

10 August 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO/USSR-EE, NIO/NESA, NIO/CF

SUBJECT : Soviet Options in Afghanistan

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1. In the accompanying memo, the Director, SWS recommends issuance of an Alert Memorandum on Soviet options in Afghanistan. I concur with his proposal.

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2. While there is as yet no evidence of military preparations to intervene beyond the present level, it must be obvious to the Soviets that the situation is deteriorating and that their options are becoming fewer. One must logically deduce that they cannot maintain the status quo, but must fish or cut bait.

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3. May we meet Monday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. to discuss the situation?

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Acting NIO for Warning

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Attachment

Signer

10 Aug 85

S-0033/SWS

10 August 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Intelligence Officer for Warning
 FROM : [redacted] : Doug MacEachin, Director, SWS
 SUBJECT : Soviet Options in Afghanistan

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1. We believe that the Soviets must choose between one of the following three general courses of action in Afghanistan.

A. Continue the present course of providing material support and advisors and technicians, but refrain from committing Soviet combat units. (Possibly at the same time continuing to seek a political solution.)

B. Commit a limited amount of Soviet combat forces, sufficient to insure at least the security of Kabul and its immediate area, and perhaps a few other key centers.

C. Commit large combat forces for the purpose of inflicting major military defeats on the insurgent forces and recapturing much of the territory now in rebel hands.

2. Like most other community analysts, we believe Moscow views the last option as undesirable both in terms of practical military considerations and the political consequences that it would entail. We believe there is a strong likelihood, however, that the Soviets will undertake the second option, and probably in the near future. We believe they must consider that if no additional military force is introduced at least to the Kabul area the USSR forces the likelihood of being forced to evacuate its mission from Afghanistan. For reasons discussed below, and also in the attached memo by [redacted] we believe that Moscow will view the consequences of such a development as worse than the political costs of introducing limited combat forces of their own and will be willing to gamble that further escalation can be contained. Once having undertaken the increase in their military units, however, the Soviets are likely to find themselves being drawn to the large operation despite whatever resolve they might have to avoid it.

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3. We have no concrete evidence that the Soviets are now preparing for or have decided upon a move of even limited combat formations. We nevertheless believe that the case is sufficiently strong to warrant the issuance of an Alert Memorandum. Although there are divided views in the community on this issue, waiting until there is clear evidence to resolve the difference of opinion among intelligence analysts may rule out the Intelligence Community's ability to provide anything more than "tactical" warning of the first movement of Soviet troops to Afghanistan. If, as we believe, the most likely form of initial military intervention is through the airlift of special combat units, the first may be on their way to or landing in Afghanistan before we can report unequivocally that the intervention option has been chosen. We believe the Alert Memorandum should be the vehicle for stating the case because its use clearly indicates the Community's intent to "warn" as opposed to "report."

Situation Now Confronted By Soviets In Afghanistan

4. Soviet military support to the Taraki-Amin regime already has gone about as far as it can short of direct action by Soviet combat units. The military momentum of the insurgency continues to grow, however, and unless it is at least halted -- preferably reversed -- the Soviet-backed Marxist government is likely to be militarily overthrown. The chance for a Soviet-engineered change in the Kabul government which could both protect Soviet interest and at the same time diffuse the insurgency appears to have been overtaken by events, if indeed there ever was a realistic prospect for carrying it off.

5. The DRA army units in Kabul have so far maintained their loyalty to the Taraki regime. These forces have squelched the most serious uprising from within the Kabul garrisons, and as long as no further erosion in loyalty occurs it is likely that they would be able to continue to keep Kabul secure. The events of 5 August, however, clearly demonstrate that the Kabul-area forces are not immune from the defections that have been taking place elsewhere in the army. As the ring of insurgent forces draws closer to Kabul, defeatism is likely to spread, and the Army leaders may start to ponder their long term future. The Soviets must at least consider the possibility of another, more serious uprising, occurring with little or no warning, which could confront them with a fait accompli and in effect eliminate whatever options they still have.

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6. In sum, it must be evident to the Soviets that unless they inject some additional military strength their investment in Afghanistan is likely to go under, and there is at least a growing possibility that this could happen with unexpected suddenness.

Soviets Faced With Choosing "Least Bad" Option

7. The Soviets doubtless recognize that they would be pilloried by much of the rest of the world if they sent combat units into Afghanistan, and they would have to consider that taking such a step would damage the chances for Congressional ratification of the SALT II treaty. Moreover, Moscow would have to be concerned that introduction of even small forces -- a few battalions or regiments, for example -- would deepen the commitment to what could grow into an open-ended military operation.

8. On the other hand, the likely consequences of not sending in combat units go far beyond replacement of a client government by a hostile one in an area which, although on the USSR border, has no great strategic significance.

-- Moscow will not be able to represent the result as anything less than a forced eviction by a native insurgency that is not even well organized.

-- There is no graceful way out. Evacuation of the Soviet mission in Kabul could not be portrayed as anything other than abandonment of the Taraki regime.

-- The manner in which these events would have been brought about would add to the aura of the growing strength of Islamic militancy in the region. The latter may be of even more concern to the Soviets than the particular situation of Afghanistan itself.

-- The Soviets would have shown themselves unable or unwilling to use their military power even to save a client government in a country snaring a common border with the USSR and in a situation in which there is little chance of direct confrontation with another major military power.

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10. In this situation, psychological factors and the Soviet big power self-image is likely to influence the decision making process at least as much if not more than the political considerations. While it is true that Soviet public statements of support for the Afghan regime have been low key of late, it is nevertheless also true that strong public statements have been made by the highest level of Soviet leadership, as is discussed in the attached memorandum.

10. Moreover, the cause and effect relationship of the "no-action" alternative appears more certain than in the case of the intervention option. The fall of the Taraki regime with all it would entail seems virtually unavoidable if the Soviets commit no combat elements. On the other hand, the Soviets may persuade themselves that they can insert some combat forces without succumbing to pressures for escalation. Insofar as SALT II is concerned, the Soviets can have no assurance that the U.S. ratification process will result in something they can accept, no matter what they do in Afghanistan. As regards world opinion, the Soviets have shown the ability to live with criticism in the past, and this is problematical which form of world impression would be more unacceptable to them -- that of a bellicose power or that of a power unable to use its military force in directly contiguous areas.

11. Commitment of troops to the defense of Kabul also would at least have some benefits to weigh against the costs. As long as Kabul is secure, the Soviets can at least maintain the argument that their client continues to govern Afghanistan and that the USSR is living up to its commitment. Moscow would have demonstrated its willingness to use its power. The Soviets also would have bought some time to find ways to defuse the situation, perhaps continuing to seek a cast of characters which might provide the basis for the hoped-for political solution.

12. At least some Soviet leaders probably will continue to argue that all this is merely rationalization and that sending in combat forces -- albeit limited -- only commits Moscow further down the road to a large scale military occupation of Afghanistan. They will argue that the increment of combat units will offer at best a holding action. Ultimately the Soviets probably would confront pressure to increase further their military commitment or face an evacuation made all the more distasteful by the fact that the involvement will by then have grown.

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13. While we tend to agree with this assessment of the likely consequences of a "limited" intervention, we doubt that Soviet leaders holding this view will be able to withstand the combination of arguments regarding consequences of no action and rationalizations that the escalation can be contained.

Indications And Collection

14. The airlift of a Soviet regiment (2,000 or so troops) without much equipment other than infantry weapons would require on the order of 130 flights of AN-12 aircraft. These could originate from almost any part of the Soviet Union where there are ground force units with ready access to an airfield. The most likely source for the troops is an airborne division, but they could be drawn from motorized rifle divisions as well. If the troops are to be airlifted, there is no great advantage in drawing them from the part of the USSR closest to Afghanistan. The Soviets might elect to draw troops from the Western USSR, keeping those in the Afghan border area in reserve for further contingencies.

15. A complete airborne division with all of its weapons and equipment would require on the order of 600 AN-12 flights. (The number of flights would of course vary depending on the type of aircraft used and the amount of equipment brought in.) This would be more easily detected and would mean that the likely origins of the troops would be more limited in number.

16. There is a good chance that if the Soviets do elect to bring in combat troops they will try to do it -- at least in the initial stages -- in as low key a manner as possible. As long as they control Bagram airfield the Soviets can move in their own troops incrementally. The civil air fleet -- Aeroflot -- is used to effect the rotation of some 120,000 Soviet conscripts in East Europe twice annually. Using Aeroflot aircraft to bring in troops and using military aircraft only for major equipment would enable the Soviets to mute somewhat the telltale sizes of military intervention at least until a substantial number of troops were in the country.

17. For these reasons, it may be difficult to obtain much advance warning that the Soviets have in fact undertaken to introduce combat elements into Afghanistan.

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18. If the Soviets intend to use combat forces in Afghanistan for more than static defense they will need to provide them with some mobility -- possibly substantial helicopter support. It is also possible that the initial form of increased Soviet military support may be to provide Soviet-piloted helicopter units -- both transport and attack. That alone, however, is unlikely to have much effect and if whole Soviet helicopter units do start appearing in Afghanistan it would -- in our view -- mean commitment of ground combat troops probably is in the offing.



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the Afghan border. We have no assurance, however, that we will identify the initial preparations for movement of Soviet combat troops to Afghanistan.

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10 August 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO for Warning

SUBJECT : Afghanistan--Pressures for Soviet Military Escalation

1. In examining Moscow's perceptions of its stakes and options in Afghanistan, it would be prudent to bear in mind the legacy of more than a century of competition for predominance in that country between Russia, on the one hand, and Britain and the latter's successors in the power rivalries of South Asia and the Middle East, on the other. Because of this long record of Tsarist and Soviet ambitions and involvement in Afghanistan, the outcome of the present struggle for power carries much greater significance for the Soviets than the fortunes of other Third World "liberation movements" or ventures in "national democracy." In a word, Afghanistan is a special case, with close parallels to the role ~~of~~ Persia/Iran has played in the history of Russian expansion southward into the Trans-Caucasus and eastward into Central Asia.

2. Soviet perceptions of the stakes in Afghanistan--conditioned by these historical and geopolitical factors--should be distinguished from Moscow's aspirations and behavior, for example, in Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Yemen and even in Southeast Asia. In the hierarchy of national and security interests, Afghanistan occupies roughly the same position as other non-Warsaw Pact contiguous states such as Finland, Iran, and Mongolia. Africa and Southeast Asia rank well below these contiguous states in terms of Soviet priorities and are viewed primarily as targets of opportunity in the global competition with the US and China for power, influence and prestige.

3. The perceptions and motives of the Soviet leaders almost certainly have been strongly influenced by the history of Russian advance and retreat in Afghanistan. Tsarist mid-nineteenth century expansion in Central Asia led to a confrontation with Great Britain over Afghanistan in 1878-79 in which the Russians were obliged to retreat and "stand idly by" while British forces occupied the greater part of the country. The British established a protectorate which gave them control of Afghanistan's foreign policy and of the tribes on the Afghan-Indian frontier. Renewed Russian expansionist probes received another humiliating rebuff at the hands of the British in 1884. For several weeks war between Russia and Britain seemed inevitable, but the Tsarist government again backed down rather than risk provoking a war.

4. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet regime cultivated the new King Amanullah, leader of a Young Afghan movement which was anti-British and reformist. In 1919, Lenin congratulated the "independent Afghan people heroically defending itself against foreign oppressors" and proposed "mutual aid" against foreign attack. During the Third Afghan War in 1919, which ended with British troops on Afghan soil, Lenin offered military aid against England and frontier concessions. The Soviets signed a treaty of friendship with Amanullah in 1921. In a striking parallel with events under the Taraki regime, Amanullah's reforms in the early 1920s alienated the Muslim hierarchy and tribal chiefs who saw a menace to their traditional autonomy. When Amanullah was overthrown, a modest intervention by the Red Army might have saved him, but the Soviets were then in no position to provide forces or material assistance in response to the King's appeal. (Amanullah died in exile in Italy). The Taraki regime has depicted itself as the heir to the Amanullah tradition of nationalism and reform.

5. After World War II, of course, Britain's retreat from empire enabled the Soviets to achieve their historic aim of assuring a "friendly" Afghanistan on their southern border. Successive regimes in Kabul saw no real alternative until the mid-1970s. The relationship was altered significantly by President Daoud's shift toward closer relations with Iran and by his break with the Parcham Communists—a process which culminated in the "revolution" in April 1978. The Soviets embraced the Taraki regime not only as an ideological client but as a valuable ally in combatting perceived Iranian and Pakistani designs to draw Afghanistan out of the Soviet orbit of influence and into a new/alignment. This combination of ideological and geopolitical interests and motives led the Soviets into what they probably now recognize to have been an excessive and imprudent commitment to the Taraki regime—including the friendship treaty last December which provides for consultations and "appropriate measures" to insure each country's security, independence, and territorial integrity.

6. In sum, the legacy of Tsarist aspirations and Soviet involvement, coupled with changes in the internal Afghan equation in the mid-1970s, which led to the April revolution and steady growth in Soviet commitments of economic and military aid, personnel, and prestige to the success of the revolution, would seem to rule out the theoretical option of Soviet withdrawal and cutting of losses. In view of the events over the past five years, the Soviet leaders probably judge that the defeat of the Taraki regime would not be followed by the installation of a successor government that would pursue the traditional Afghan policy of neutralism and accommodation with the USSR. On the contrary, the Soviets apparently are operating on the assumption that a successor regime would be dominated by Muslim "counterrevolutionaries"

aligned with the Khomeini and Pakistani governments and committed to anti-Soviet policies. Moscow probably fears, moreover, that strong Pakistani influence in Kabul would open the way to a growing Chinese presence in Afghanistan. In the longer term, the Soviets may be apprehensive about the influence of a militant Islamic regime on the Muslim population of the USSR's Central Asian republics.

7. All of these factors would seem to generate compelling pressures on the Soviets at some point in the very near future to overcome their evident doubts and hesitations and gamble on strong measures to avert a damaging defeat for the USSR's international prestige and its major geopolitical interests in Afghanistan. The high stakes involved and the absence of any low-risk and satisfactory options for coping with this threat to Soviet interests confront Moscow with one of the most difficult foreign policy decisions since the Cuban missile crisis. A case could be made that the Afghan imbroglio represents a more hazardous and potentially costly dilemma for the Soviets than the situation created by the US mining of Haiphong harbor on the eve of President Nixon's visit in May 1972, the October War in 1973, or China's invasion of Vietnam last February. Afghanistan also requires the kind of grave choices which in the past decade have triggered sharp controversies and divisions in the Soviet leadership. It seems possible that Moscow's evident hesitation and vacillation in dealing with the Afghan crisis during the past five months reflect not only a delayed recognition that the USSR had seriously miscalculated the strength of the forces opposed to the Taraki regime, thus drawing it into an essentially no-win predicament, but deep disagreement within the top Soviet leadership over the most effective course of action for protecting their stakes in Afghanistan.

8. Carrying this line of conjecture a step further, the postulated disagreement may center on the use of Soviet combat forces not simply to protect an evacuation of Soviet personnel—a contingency associated with an unacceptable cut and run option—but to avert the total defeat of the Afghan "revolution" and salvage Moscow's investment of prestige and credibility. Even if the Soviet leaders have reached a general consensus that the rapidly deteriorating situation requires the use of Soviet forces—a consensus that seems unlikely—the scope, timing, and specific objectives of military intervention almost certainly would stimulate a host of unresolved policy disagreements and technical questions.

9. Aside from the manifold decision and action requirements involved in intervention, the political and diplomatic consequences almost certainly have been another major cause of Soviet hesitation and delay. The need to confront crucial decisions regarding Afghanistan could not have come at a more awkward time for the Soviet leaders. Any decision to intervene would be preceded by a prolonged and probably acrimonious debate over the political liabilities this action would entail. The Soviets certainly recognize that military intervention, at a minimum, would mean an indefinite delay in Senate approval of SALT II. The Soviets would also have to weigh the possible consequences in other areas of Soviet-US relations, including the urgent need for major grain imports and prospects for winning MFN status in trade and credits. In terms of the USSR's global standing, the Soviets would have to consider the costs of playing into China's hands and facilitating its tenacious efforts to influence US, European and Japanese policies toward the Soviet Union.

10. There is no way to judge how or when the Soviets will resolve the conflict between their detente policies and pressures for bold actions to protect their geopolitical and prestige interests in Afghanistan. The usual difficulties in assessing Soviet intentions have been compounded in this

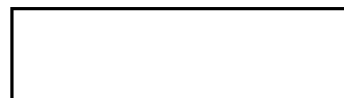
case by the absence of any reliable historical precedents. The intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 probably represents the nearest parallel, but the Soviet stake in Afghanistan, however important and valuable, clearly falls far short of Moscow's vital interest in a secure and "loyal" Czechoslovakia.

11. Despite the formidable military, diplomatic, and political deterrents to even limited military intervention (use of small combat units to assure control of specific assets), the Soviets have not foreclosed this option or that of large-scale intervention. There are no signs as yet in Soviet propaganda that Moscow has begun to prepare the ground and establish the justification for imminent intervention. On the other hand, Soviet media are doing nothing to counter Western press speculation that Moscow may opt for military action. Soviet commentaries continue to portray the rebel tribal insurgents as instruments of sinister foreign interference and influence. Moscow radio picked up the Taraki regime's allegations that the fighting in Kabul on 5 August was caused by "rebels who had infiltrated from abroad" and that the "mutiny" was planned by the Moslem Brotherhood supported by Pakistan and Iran. TASS has cited charges by other Kabul spokesmen that "Pakistan, imperialism, China, and certain Arab regimes" were involved. Following the 5 August uprising, the Afghan Minister of Interior instructed officials in northeast Afghanistan to obtain "proof" of Chinese and Pakistani intervention in Afghan internal affairs and to forward this information to Kabul immediately.

12. Although one might say, as of 10 August, that all Soviet options remain open, the above analysis suggests that the cut and run option is no more than theoretical under present circumstances. The end of the Taraki regime seems to be approaching; it may not last through the end of the month.

Thus the moment of hard decision for the Soviets is also near. If the combined weight of historical aspirations and solid geopolitical interests points to Soviet military escalation, it seems likely that the Soviet leaders will take strenuous measures to contain the resulting political and diplomatic damage. They can be expected not only to portray military intervention as a legitimate response to a request by the Kabul government, but as a necessary contribution to protecting the peace and stability of southwest Asia and the Middle East. Brezhnev probably will present the justification for intervention in letters to President Carter and other heads of government, emphasizing the USSR's objectives are limited to protecting the independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, consistent with the treaty signed last December, and that Soviet forces will be withdrawn whenever these aims have been secured.

13. However strenuous and agile their efforts to contain the damage, the Soviets will recognize that military intervention will place their relations with the US in a temporary freeze. This prospect would not deter them from gambling on intervention because they have long since persuaded themselves that, in view of the prevailing correlation of forces, the US has an equal interest in avoiding lasting damage to US-Soviet relations and in resuming, after a pause, the bilateral dialogue toward further accommodations in strategic arms limitations and economic relations.



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