the principles contained in the declaration on principles of international law concerning friendly relations and co-operation among states, unanimously adopted by the General Assembly at its 25th Session. One of the principles violated by the Soviet actions is the principle that "every state has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives people of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence". Another principle which has been violated is that "no state ... has the right to intervene directly or indirectly for any reason whatever in the internal or external affairs of any other state". Yet another principle which has been violated is that "no state shall organise ... armed activities directed towards the violent overthrow of the regime of another state ...".

The actions of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan have certain grave implications for countries in Asia and for small and non-aligned countries. The fact that this occurred barely a month after the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, based upon a Soviet initiative, condemning all forms of hegemonism, clearly suggests that the Soviet Union has a credibility gap. How can we reconcile Soviet deeds with Soviet words? Henceforth, it will be extremely difficult for us to give any credence to declarations by the Soviet Union that it will respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of other states and that it will strictly abide by the principle of non-interference in one another's internal affairs.

In the past, Soviet Union has encouraged small nations to pursue a foreign policy of non-alignment as a means of securing their political integrity and independence. Some 90 nations including Afghanistan have joined the movement of non-aligned countries. The fact that the Government of Afghanistan, which was overthrown by Soviet troops, was a member of the non-aligned movement and was friendly to the Soviet Union, is doubly disconcerting. It makes some of us wonder whether a foreign policy of non-alignment provides one with any security against external interference and aggression in the world today.

The great powers have a special responsibility by virtue of their strength and prestige to adhere loyally to the basic principles of the UN Charter. They should set an example to smaller nations on rational and peaceful conduct of relations between countries. They should be enforcers of the purposes and principles of the United Nations. That is why five of the members of the Security Council were accorded the special status of permanent members with veto powers. They were accorded this privileged position because they had a special responsibility. But when those in a privileged position to enforce the purposes and principles of this organisation breach them at the expense of a small nation then we are well on the way to a world without law and without principles.

In conclusion, my delegation joins others in demanding, first, the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan; second, the cessation of Soviet interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and third, respect by the Soviet Union and all other states for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Afghanistan.