

Forum: Historical Security Council (1980s)

Issue: The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

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Introduction

Tens of thousands of the United Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) troops were sent to Afghanistan in December 1979 to support the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the communist Afghan party that took over the government with a coup in April 1978. The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan was a highly critical conflict in not just Afghanistan's history but also the course of the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Physically and economically harmed by the policies of the PDPA and the Soviet intervention, Afghan rebels organized as the "Mujahideen" forces and were supported by the USA and Pakistan, which stood firmly against the Soviet invasion. The Soviet Army's use of chemical weapons and other harsh methods against them accelerated bloody disputes and impaired significant segments of Afghanistan's infrastructure in addition to resulting in the death of civilians.

This crisis is a crucial one for human rights and includes a violent amount of polarization, therefore, all member states in the Historical Security Council should strive towards creating a comprehensive resolution.



Soviet soldiers directing tank traffic outside Kabul on January 7, 1980

Definitions of Key Terms

Red Army: The Soviet Union's armed forces, consisting of approximately four million troopers (not all of them deployed in Afghanistan,) with which Afghanistan was invaded

USSR: The United Socialist Soviet Republic, a federal socialist state ruled by the Communist Party over land that covers a large part of Eurasia

KGB: The Committee for State Security- the USSR's main security agency

People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA): A Marxist-Leninist political party in Afghanistan that split into two segments, the Khalq segment being more radical than the Parcham segment which was considered more moderate.

Guerillas: The Afghan resistance forces against the USSR and the Afghan government, known for using hit-and-run and ambush tactics.

Mujahideen: Afghan rebels who fought against the communist Soviet government and the Afghan government in Kabul via tactics such as guerrilla warfare tactics and gaining international military and funding support.

Politburo: The highest political organ in communist parties, which was a permanent body that vetoed or confirmed significant actions in the Soviet Union, such as the invasion itself.

General Overview

What initiated this conflict was the Saur Revolution of 1978. Going against the Islamic beliefs of rural populations, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) aimed to modernize the nation after seizing power in a coup. This party demonstrated a repressive manner against the resistance of the public. Although the parties had signed the "Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty" in 1978, the USSR's invasion began in 1979, initially resulting in the KGB's killing of President Nur Muhammad Taraki and gradually increasing the number of troops sent into the region. By the end of the first day of the invasion, the Soviets had attained control of key government buildings, military installations, and communication facilities. The ultimate purpose was to turn Afghanistan into a satellite state of the Soviet Union, but perhaps even before that, the Soviets wanted to prevent any Islamic nationalism from growing to threaten their union, especially given that there were notable Muslim populations in many of their satellite states. The Soviets had been following an expansionary international policy, and Afghanistan was the final obstacle between them and the Persian Gulf.

Babrak Karmal, an ex-leader of PDPA and a pro-Soviet communist, was declared the leader. The Soviet Union reportedly carried out mass arrests and tortured civilians, also causing dispute between themselves and tribal leaders due to the land reforms they implemented that made conditions worse for the poorer classes. The rationale behind the unconcerned and even relaxed attitude of the Soviets was Afghanistan's economic dependence on its Northern neighbor. The mining industry, airfields, roads, and other infrastructure in Afghanistan had been significantly funded by the Soviet penetration of the economy, also clearly indicated by the fact that 80% of Afghan trade was done with the Soviet Union. It has been pointed out that a military penetration had been occurring in the process leading up to the invasion; thousands of Afghan officials had attended training programs in the USSR by 1979.

Additionally, school curriculums had been modified to contain the teaching of the Russian language and encourage students to study in the USSR. (Brown)

Not just in strategic locations but throughout the countryside of Afghanistan, opposition to the so-called reform powered by the Soviet Union and the PDPA gained momentum. It specifically reached a climax in the Herat Uprising in Western Afghanistan in March 1979 with violent demonstrations by the civilians against the government. The efforts to keep the rebellion under control were unsuccessful because some military officials actually chose to join the Mujahideens. At this time, the American Ambassador Adolph Dubs was killed and the USA's support of Afghanistan had been hindered. Nearby countries such as China, Iran, and Pakistan became places where the Mujahideens gathered in addition to the sites in Afghanistan. These Mujahideen forces joined to form a united yet disorganized army in 1980 with the goal of controlling the strategic location of the Panjshir Valley under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud. Massoud's group had the support of Britain's foreign intelligence services against the Soviet forces' aerial bombardment, helicopter landings, and mechanized forces (which destroyed agricultural resources and livestock in addition to killing civilians.) Soviet air forces were involved but the United States' military support aimed to balance that out. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States also carried out an undercover operation, working in Pakistan to defeat the Soviet Army.



Map of the Panjshir Valley

On a more global scale, as one of the two communist giants of this period, China opposed the invasion, providing military and political support to the Mujahideen forces. In alignment with their firm rejection of the expansionist policies of the Soviets, China even fostered better relationships with the US. On the other hand, the Warsaw Pact (the collective defense treaty between the Soviet Union and its satellite states) forces in Hungary, Bulgaria, Germany, and Czechoslovakia were alerted. A gradual buildup in the Central Asian Military District on the Afghan border brought Soviet strength up to 8 divisions, three of which were classified to be in Category I (fully manned with all weapons and equipment.) By mid-December, the Soviets had introduced brigade-strength units at each of three key locations: Kabul, the Bagram air base 40 miles North of Kabul and the airbase at Shendan to the West. (Phillips)

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Soviet Union: The Union believed that its intervention in Afghanistan was necessary to support the communist government there and stabilize the country. Dozens of thousands of troops were deployed by the USSR in addition to the military support they provided the communist Afghan government with.

Afghanistan: Opposing both Islamic Fundamentalism and Western Imperialism, the Afghan government accepted the invasion, stating its necessity for the government to keep its power and the implementation of social policies of its preference. They soon grew dependent on the Soviet Army.

Mujahideen: Initially a loose coalition of various resistance groups (guerillas) and having become organized opposition over a few years, the Mujahideen forces fought against the Soviet and Afghan governments, focusing on the Panjshir Valley as the primary location they sought to protect.

United States: The US firmly opposed the Soviet Union's invasion, viewing it as an aggressive violation of security interests. Therefore, they assisted the Mujahideen in technical and financial aspects.

Pakistan: Pakistan feared that the conflict could affect their country and viewed the Soviet invasion as a threat to their security. As a result, Pakistan served as one of the bases of the Mujahideen forces, providing them with logistic and military support. They earned Western nations' approval and damaged their relationship with the Soviet Union in the process as the US's CIA officials or troops also used Pakistan as a safe haven.

China: China's assertion that the Soviet plan to control Afghanistan to follow a route toward the South, reach the Indian Ocean, and take hold of the oil supply lines of the West & East might have been a bit distant for that time, but regardless, it was certainly against the Soviets' expansionary involvement in the South and provided military & political support to the Mujahideen troops. It also received equipment from the USA on the ground that they could potentially have to defend themselves from the USSR in the near future.

Timeline of Events

March 1979	<p>The Herat Uprising took place in the city of Herat against the PDPA and the Soviet advisors that had been sent to the country to carry out the communist reform.</p>
December 24th, 1979	<p>On December 24th, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan officially began as 30,000 troops were sent.</p>
December 28th, 1979	<p>Considered the second phase of the invasion, on this date, two Soviet motorized infantry divisions crossed the frontier in three places in support of troops which had already been airlifted into Afghanistan. This meant that major population centers and potential future movements were better controlled.</p>
1979	<p>The detente (friendly diplomatic relations) between the US and the Soviet Union came to an end, reducing the pressure on the Soviet Union to consider the impact of their actions on their relationship with the states.</p>
January 1980	<p>The Security Council debate that took place was unfruitful.</p>

UN Involvement

The United Nations has not yet been involved in the conflict as of the date that this committee is taking place (January 10th, 1980). It is recommended that delegates focus on collectively intervening in the region via the means of the UN.

Relevant UN Documents

Security Council resolution 462 (1980) [deciding to call an emergency special session of the General Assembly on the Afghanistan situation] (9 January 1980, UNS(01)/R3)

Treaties and Events

In response to this invasion, Jimmy Carter, the president of the United States at this time, postponed the actions that were to be taken on the SALT II nuclear weapons treaty in addition to calling the US ambassador in Moscow back to the states in 1979. This reaction indicated that the friendlier diplomatic relations that had been established between the states and the union (called the detente) had come to an end in the sense that the US was strongly on the Afghan citizenry's side.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In light of the Security Council resolution 463 (see the section Relevant UN documents), six emergency meetings took place under the General Assembly. However, no effective solution was established. This might have been the case due to a lack of unified actions aiming to stop the invasion.

Possible Solutions

It is clear that the Afghan government is not acting in alignment with Afghan citizens' needs, views, or wants. Therefore, the establishment of a new government that would be more inclusive of the people's religious and ethnic values via democratic processes would be an efficient yet late step to take. It should be noted that for this to work, the violent clashes in the region must be ended or at least minimized first. This can be achieved by a ceasefire agreement.

Note that the central government is severely out of touch with the tribal-living parts of the country, and reforms for the well-being (such as access to sanitary products) of the remote areas of Afghanistan remain an issue at this time. Class divisions between the elite and rural folks are quite sharp and stand in the way of the formation of a unified state. Charity organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and certainly the UN must intervene with targeted aid and infrastructural support.



Afghan refugees fleeing to Pakistan near Peshawar

A concrete and large-scale peace treaty could require a gradual withdrawal of the Soviet forces while initiating diplomatic talks between the Afghan government and the Mujahideen group via meetings

under the supervision of the Soviet Union. A common ground needs to be determined by all parties with the priority of preventing civilian casualties and further damage to Afghanistan. A starting point could be to determine the locations, situation, and needs of civilians and how to send them aid.

Economic sanctions, when implemented considerately on the USSR, might be an efficient response to their violation of human rights. Such a decision will definitely provoke dissent from the USSR; therefore, delegates should prepare to debate confidently.

Delegates should bear in mind that thousands of refugees fled Afghanistan during this conflict. Actions need to be taken for their basic rights and needs such as access to shelter, food, education, and health services. Clauses with specific steps on how to support refugees might be discussed.

Notes from the Chair

Useful links (bear in mind that no information that dates after January 10th, 1980 is relevant to this committee):

Britannica web page on the Afghan War:

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Afghan-War>

“The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan,” a news article by PBS NewsHour:

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-july-dec06-soviet_10-10

“Afghanistan - The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response” by M. Hassan Kakar, an academic paper for those looking to dive deeper into the details:

https://books.google.com.tr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=X68wDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP9&dq=soviet+invasion+of+afghanistan&ots=A5dq0Bq7lx&sig=OsikJxVeQ5j9BMumdq9g8sMhJqc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=soviet%20invasion%20of%20afghanistan&f=false

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