

The Director of Central Intelligence

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OFFICE OF  
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MEMORANDUM FOR: The President  
The Vice President  
Secretary of State  
Secretary of Defense  
Assistant to the President for  
National Security Affairs

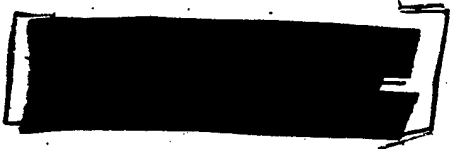
The attached paper sets forth our preliminary views of Soviet options and constraints in Southwest Asia following the invasion of Afghanistan. Its focus is on the major actors in the region from the Soviet perspective; it does not deal explicitly with possible US policies or how those might influence Soviet positions.

  
STANFIELD TURNER

Attachment

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OCTOBER 99

  
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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Union and Southwest Asia

1. It is unlikely that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan constitutes the preplanned first step in the implementation of a highly articulated grand design for the rapid establishment of hegemonic control over all of Southwest Asia. Rather than signaling the carefully timed beginning of a premeditated strategic offensive, the occupation may have been a reluctantly authorized response to what was perceived by the Kremlin as an imminent and otherwise irreversible deterioration of its already established position in a country which fell well within the Soviet Union's legitimate sphere of influence. However, there is no reason to doubt that the Soviets covet a larger sphere of influence in Southwest Asia or to suppose that their decision to occupy Afghanistan was made without reference to broader regional objectives. On the contrary, their willingness to incur what they almost certainly anticipated would be serious costs strongly suggests a belief that their occupation of Afghanistan would improve their access to a number of extremely lucrative targets of opportunity and might eventually lead to a highly favorable and enduring shift in the regional and perhaps even global balance of power.

2. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was probably predicated on a belief that Afghan resistance would prove relatively short lived. Among other things, their historical experience in their own Central Asian republics may have persuaded the Soviets that a strategy combining military intimidation, political conciliation, and economic enticement would quickly reduce resistance and enable their puppet regime to acquire at least a modicum of grassroots political authority and administrative control. If this turns out to be a miscalculation and Afghan resistance becomes or remains persistent and widespread, the Soviets could become so bogged down in guerrilla warfare that they abandon any hopes of further near-term expansion. However, they are unlikely to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan and might well try to alleviate their problems there by intensifying pressure on or expanding the conflict to Pakistan.

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3. In the face of intractable Afghan resistance, the Soviets are likely to attribute much of the blame to direct or indirect Pakistani involvement and to take what they deem to be essential deterrent and retaliatory measures. These measures could include not only cross-border raids by loyal Afghan and/or Soviet forces, but also extensive Soviet support for anti-Pakistani tribal insurgents and intimidating demarches on Islamabad by the Soviets' Indian allies. In extremis, moreover, the Soviets might press a not-too-reluctant India to join them in an all-out campaign of political subversion or even in a concerted invasion. Although the inevitable costs of such a drastic action might give the Soviets pause, their behavior in Afghanistan (as well as the earlier escalatory behavior of the United States in Vietnam - Laos - Cambodia) suggests that they might be undeterred by anything short of a credible threat of direct US military retaliation.

4. Unless their position in Afghanistan impels them to take a harsh anti-Pakistani line, the Soviets are likely to give Islamabad time to adjust to the "realities" of its new situation and adopt a more conciliatory approach to the USSR. In this case, the Soviets are more likely to let their presence in and growing control over Afghanistan speak for themselves than they are to underscore Pakistani vulnerabilities by issuing explicit threats. While exercising such self-restraint, moreover, the Soviets are likely to offer the Pakistanis substantial inducements to distance themselves from the United States and the PRC. Although they will have to guard against jeopardizing their close relations with India in the process, the Soviets are likely to try to woo the Pakistanis not only with pledges of noninterference and offers of economic aid but also with offers of at least limited military assistance and promises to use their good offices to keep Pakistani-Indian relations on an even keel. Should India take serious umbrage at such initiatives, the Soviets might temporarily take a less forthcoming line. But they would also be mindful of the extreme improbability of a markedly anti-Soviet realignment of Indian policy and might be willing to expend a substantial amount of the capital they have accumulated in Delhi in order to secure Pakistani acceptance of the Soviet Union's growing regional influence.

5. If Islamabad were to prove insufficiently responsive to their blandishments, the Soviets would probably use less subtle means to try to encourage greater "realism." As already indicated, the means at their disposal would include military intimidation, political subversion, and tribal insurrection, as well as the activation of longstanding Afghan

and Indian claims on Pakistani territory. If these tactics also fail to produce the desired results, the Soviets might eventually conclude that it was advisable to allow Pakistan an interlude in which to work out its own destiny. A decision to this effect would seem particularly appropriate if attempts to escalate the pressure on Islamabad seemed likely to increase US involvement in Pakistan and to limit Soviet opportunities elsewhere in the region. Such an interlude would not necessarily be long lasting, however, and could come to an abrupt halt if subsequent developments expose additional Pakistani vulnerabilities.

6. Of all of the objectives that their occupation of Afghanistan may have placed within easier Soviet reach, a pro-Soviet Iran is almost surely the most tantalizing. Although the Soviet occupation of an Islamic country has undoubtedly confirmed and strengthened the anti-Communist sentiments of Iran's fervently religious ruling elite, it has also emplaced Soviet forces on Iran's eastern as well as its northern border and has created possibilities for direct large-scale Soviet aid to Baluchis as well as to Azari and Kurdish separatist movements. Furthermore, it has done so at a time when Iran is going through a paroxysm of anti-American hysteria and may be on the brink of political, social, and economic chaos. Since this is also a time when the Soviets are about to encounter significant shortfalls in domestic energy production, it seems probable that the expansion of its influence over Iran will rank at or near the top of the Kremlin's hierarchy of regional priorities.

7. Although the possibility cannot be excluded, it does not seem likely that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan will turn out to have been a dress rehearsal for an impending gala performance in Iran. Unlike Afghanistan, Iran is clearly too important to the West to make the risk of a counterintervention seem negligible, and the exercised American reaction to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan has probably convinced even the Kremlin's most unreconstructed hawks that a frontal attack on Iran could lead to a full-fledged military showdown with the United States. However, fear of such a showdown will not lead the Kremlin to forsake its ambitions or prevent it from pursuing them by more circuitous means. At the margin, apprehension that any important Soviet breakthrough in Iran would elicit a determined US military reaction may exercise a restraining influence, but the Soviets will probably still have extensive room for maneuver in a situation in which American options are severely circumscribed and Iranian vulnerabilities are very large.

8. At least for the immediate future, the Soviets are likely to make assiduous efforts to improve their relations with the Khomeini regime. Among other things, they will probably signal their willingness to be supportive diplomatically and to provide Tehran with economic and military aid. Such overtures will not prevent the Soviets from entrenching themselves on Iran's Afghan border, cultivating their contacts with anti-Persian nationalist movements, and supporting the Tudeh's efforts to build up its organizational infrastructure and penetrate the country's governing elites. Instead of flaunting these activities, however, the Kremlin will probably try to keep them inconspicuous and take special precautions to neutralize their potentially provocative effects.

9. Although the Soviets can have few illusions about the possibility of altering the fundamentally anti-Communist ideological tenets of the Khomeini regime, they probably do foresee a possibility of growing Tudeh influence over current governmental policy and of a significant Tudeh role in a more secular and "progressive" post-Khomeini regime. The early emergence and smooth stabilization of such a non-Communist but Communist-tinged regime probably represents the Soviets' preferred outcome to the Khomeini succession, since they could then look forward to the establishment of much more intimate Soviet-Iranian relations which it would be extremely difficult for the United States or other foreign countries to disrupt. Outside powers would be hard pressed for an excuse to interfere with a legitimate and viable Iranian regime, and any credible threat of hostile action on their part could provide the Soviets with a welcome opportunity to extend protection to a friendly neighboring country which also shared a common border with the Soviets' Afghan allies. While the experience of President Amin, et al., would doubtless make many Iranian leaders question the wisdom of signing a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with the USSR, the external (and/or internal) pressures upon them might make their position seem too precarious to allow them any choice.

10. Given the extremely remote prospect of an early pro-American reorientation of Iranian policy, the Soviets would probably not attempt to overthrow or subvert a post-Khomeini regime which denied the Tudeh access to position of influence power. However, if they were persuaded that such a regime was developing real durability and becoming so anti-Communist that their potential leverage in Tehran was in jeopardy (e.g., as a result of a credible threat to crush the Tudeh), the Soviets would probably not hesitate to take strong counteraction. Unless it were firmly convinced that such behavior would boomerang, the Kremlin might well resort not only to stern diplomatic protests but also to military

intimidation and even, if necessary, to the encouragement and support of intense centrifugal pressure on Tehran by anti-Persian nationalist forces. So long as they themselves stopped short of direct military intervention, the Soviets would probably discount the possibility of US military action to save the incumbent regime. If, as also seems probable, they were highly skeptical about the likelihood and/or efficacy of US nonmilitary responses to a possible request by Tehran for help, the Soviets might well risk the possibility that Tehran could successfully resist their pressure and become militantly anti-Soviet for the sake of the probability that it would bow to their pressure or be replaced by a more accommodating successor.

11. Unless they become convinced that Iran was otherwise almost certain to become a US client or was caught in the throes of an irreversible process of fragmentation and disintegration, the Soviets are not likely to become wholehearted supporters of any of the country's ethnonationalist secessionist or independence movements. If they were so convinced, however, the Soviets would probably foment Tehran with animosity and encourage the formation of Soviet-backed provisional governments in Iranian Azarbayjan, Kordestan, Baluchestan, Khuzestan, etc. Although the Kremlin would recognize that such a patent effort to establish Soviet controlled mini-states could precipitate a US military intervention (presumably to try to preserve the integrity of Iran but possibly—and in a possible de facto and ad hoc alliance with a severely chastened Iraq—to simply occupy Khuzestan), it might well try to deter such an intervention by a preemptive intervention of its own. Moreover, if they felt that their only other real choice was acquiescence in what they would almost certainly envision as a more or less permanent US military presence on or close to their southern border, the Soviets might not be averse to confronting the United States in an area in which the local population was strongly anti-American and the USSR could benefit from many logistical advantages.

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