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Question of: Addressing Military Intervention and Regional Stability: The Soviet-Afghan War and Panjshir Offensive, 16 May 1982
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Introduction

The Soviets began their invasion of the country of Afghanistan in late December 1979. The decision to intervene was due to the fact that the Soviet Union, at the time, was in support of the communist regime. The Soviet Union was adamant about keeping their communist influence alive through the government, which is how they justified its invasion. The Afghan government, however, faced uprisings and conflicts against anti-communist Muslim **guerrillas**. This conflict quickly escalated to be more devastating and prolonged than expected; the war left a significant mark on both countries (“Soviet invasion of Afghanistan”).

Afghanistan held strategic importance to the Soviet Union as a geopolitical pawn in the conflict between the Soviet Union and The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (U.K.), whose concerns centered on the Soviet Union’s Tsarist territorial expansion into Central Asia; they feared that this conquest would ultimately reach India’s borders, which prompted the U.K. to pursue three wars with the Soviets as a buffer against Soviet advances. Furthermore, gradual unrest arose in Afghanistan as a result of political and national uncertainty. A new government was established through a coup led by Mohammed Daoud Khan. However, the Soviets could not lock in Afghan allegiance because the new successor was in favor of foreign exports and refused to be a Soviet pawn. Khan set his sights on expanding his options; not allowing Afghanistan to be solely dependent on the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union was not pleased and the **Saur Revolution** was a coup staged by the **People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan** (PDPA), the socialist party of Afghanistan, to successfully implement a new communist leadership. This government was ultimately overthrown by a revolution conducted by **Hafizullah Amin**. The chaos left the Soviets on edge (McGee).

The Panjshir offensive was a series of Soviet military campaigns aimed at defeating **Ahmad Shah Massoud**, a commander that led the resistance against the Soviets in the Panjshir Valley, which was a key area directly northeast of Kabul. Between 1980 and 1985, nine different offensives were launched, which involved thousands of troops, armored vehicles, and airpower to combat the resistance. Although its weapons and firepower were far superior, the Soviet Union failed to establish lasting control over the



country due to Massoud's guerrilla tactics, knowledge of the mountainous terrain, and strong local support. After the ninth Panjshir offensive in 1985, the Soviets no longer took any action after realizing their lack of strategy could not overcome Massoud's grip on the valley (Mackenzie).

The agenda reflects the conference theme "Voices of Tomorrow" by encouraging delegates to analyze past military conflicts and long-term impacts on global security. By revisiting the Soviet-Afghan war and the nine offensives that came with it, delegates are challenged to learn from historical mistakes and advocate for future policies to protect vulnerable communities, amplifying the voices of tomorrow's leaders who will shape global conflict resolution.

Definition of Key Terms

Guerrillas

Guerrillas are usually part of small groups that fight against a larger army or government. They are known for using irregular military tactics, relying on hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, sabotage, and raids by using the terrain as an advantage. Guerrilla fighters are oftentimes associated with rebellion and freedom ("Guerrilla").

Saur Revolution

The Saur Revolution was a violent communist coup that took place on April 27-28, 1978 which was led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The PDPA overthrew and killed President Mohammed Daoud Khan, who was known for ending Afghanistan's monarchy. The PDPA went on to establish a pro-Soviet communist government. The government was known for introducing radical reforms such as land redistribution, women's rights, and more, which angered many traditional and religious Afghans. This widespread opposition led to growing rebellions across the country, eventually leading to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ("Saur Revolution in Afghanistan").

People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)

The PDPA was a communist political party in Afghanistan that was founded in 1965. The main goal of the party was to transform the country into a socialist state. The party was divided into two factions: Khalq ("Masses"), which was more radical, and Parcham ("Banner"), which was more moderate ("People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan").

Hafizullah Amin



Hafizullah Amin seized control of Afghanistan after the Saur Revolution in 1978. He was blamed for the increasing violence and unrest in the country. In December 1979, the Soviets killed Amin during their invasion and replaced him with a leader they could control (“Hafizullah Amin”).

Ahmad Shah Massoud

Ahmad Shah Massoud was a famous Afghan resistance leader who fought against the Soviet invasion. He was often regarded as the “Lion of Panjshir.” He used guerrilla tactics to defend the Panjshir valley and became the figurehead of the resistance. Massoud later fought against the Taliban and was assassinated in 2001 (Dupree et al.). Massoud was known to be affiliated with the Islamic Society which supported foreign Islamic groups in addition to traditional religious leaders (Dupree et al.). He is solidified as a polarizing figure; considered a hero to those who resist Soviet and Taliban dominance while some believe he is a warlord and abuser because he was associated with corruption and authoritarian control. He was assassinated by two al-Qaeda operatives disguised as journalists in the Takhar Province. His death was a shock to the country of Afghanistan, just two days before the nine eleven attacks (Freshta).

Timeline of Key Events

December 27th, 1979 - Operation Storm-333

On December 27th, 1979, the Soviet Union launched Operation Storm-333, a military assault that marked the beginning of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The target of the operation was the leader of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA): Hafizullah Amin. As a Marxist-Leninist, Hafizullah was known to be ruthless and had suspiciously risen to power following the death of his predecessor, Nur Mohammad Taraki. Despite Amin’s public allegiance to Soviet ideals, he was perceived as superficial by the committee of state security of the Soviet Union (KGB). The KGB believed that Amin had secret ties to U.S. intelligence and ultimately decided to eliminate him. On the day of the operation, the KGB first attempted to poison Amin during a state dinner, but the endeavor failed as his doctors unknowingly revived him. Hours later, Soviet special units, the elite KGB units and GRB Spetsnaz, stormed the Tajbeg Palace in Kabul. They met little resistance at first because they were initially disguised as allies. They proceeded to launch a brutal attack that ended with the death of Amin, along with his family. The Soviets installed Babrak Karmal, who was considered to be more compliant. However, the operation ignited



national resistance, and what was intended to be a swift change of regime turned into a prolonged and costly conflict that significantly weakened the Soviet Union (Syah)

1980 - 1985 - Panjshir Offensives

Between 1980 and 1985, the Soviets launched nine major offensives into the Panjshir valley, in hopes of crushing the influence of Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. The largest and most impactful offensives were Panjshir 5, 6 (1982), and 7 (1984), each involving around 15,000 Soviet and Afghan troops. During these offensives, the Soviets used tactics such as ground invasions and heavy aerial bombardment, oftentimes deploying fighter-bombers and MiGs to villages in an attempt to repel resistance fighters. Despite the Soviets' immense firepower and temporary control, Massoud's forces were able to consistently avoid capture by escaping into the mountains and regrouping to retake the valley from Soviet forces. A key moment from Panjshir 5 (1982) is shown when Massoud negotiated a brief truce to evacuate civilians, which drew criticism from other rebel groups. The Soviet troops continued to struggle with the terrain and lacked sufficient knowledge of guerilla warfare to defeat Massoud's network. By 1985, the Soviets had ended its large-scale offensives in the region (Mackenzie).

October 29th, 1987 - Battle of Keran

The Battle of Keran was a major Mujahideen offensive led by Ahmad Shah Massoud in northeastern Afghanistan. The aim of the battle was to seize control over the seven Soviet-backed Afghan army bases to disrupt the supply line and weaken Soviet control. To win, Massoud used inside information from spies as well as building a model of the valley to rehearse the attack. The battle began at dawn, which was slightly earlier than anticipated, due to a Soviet soldier spotting the attack and raising the alarm. Massoud went on to launch the assault anyway, even though some weapons were not in place. The main base fell in forty minutes, with government troops either surrendering or fleeing, while the secret Khad police forces fought to the death, knowing their capture would end in execution. Although there were concerns of Soviet air support, no intervention came, and the Mujahideen won a decisive victory. The casualties on the prevailing side resulted in 14 casualties and 11 injured, while the enemy had 29 casualties, and 300 were captured. This battle showcased the declining morale of the Soviets and the effectiveness of guerrilla warfare (Mackenzie).

September 25th, 1986 - Summer, 1987 - Introduction of the Stinger Missile and Its Impact

In September 1986, the U.S. introduced the FIM-92 Stinger missile to the Soviet-Afghan War, which was the turning point for the Mujahideen, since they were finally able to challenge Soviet air power. Within days of use, the Stingers took down multiple Mi-24 Hind helicopters, which limited Soviet



aerial dominance. The weapon caused the Soviets to change their tactics to become more cautious by flying lower. Although effective at first, the missile's impact faded by 1987 as Soviet countermeasures improved and Mujahideen's misuse of weapons reduced their battlefield presence. Despite its symbolic significance, the Stinger was not the primary reason for the Soviets' ultimate withdrawal: factors such as politics, economics, and strategies had already set it in motion (Garcia).

October 1985 - February 15, 1989 - Soviet Withdrawal and the Failure of Reconciliation

After nearly a decade of war, the Soviet Union decided to withdraw from Afghanistan in October of 1985. The timeline was officially announced in February of 1988. The aim was to create a stable Afghanistan preferably through U.N.-supervised free elections. However, the U.S. shifted its position over time: from initially supporting mutual withdrawal in 1985 to continuing to send arms shipments to the Mujahideen, even after the 1988 Geneva Records were signed. Both the Reagan and Bush administrations were heavily against any election plans for Najibullah, a Soviet-backed Afghan president. By 1990, the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze became frustrated with U.S. involvement and argued that the American-backed Mujahideen was more interested in seizing power than democracy. The Soviet military withdrawal was officially completed on February 15, 1989, but there was no political reconciliation as previously hoped, sending Afghanistan into a civil war ("The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan 1989").

Position of Key Member Nations and Other Bodies

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in December 1979 to secure a pro-soviet government and prevent the rise of Islamic insurgency near its borders. The Soviet Union was threatened by the growing influence of its leader, Hafizullah Amin. Fearing instability and U.S. influence, Soviet troops were sent to invade and kill Amin to install Babrak Karmal. Moscow wanted to protect socialist values under the Brezhnev Doctrine but underestimated the resistance. The U.S. and other allies supported and sent aid to the Afghan Mujahideen. Despite hopes for a quick victory, the Soviet Union was subjected to a costly war that would fail to secure its goals (McGee).

Afghanistan



Afghanistan was in a deeply unstable state during the Soviet-Afghan war. After the coup in 1973 by Mohammed Daoud, the country struggled to balance nationalist and pro-Soviet forces. The 1978 Communist revolution allowed Hafizullah Amin and Nur Taraki to rise to power. Their attempts to push Marxist reforms sparked widespread armed resistance, especially in Islamic tribal regions. Civil war continued to escalate, and internal power struggles only further weakened the government. By late 1979, the Afghan army was collapsing, which led to Soviet invasion and political control (“Soviet invasion of Afghanistan”).

United States

The U.S. initially hoped to maintain its influence and democratic views in Afghanistan by recognizing the Taraki regime after the 1978 revolution. However, as Soviet control deepened, the U.S. grew concerned. After the Soviet invasion in December 1979 and their installation of Soviet pawn Babrak Karmal, the Carter administration strongly opposed the Soviet Union’s actions. In response, the U.S. imposed economic sanctions, boycotted the 1980 Olympics, and began to aid the Mujahideen to combat the Soviets (“Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations”).

Pakistan

Although not directly involved in or invaded by the Soviet Union, Pakistan viewed Soviet occupation in Afghanistan as a threat to its sovereignty and regional security. As a result, under President Zia-ul-haq, Pakistan aligned itself closely with the U.S. and served as a conduit for support to the Afghan Mujahideen. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) became the key agency for channeling arms, training fighters, and managing guerrilla operations. Pakistan also negotiated a massive compensation from the U.S. for its cooperation, which involved the exchange of economic and military aid valued at \$3.2 billion. Pakistani tribal regions and Pashto-speaking officers helped with training and assisting the Afghan militants. President Zia demanded secrecy, rapid arm shipments, and no direct CIA involvement during training. This collaboration helped the Mujahideen greatly and added a hefty bill for the Soviets (Khan et al.).

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia contributed greatly to the funding of recruitment and training of Islamic fighters. Around 35,000 fighters from 40 different countries joined the war, and most received training in Pakistan from Saudi financial backing. Saudi Arabia’s support enabled the large-scale mobilization of Mujahideen, which helped boost morale and global support for the cause. Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were indispensable to the success of U.S.-led efforts to resist Soviet expansion in Afghanistan (Steinberg et al.).



United Kingdom

Within three weeks of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the cabinet officials of the United Kingdom discussed providing military aid for “Islamic resistance” purposes. The cabinet discussions were revealed via secret notes sent by Sir Robert Armstrong to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The United States, France, and Germany all cooperated with the United Kingdom to send supply of missiles through Pakistan. Thatcher supported Afghanistan’s opposition to the Soviet Union and heavily supported the Carter administration’s boycott of the Moscow Olympics. The United Kingdom, under Thatcher, moved quickly to send aid with allies to support the Mujahideen (Bowcott).

France

The French government, at the time during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, led by President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing was criticized for not taking a stronger stance on the situation. Paris demanded for “positive gestures” from Moscow, specifically withdrawal of Soviet troops. France moved toward a firmer anti-Soviet stance (Lewis).

China

China played an important role in aiding the Mujahideen, training them and sending them millions of dollars worth of supplies. However, unrest spilled into Xinjiang since the majority of the city’s population was Muslims. China’s support for the Afghan Mujahideen in 1980, was driven by the fear of Soviet power. Xinjiang remains the central driver of China’s Afghan strategy, shaping its cooperation with unlikely partners in the west.

Suggested Solutions

To address conflicts, such as the Soviet-Afghan War and Panjshir Offensives, that heavily involve military intervention, delegates are encouraged to consider ways in which the international community can balance non-intervention for regional stability and civilian protection.

One potential course of action is neutral peacekeeping coalitions; this role could be possibly taken on by neutral groups such as the U.N. By taking on the role of peacekeeper, the coalitions would monitor conflict zones to ensure humanitarian access. Such bodies would help reduce the risk of escalated tensions between strong foreign powers such as the Soviet Union and the U.S. With that being said, neutral peacekeeping coalitions could prove to be a valuable asset during strained conflicts, as they can act as



both a mediator between two major powers while attending to the needs of displaced populations and vulnerable groups. In such instances where mediators are sent to help with conflicts, they are managed by the Department of Political and Peacekeeping Affairs (DPPA), which oversees many political missions that serve as platforms for diplomacy. The DPPA's Mediation Support Unit (MSU) aims to provide advisory, financial, and logistical aid through its "on call" groups of assistant mediators that are deployed to provide support during negotiations by being well versed in power sharing, constitution making, cease-fires, and other arrangements that relate to the conflict. Special units such as the MSU play an important role in maintaining peace and reaching compromises in difficult times ("Prevention and Mediation").

Another approach could focus more on the diplomatic pressure and negotiation aspect of the conflict. Delegates can propose mediated talks between the warring factions to explore the possibility of any compromises on power-sharing or transitional governance models. Direct talks between the two countries can be perceived as more effective than talks through a mediator. These proposals should also come along with talks of short-term measures such as temporary ceasefires, demilitarized zones, or agreements on how to handle civilian evacuation, especially in areas like the Panjshir Valley where civilian suffering was severe.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to post-conflict rebuilding. Delegates could recommend ways for political reconciliation and reconstruction aid. Pursuing talks about the aftermath of the war can lessen the tension between the two countries as they compromise and suggest proposals on refugees, displaced soldiers, release of hostages and prisoners, and investment in education and governance reforms that address the root causes of the conflict.

In all cases, delegates are challenged to think critically about the long-term consequences of military intervention by analyzing past historical outcomes such as the Soviet-Afghan War. By reflecting on conflicts in the past, delegates can suggest alternative solutions that might prove to be more effective in terms of sovereignty, human rights, and peace.

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