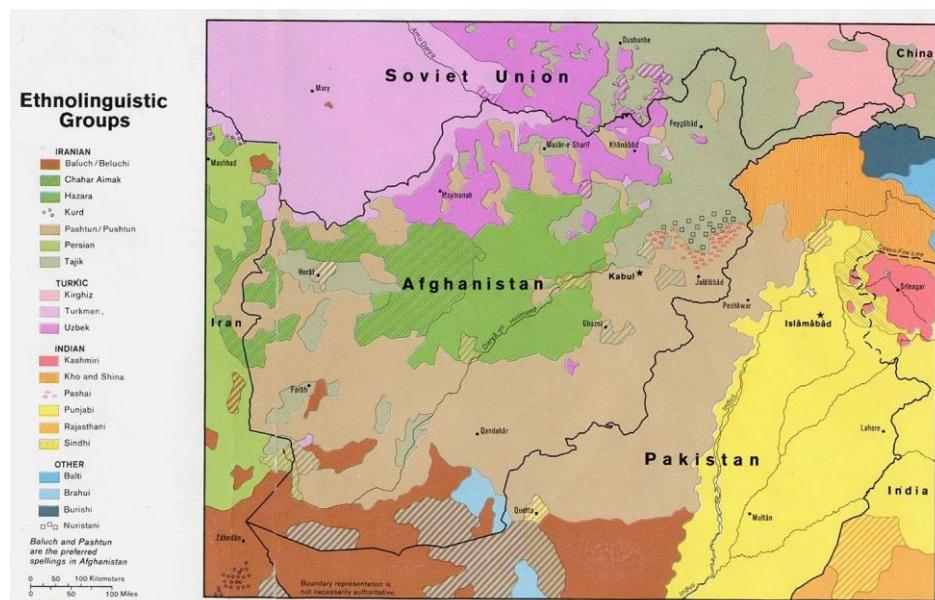


**Forum:** Historical Security Council  
**Issue:** Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan  
**Student Officer:** Rana Ürek  
**Position:** Vice President

## Introduction

"Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destiny of the world."

- Nicholas Spykman, an American political scientist, 1942 ("Rimland").



Afghanistan map from 1980's showing different ethnicities and existing borderlines ( *Afghanistan Ethnolinguistic*).

Afghanistan, the gateway between Middle East and Asia, has been the battleground between world powers from the very beginning. Possessing a valuable geopolitical position, the country has witnessed repeated invasions in its history. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, the regional rivalry between the British and the Russian Empires over Afghanistan, the buffer zone between the Russian lands and the British controlled India, resulted in four proxy wars fought between the years 1838 and 1878 also known as The Great Game.

Since 1800's to 1979 there hasn't been a surprising change regarding the external influences over Afghanistan. On the Christmas Eve of 1979 Soviet forces according to Western media invaded Afghanistan and according to the Soviet government, began a necessary political intervention. The indisputable fact is that with the arrival of the Soviets the President Hafizullah Amin was killed and overthrown to be replaced by Babrak Karmal as a result of the coup. The external influence of Soviet Russia over Afghanistan would trigger international response over the world, especially by United States. The region seems to be bounded to once again become a playground for the two world superpowers, United States of America and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as well as a reflection of the Cold War between them.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Pashtun:** The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Pashtuns largely inhabit in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan since the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Durand Line, established by the British in 1896 divided the Pashtun tribes into two. This division of this ethnic group into two in separate countries would become one of the political elements to fuel the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan especially with the late 1940's and the question of an independent "Pashtunistan."

**Land Reform:** Implementing changes regarding the laws and regulations of land ownership. Land reform was one of the many changes brought to the country by People's Democratic party of Afghanistan. They aimed to take the land from mullahs, who controlled about 40% of the land, and give it to the control of the people who actually did the farming. Financially, it is one of reasons for the uprisings the PDPA regime experienced.

**Mujahideen:** A term most commonly associated with the Islamic traditionalist militia groups supported by United States of America and Pakistan in their fight against the Soviet invasion. Yet the foundation of the mujahideen existed long before the Soviet invasion, 1979. Traditionalists always despised the rule of communist party in Afghanistan, opposing the changes brought by them such as opening

**Guerilla Warfare:** A military tactic adopted by militias to compensate the indifference in arms supplies, technical equipment and number of soldiers existing in organized armies. It is an irregular form of warfare to be generally conducted by small groups of combatants. The military strategies to wear down the enemy include sabotages, ambushes and hit and run tactics.

**People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan:** The political party governing Afghanistan during and before the Soviet invasion embodied a communist ideology and has gained the control over the country with the Saur Revolution in April 1978. With the coup, they overthrew the previous ruler Daoud Khan who has also gained control over the country as a result of a coup. Even though Daoud had gained the support of some factions of PDPA at the time he overthrew the king, his support ceased to exist as Daoud jailed many members of the PDPA. With the leadership of PDPA many reforms were trying to be implemented in the country. Legalization of trade unions, women rights and land reforms were the aimed changes that received a backlash from traditionalists.

**Khalq and Parcham:** Names of the factions existing under the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. In a simplified view Parcham is a reformist faction Khalq is a more revolutionary faction. The division between the party itself was criticized by the Communist Party Soviet Union, which supported the PDPA with military equipment as well as advice. They also encouraged these factions to unite which happened in 1977.

## General Overview

With the Saur Revolution, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan overthrew Daoud on 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1978. Daoud was also a leader that came into power as the result of a coup he conducted against his cousin Zahir Shah in 1973. Even though Daoud previously had the support of PDPA, the five years under his rule confirmed him as a tyrant. He jailed many PDPA members and removed communist members from cabinet positions. Arguably in order to further suppress the communist opposition, he weakened the ties and dependence of Afghanistan with USSR. He tried to reduce the number of Soviet military advisors in Afghanistan, and instead favoured some of the military men to get their trainings from US. In a 1977 meeting Daoud had with Leonid Brezhnev, the end of the relations can be seen very clearly. When Brezhnev wanted to discuss the agenda item of the number of experts brought to Afghanistan from NATO countries, and asked the removal of those "spies," Daoud responded with wanting to keep USSR out of the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Daoud furthermore sought to establish ties with Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia. From the Soviet point of view his actions possessed the threat of Afghanistan becoming an ally of the West, therefore Daoud's policies were not well received by Soviets. Additionally, Daoud's Pashtun nationalist policies resulted in him losing popularity from traditionalists in the country as well. During this period of time Pakistani intelligence started to aid traditionalist Islamists in Afghanistan as early as this time due to Daoud's Pashtun nationalism.

Daoud's rule increasingly polarized the country, both the Islamists and communists wanted to gain control. After the Saur Revolution, the Islamic insurgency still continued to this reason as well as ideological differences with the communist regime. According the Soviets the revolutionary changes implemented in Afghanistan by PDPA were taking place too fast without getting much public approval and further aggravating the situation with the traditionalists who wanted an Islamic rule. Even though they managed to increase the number of women attending in universities and also tried to decrease the illiteracy levels in general, the Taraki government constantly had to deal with insurgencies. The insurgencies and the mujahideen fighters were also backed before the Soviet invasion by United States, as a part of the global proxy wars, where world powers endeavored to gain control over strategic nations. Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter at the time, states that US aid went to those fighters even six months before the Soviet Invasion. Pakistan also played an important role in the aiding of these Islamic fighters alongside United States. That's why PDPA for a Soviet military intervention to combat these insurgencies, especially after the Herat uprising in March 1979, yet Brezhnev responded with the following answer: "[full Soviet intervention] would only play into the hands of our enemies – both yours and ours" (Graebner et al. [Page 433]). Of course this policy would change after a few months, but this shows that Soviets viewed the leadership of PDPA not to be very strong and believed that their troops' presence would further increase the instability of the country. Still, they provided military equipment to PDPA. However the only opposition PDPA had to deal with was not the traditionalists. Until 1977 two different ideological factions existed within the party itself and resulted in further conflict and instability.

The two factions were called Parchams and Khalqist. Let it be noted that the first president after the revolution, Nur Taraki belonged to the Khalq faction. The first significant ideological difference between these two factions resulted after the revolution. Khalqs wanted to give military officials that participated in the Saur revolution, a membership in the PDPA Central Committee. Parchams opposed the idea and were seen as non-active members of the Saur Revolution and opportunists by the Khalq faction who were more radical than the Parchams. The ambassador crisis with the United States also thought to be resulting from this faction difference. On February 1979, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Adolph Dubs was kidnapped and killed by leftist militias thought to be ideologically in line with Parchams. Even though their negotiating terms and aims are still not entirely clear, it is assumed that these Parcham militias tried to gain leverage over the Khalq government by kidnapping the US official and asking for the release of political prisoners of their cause. The crisis resulted in the weakening of US Afghan relations, showing that the divided nature of the PDPA was causing problems in the country. Let it also be noted that the Soviet backed Babrak Karmal was a part of the Parcham faction.

After Hafizullah Amin overthrew Taraki, the need to interfere arose in the Soviets. First of all the uprisings only increased with the coup since Amin was heavily associated with the radical changes made in the country and the coup further decreased the instability. Some sources argue that because of the increase in the Islamic insurgency movements, USSR feared another Islamic Revolution similar to what has happened in Iran. But more importantly, Amin was viewed as an unreliable leader who was thought to have ties with US officials. The immense change in circumstances fueled Soviets to interfere. On 24<sup>th</sup> of December, approximately a month after the coup conducted by Amin, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. Amin was assassinated and replaced by Babrak Karmal. Shortly after the event United Nations called for the removal of troops and gathered an emergency meeting to discuss the issue of "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan."

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **USSR**

It is assumed that Soviets welcomed the opportunity to interfere in Afghanistan without a show of reluctance. Yet this is a misconception. There has been several occasions where the government of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan contacted Soviet leaders for military help in suppressing the uprisings against the regime before the December of 1979. When President Taraki contacted both Alexei Kosygin, the chairman of USSR, and Leonid Brezhnev, President of USSR, regarding the Herat uprisings in March of 1979 he was met by refusal. Other influential figures such as Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko and Andrei Krilenko were also highly skeptical towards any intervention. Gromyko even stated the following: "With whom will [the Soviet army] fight? With the Afghan people! Our Army would have to shoot them! To be blunt, the Afghan [communist] leaders have made many mistakes and haven't got the support of their own people" (Gibbs [Page 235]). USSR thought of PDPA to be divided within itself due to the two fractions existing in it and viewed most of their reforms to be too fast and sometimes untimely. Even though they had supported the PDPA in the form of equipment and advisors, because of the mentioned political implications a few months before the invasion Soviets were not in favour of taking military actions. It can be argued that the main catalyst for their actions on December 1979 was due to Hafizullah Amin taking the power of the government. He was considered to be unreliable by USSR and was suspected to have ties with United States of America. Actually from the Russian point of view the invasion was legitimized by their aim to combat US ties in Afghanistan. Yet this reluctance to interfere first should not be the sole reason to justify the invasion. It should also be noted that trying to combat Islamic militias by making sure they were not getting aid from local civilians would only

result in the killing of innocent civilians. Which is exactly what Gromyko has once said and listened that was now disregarded.

### **United States of America**

United States was one of the countries that openly criticized and opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It is also known during the Cold War, United States used the “domino theory” to justify taking actions in one end world to protect their well being as a nation. Eisenhower was the first one to describe the theory, which predicted that with many socialist revolutions taking place in the world, each one would further trigger the other resulting in USSR expanding its control over the world. This idea was used to justify the United States war in Vietnam before getting involved with Afghanistan. And with the case of Afghanistan it is also similar. In the 4th of January 1980 speech, when the president Jimmy Carter addresses the nation he says: “this invasion is an extremely serious threat to peace because of the threat of further Soviet expansion into neighbouring countries in Southwest Asia” ("President Jimmy" [2:41]). United States did not want USSR to gain regional dominance and extend its influence over the Persian Gulf. Even before the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan and before the assassination of Hafizullah Amin, they supported the mujahideen that was against the already existing communist regime of Afghanistan under the leadership of Nur Taraki. An interview conducted in a French journal with Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security advisor to President Jimmy Carter at the time of the invasion reveals important information. He comments the following: “According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the mujahideen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul” (Gibbs [Page 241]).

### **Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (PDA) & People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)**

The quick buildup of communist reforms on top of each other were creating opposing Islamic traditionalist factions in the country. Before the coup and consequent invasion there were uprising the government of Taraki had to deal with. On top of this inconvenience, the party was not completely united and had two different factions in it: Parcham and Khalq. Upon the encouragement of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, those two faction were reunified in 1977. Yet PDPA was still not strong with the internal politics within itself. The successful coup of Hafizullah Amin, a member of PDPA who was also the minister of national defence, to

overthrow Nur Taraki illustrates this situation. Amin was seen as an unreliable politician and suspected to have ties with US by USSR officials. Therefore his presidency only lasted a month before he was assassinated with the Soviet invasion and replaced by Babrak Karmal, another member from the PDPA, by the Soviets. Amin used to belong to the Khalq faction and Babrak was from the Parcham faction.

### **Mujahideen**

The traditionalist Islamic fighters opposed the communist regime due to the ill-timed implementations of many radical changes in the country that went against the ideology of traditionalist Islam such as women rights and the secularism. Yet there were also significant financial motives for opposing the regime such as the land reform policies. With their fight against PDPA and USSR, mujahideen received training and help by United States often directed to them by the intelligence agency of Pakistan. During the invasion these fighters were mentioned positively by the Western media. Yet today, it is acknowledged that the aid that went to the radical Islamic fighters and the mujahideen may have helped the formation of terrorist militias such as Taliban acting in Afghanistan.

### **Pakistan**

Pakistan and Afghanistan are not known for their good bilateral relations. Starting from 1940's, as Pakistan gained independence there arose a call for a separate Pashtunistan from Pashtun nationalists or alternatively a proposition to merge their land with Afghanistan. The political situation with the divided Pashtuns existing in these two neighboring states led to the increase of tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, such as Afghanistan opposing the entry of Pakistan into United Nations, and Pakistan committing airstrikes in the Pashtun region. The bad relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan heavily affected the course of the events before and during the invasion due to Pakistan's involvement with the support of the mujahideen. As it is known the mujahideen, traditionalist Islamic fighters opposing the communist changes in the country, played an important role fighting with the Soviets and opposing the communist regime, they were also supported by United States through Pakistan. A former Pakistani military official even states that he had personally introduced a CIA official to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a warlord who fought with the mujahideen. This is an example of how important the Pakistani intelligence was regarding their cooperation with United States regarding the situation of the mujahideen.

## Timeline of Events

<b>27 April 1978</b>	PDPA overthrows Daoud, a ruler that has also came into power by another coup by overthrowing the Zahir Shah. The country is renamed: Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). An insurgency movement begins in rural parts of the country soonly due to the communist reforms being implemented.
<b>5 December 1978</b>	A friendship treaty is signed with the USSR, the beginning of Soviet support for PDPA.
<b>February 1979</b>	US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Adolph Dubs is killed after being kidnapped by leftist militias in Afghanistan. Of course, this event weakened the US Afghan relations.
<b>March 1979</b>	Herat uprising against the communist regime takes place. PDPA asks for military troops to be sent by USSR, yet USSR declines this proposition, not eager to have a military intervention at this time. Instead they provide military equipment and advice.
<b>September 1979</b>	Taraki is assassinated in a coup and Hafizullah Amin seizes the power. The insurgency continues to grow under the rule of Amin.
<b>12 December</b>	The Politbureau's inner circle decided to interfere with the concern raised towards Amin's secret meetings with US diplomats.
<b>24 December</b>	Soviet forces enter Afghanistan and within 5 days Amin is assassinated and replaced by Babrak Karmal from PDPA.
<b>January 1980</b>	United Nations calls for the removal of soviet troops and commences an emergency meeting discussing the issue of "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan"

## UN Involvement

After the entry of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan on 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1979, United Nations to hold an emergency meeting regarding the topic of "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan". On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1980, a resolution prior to the Resolution 462 was being drafted in United Nations Security Council, yet it was vetoed by USSR. Due to the nature of the veto right, the council decided to hold a General Assembly debate upon the topic. Two days later on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, the Resolution 462 passed in Security Council with 12 votes in favor. The countries opposing the resolution were USSR and East Germany.

The general attitude towards the topic in General Assembly debate was definitely not in favor of USSR. The actions of USSR was condemned by many nations and the removal of troops were called upon by the United Nations. Still there were a few countries that took moderate to favorable stances upon USSR such as Cuba, Ethiopia, Angola, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria. Some of them being dependent on USSR with the Warsaw Pact. Yet it is an oversimplification to assume that economic dependency was the only motivating element in the decision of the 18 Member States that voted against the UN General Assembly resolution asking for the complete removal of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Many of those countries that voted against embodied socialist, Marxist ideologies in their countries' policies, resulting in their favorable attitude towards USSR that has supported PDPA in the past.

## **Relevant UN Documents**

United Nations Security Council Resolution 462  
Record of Meeting Held On 10 JAN. 1980 (OPENING) A/ES-6/PV.1  
Record of Meeting Held On 11 JAN. 1980 A/ES-6/PV.3  
Record of Meeting Held On 12 JAN. 1980 A/ES-6/PV.5  
Record of Meeting Held On 14 JAN. 1980 (CLOSING) A/ES-6/PV.7

## **Possible Solutions**

The war in Afghanistan lasted for a decade. Some would call it the "Moscow's Vietnam" for the long duration of the conflict and its proxy war nature during the Cold War era. The Soviets faced strong resistance from the mujahideen supported by the United States of America and couldn't easily advance into the villages. There were international calls for Soviet Union to draw its military forces back, the decisions coming from the United Nations after the emergency meeting included, yet USSR - one of the world powers of its time- resisted to such humanitarian calls. And it should be noted that the war in Afghanistan was very much like a proxy war more than a single sided USSR invasion. In fact as mentioned previously in the report even before the invasion, United States had been aiding the traditionalist opposition towards the communist regime in order not to lose control over the region of Afghanistan. Therefore in many ways the war was not about achieving short military victory. Both of the sides, Soviets and the Afghan resistance backed by United States, tried to keep their presence as long as they could. Therefore a quick military solution is not realistically possible once the war in Afghanistan is viewed as a small part of the many decade long tensions between USSR and US. Yet that didn't stop the two world powers from asserting their dominance over the region for ten years, knowing the conflict would continue for many years.

## Notes from the Chair

<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000600190013-5.pdf>

Here is the link to a CIA prepared document on the specific political attitudes taken by various countries around the world regarding the issue of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I would recommend the delegates to check the policies of countries not outlined in the “major parties involved” section or the “UN involvement section” of the research report if they are interested.

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