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DATE 12/4/85

DOC NO RESA 85-102260

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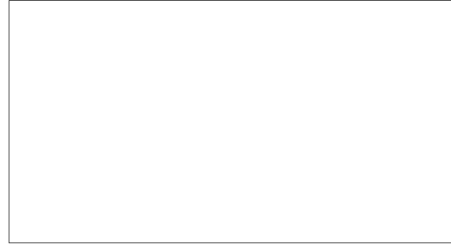
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Afghanistan Situation Report



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3 December 1985

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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT



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CONTENTS

**SOVIETS ACTIVE IN THE PANJSHER, JALALABAD, QANDAHAR,
AND HERAT**



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Soviet forces have conducted operations throughout
Afghanistan this past week, with heavy fighting
occurring in the Panjsher Valley, Qandahar,



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IN BRIEF

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PERSPECTIVE

GORBACHEV AND AFGHANISTAN: A SCHOLAR'S VIEW 

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Soviet leader Gorbachev may be willing to make minor concessions on Afghanistan for the sake of improving the atmospherics of US-Soviet relations, but he is unlikely to move Moscow in the direction of withdrawal and is, in fact, more likely to increase the Soviets' military effort in Afghanistan. 

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and the Office of Soviet Analysis. Questions or comments on the issues raised in the publication should be directed to 

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[Redacted]

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SOVIETS ACTIVE IN THE PANJSHER, JALALABAD, QANDAHAR, AND HERAT

[Redacted]

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Soviet operations during the past week have been heavy in several regions of Afghanistan, including the Panjsher Valley. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] According to the US Embassy in Islamabad, the insurgents attacked the Afghan garrison at Peshghowr and nine other Soviet posts, capturing eight Afghan officers. [Redacted]

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Significant Soviet Air Force assets were also deployed to Qandahar by mid-November to support a large combined Soviet-Afghan combat operation there. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Soviet ground forces had returned to the Qandahar garrison and most air assets had returned to their bases by the end of the month, the presence of SU-25 ground attack aircraft and signals equipment indicates that air operations were continuing as of 1 December. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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IN BRIEF

-- [Redacted]

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[Redacted] learned that some mothers of Soviet soldiers killed in Afghanistan recently demonstrated in Moscow against the war. [Redacted] were summoned to break up the protest, which was held near a Moscow cemetery some time last month.

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[Redacted]

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-- Soviet experience in Afghanistan may have encouraged the use of counterinsurgency battalions in Nicaragua, [redacted]

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[redacted] Doctrinal training for Nicaraguan units greatly emphasizes Soviet lessons in Afghanistan and Cuban experience in Africa and Central America. [redacted]

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PERSPECTIVE**GORBACHEV AND AFGHANISTAN: A SCHOLAR'S VIEW* **
by an External Contractor

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Soviet leader Gorbachev will more likely sponsor an increase in the Soviet military effort in Afghanistan and a hardening of related Soviet policies than take the risks of a truly accommodating approach. His reputed pragmatism, together with his apparent desire to improve at least the atmospherics of US-Soviet relations, may, however, move him toward a pose of public reasonableness vis-a-vis Afghanistan and a greater willingness to negotiate limited, essentially cosmetic concessions. 


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Gorbachev--Unfettered but Cautious?


Gorbachev at least in theory has more flexibility concerning Afghanistan than Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko. Because he was not a full member of the Politburo when it voted in 1979 to invade, he is relatively free of any onus attached to that decision, and he presumably could alter the decision without personal embarrassment. In his public statements, Gorbachev has not as yet declared, as did Brezhnev, that the Afghan revolution is irreversible; nor, like his predecessors, has he literally invoked the Brezhnev Doctrine, a move which would make Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan virtually impossible.** 

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Overall, Gorbachev's record suggests a Soviet leader who is certainly no radical. He is perhaps realistically aware of the needs of his society and prepared to address them with more energy than, say, a Chernenko, but he is more an intelligent party politician and careerist than an innovator and statesman. He appears to be at least as conscious of

*This article was prepared by a contractor who relied exclusively on unclassified literature. It was not coordinated within this Agency. The views expressed are those of the author. 

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**The Brezhnev Doctrine posits the right of the USSR to intervene in socialist states threatened by "counterrevolution." The Soviets have never counted Afghanistan as a socialist state. 

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the needs of his constituency--the party bureaucracy, the military, et al--as he is of the requirements of his statecraft. [redacted]

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Thus, for a man much heralded as dynamic, he has been cautious in his approach to problems. For example, concerning the troubled Soviet economy, he advocates a reform program but fails to define its particulars, shuns truly new approaches, and proceeds slowly and--as far as we can tell--very carefully. In the major areas of foreign policy, he appears more adroit than his predecessors and has relaxed policy somewhat on the surface, but so far he has sidestepped any very meaningful changes in substance. [redacted]

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Calculating Alternatives

The gains of a genuinely accommodating policy would probably seem little more than marginal to most of the Soviet leadership. Soviet casualties in the Afghan fighting--although worrisome principally because of their possible long-term effects on public morale--have not been large enough to have any particular significance. The rubles spent on the conflict appear insufficient to cause any major headaches in the exchequer, especially when balanced against the benefits of combat training for the troops. The ending of the military stalemate must have its appeal, but the General Staff may see other ways--such as a major buildup of Soviet strength--less painful than withdrawal to accomplish this. [redacted]

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Better relations with, and a less menacing image, in countries critical of the Soviet position in Afghanistan could also be seen as attractive, but the Kremlin almost certainly does not believe its policy toward Afghanistan to be a prime determinant of the USSR's international status or reputation. It might concede that Afghanistan is an irritant in the USSR's relations with the West, but it surely would not expect the removal of that irritant by itself to alter greatly the character of those relations. [redacted]

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To Gorbachev and his colleagues, moreover, the costs of a significant concession in Afghanistan, in our view, loom quite large.

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- Within certain Soviet elites, such as the military, opposition would probably be strong to a genuinely concessionary policy. Such a turn would probably also generate disaffection among conservative and/or ideologically inclined party figures and possibly within the KGB, and it might stimulate existing opponents of Gorbachev's economic reform program into more vigorous activity.
- Some Soviets would almost certainly view a Gorbachev-engineered withdrawal that appeared in any way to represent a surrender to pressures from the West as a betrayal of Soviet interests, the Afghan revolution, and the Communist cause at large--an event comparable to Khrushchev's bowing to US resolve during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.
- Withdrawal from Afghanistan under any circumstances other than those wholly consistent with Soviet goals would, in the view of many Soviets, severely damage Soviet prestige, detract from the USSR's image as a superpower, and leave behind in Afghanistan at best only partial control by the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), and at worst anarchy or the assumption of power by forces actively hostile to Marxism and the Soviet Union.
- Moscow faces, in addition, the very real problem of just who would sit on the other side of the table should it one day decide to enter into a serious negotiating process. Would Soviet willingness to negotiate be interpreted by the insurgents as a sign of weakness and in this way invoke stronger insurgent demands and perhaps fiercer fighting? And who ultimately would govern in Kabul--could a coalition (including the PDPA) function effectively or even be established? Practical questions such as these could forestall negotiations altogether or run them off the rails once underway. 

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Bottom Lines

Gorbachev will not be disposed to offer the Afghan opposition and its international allies any concessions other than the purely cosmetic.



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- **Militarily**, the USSR has as yet to go all out in Afghanistan. In the absence of any hard evidence, we must allow for the possibility that influential Soviets may feel that after six years of inconclusive warfare a much greater effort is both feasible and desirable. Economic costs would not, we think, seem very large in Gorbachev's mind if military benefits promised to be rapid and substantial.
- **Politically**, the Soviet leadership, while apparently not now anxious, is almost certainly apprehensive about the consequences of the war on domestic popular opinion over the long term--hence the campaign to glorify the conflict in the public press. But Gorbachev's apprehension could pull the leaders in two directions, toward constraint or toward new ways to end the fighting decisively and quickly. True, Gorbachev appears to be concerned that Afghanistan not prove an obstacle to developments in post-summit diplomacy with the US, but he almost certainly hopes that the appearance of a softening Soviet attitude, rather than a real shift in substance, would suffice for the time being.
- The Soviets have surely pondered ways and means of ending or reducing outside aid to the Afghan rebels. Gorbachev's talk with President Zia at Chernenko's funeral earlier this year hinted at heavier pressures to come on Pakistan. If Moscow came to believe that, short of war, Pakistan could somehow be coerced into stopping or restricting the flow of arms to the insurgents and also was persuaded that such supplies were crucial to the insurgents' war effort, then it would almost certainly give serious consideration to mounting a forceful campaign of intimidation against Islamabad.

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In Sum...

The equation for Gorbachev is quite simple if not altogether attractive: He has much to lose--including perhaps the security of his own political position--if he turns away from existing policy toward a more accommodating position and little to gain.

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