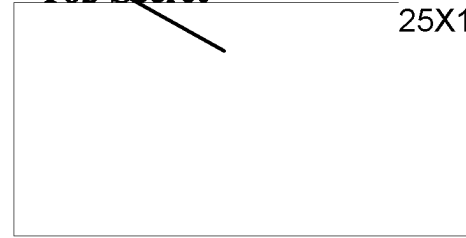




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Soviet Tactics on a “Political Solution” in Afghanistan

Special National Intelligence Estimate

~~Top Secret~~

SNIE 11/37-86

January 1986

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Treasury, and Energy.

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The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

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SNIE 11/37-86

**SOVIET TACTICS ON A
"POLITICAL SOLUTION" IN
AFGHANISTAN**

Information available as of 16 January 1986 was used in the preparation of this Estimate, which was approved by the National Foreign Intelligence Board on that date.

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SCOPE NOTE

In Special National Intelligence Estimate 11/37-2-85/L, *Afghanistan: Soviet Problems, Prospects, and Options in the Next Year* (March 1985), we concluded that, despite mounting costs and no near-term prospects of victory, Moscow would hold to its primary objective of a Communist regime in Afghanistan. We judged that Moscow was not interested in a political solution that required abandoning this objective and withdrawing its military forces from Afghanistan. Since that Estimate, some Soviet statements and Afghan Government actions have raised questions about these judgments. This Special National Intelligence Estimate examines whether there is now indeed more Soviet interest in a political resolution of the conflict short of complete victory.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

In recent months, particularly surrounding the Geneva summit, the Soviets have issued vague hints about their increased interest in a compromise political solution in Afghanistan.

We believe that these probes are part of a political effort to divide the coalition of countries and forces opposing them—particularly the United States, Pakistan, and the Afghan resistance groups. They are not, we believe, authentic indications of increased Soviet interest in a political solution short of the established Soviet aim of securing a Communist-controlled regime and suppressing the resistance with outside acquiescence. Supporting this judgment are:

- Explicit reporting on Soviet intentions to confuse their adversaries.
- The lack of change in Soviet conditions for a political settlement, which continue essentially to oblige acceptance of a Soviet victory.
- Intensified Soviet military action in Afghanistan indicating continued commitment to suppression of the Mujahedin.
- The character of regime-building actions in Afghanistan, which have feigned but not accomplished a broadening of its political base.
- Soviet domestic propaganda legitimizing a long-term commitment to the war.
- Indications that the Gorbachev regime intends to sustain, reinforcing where necessary, its commitment to Marxist-Leninist clients in the Third World.

Soviet hints have excited speculation and rumors that various “deals” have been or might be struck between the superpowers. This campaign has confused Soviet adversaries to some extent, but also undercut the confidence of the Kabul regime.

The Soviets are likely to continue to play intermittently on international hopes for a political settlement, particularly in the period leading to the next US-Soviet summit, and are likely to achieve some divisive effect. US actions supportive of the Mujahedin and Pakistan, as well as care in making our positions clear, will be needed to assure them that no compromise short of Soviet withdrawal is in sight.

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Should the current Soviet strategy in Afghanistan shift in a major way toward significant escalation of the conflict or toward withdrawal short of securing a Communist regime, we continue to believe we would receive convincing and timely indications.

For the near term, we expect the Soviets to continue their current strategy, which aims at eventual victory through incremental increases in military effort, more effective regime building in Afghanistan, and more efforts to split opposing ranks. We do not believe that their strategy is any more promising than heretofore, but see some signs of increased Soviet optimism.

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DISCUSSION

Background (1980-85)

1. Soviet conditions for a political settlement of the Afghan conflict were first set forth in a statement by Brezhnev in February 1980; they have not changed appreciably since then. Brezhnev blamed all internal Afghan opposition to the Communist takeover on foreign interference in Afghan affairs. He said that Soviet troops would be withdrawn only *after* all such interference, and therefore resistance, had ceased and the USSR had guarantees that it would not be resumed. The Soviets have consistently characterized their aim as an "independent and nonaligned" Afghanistan, a characterization they also apply to Cuba and Vietnam. They have left little doubt that their aim is an Afghanistan protected by Soviet power and governed by a Leninist regime. The Soviet formula for a "political solution" merely requires the acquiescence in this outcome of other interested parties. Soviet forces would stay or depart at Moscow's discretion. [redacted]

2. The Soviets seriously underestimated the international consequences of their intervention in Afghanistan and, for most of the first two years they were there, were on the defensive diplomatically. Pressed by various international players to negotiate, they would agree in principle and then reject the specific proposal at issue. Only after they failed to stave off UN, Islamic, and Nonaligned condemnations of their actions in late 1980 and early 1981 and the UN Secretary General appointed a special mediator on Afghanistan did the Soviets conclude that they needed a better approach. In August 1981, they let their Afghan allies make the tactical concessions necessary to begin the UN-sponsored Proximity Talks. Previously, the Afghans had insisted on direct talks with Islamabad and Tehran. [redacted]

3. Since that time, the Soviets have sought in the UN talks to test Pakistani resolve, to rebut charges the USSR is not serious about a political resolution of the Afghan conflict, to split the broad coalition that supports the Afghan resistance and Pakistan, and to obtain international legitimacy for their client regime. But the effort has been intermittent, generally timed

to influence the annual UN debate about Afghanistan or upcoming Proximity Talks. [redacted]

4. During the first few months of Andropov's term as General Secretary, there was a concerted Soviet effort to display the USSR as more seriously interested in a political solution to the conflict. The Soviets also stepped up attempts to negotiate cease-fires with resistance groups, which have gone on intermittently since then. After two rounds of UN talks, however, it was clear that the Andropov regime had not changed the Soviet position. [redacted]

5. Gorbachev came to power cultivating an aura of broad policy change and was the first of Brezhnev's successors not a full member of the Politburo at the time the decision to invade Afghanistan was made. Speculating that he may not have the same personal responsibility for Soviet policy toward Afghanistan as his predecessors, many observers—including Soviets—felt he might be more eager to find a way out of the conflict. His first moves, however, showed no change in the Soviet position. Gorbachev told [redacted] at former General Secretary Chernenko's funeral in March 1985 it was inconceivable that the USSR would abandon its ally or accept an unfriendly government in Kabul. The Soviets reportedly also said that they would defeat the Afghan opposition sooner or later, just as they had the Basmachi guerrillas in Soviet Central Asia. [redacted]

6. [redacted]

[redacted]

7. Mindful of the continuing international costs of Afghanistan and ready to discuss other regional problems in the context of a more activist diplomacy toward the United States, Gorbachev approved the June bilateral meeting with the United States on

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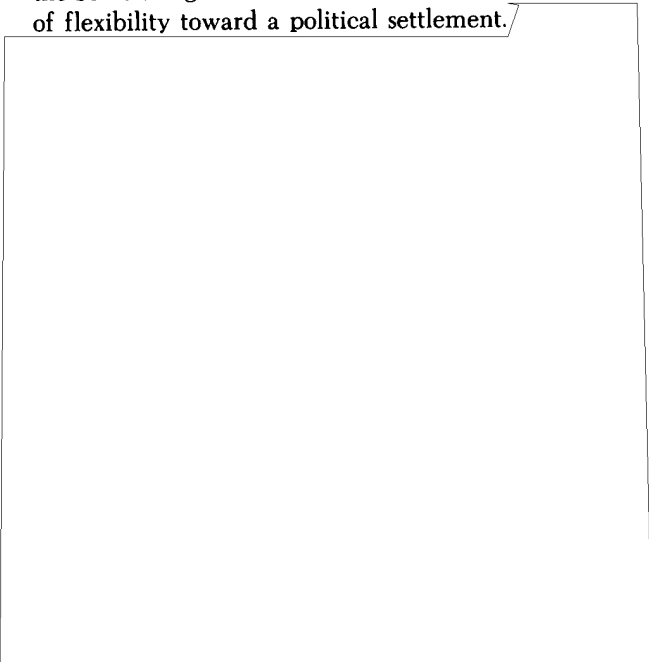
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Afghanistan and the reconvening of the UN-sponsored Proximity Talks. These meetings, however, provided no signs of a changed Soviet position. [redacted]

8. In the meantime, as General Secretary, Gorbachev presided over intensification of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, including a modest increase in troop levels, the appointment of a more activist new commander, more aggressive and costly operations, and additional pressures on the Pakistani border. Additionally, during Gorbachev's rise and tenure so far, Soviet domestic propaganda supportive of the war effort has increased. Although it bespeaks more leadership concern about domestic attitudes, it also signals resolve to stay the course. [redacted]

Recent Developments (Since Summer 1985)

9. As the November US-Soviet summit approached, the Soviets began a new effort to create an impression of flexibility toward a political settlement. [redacted]



11. The same month, the US Embassy in Moscow noted that the Soviets were sending mixed signals on Afghanistan. Some Soviet spokesmen were stressing that Gorbachev really wants out of Afghanistan and was prepared to cut a deal—contents unspecified—while others were saying the current policy was working, and there was no need for change. [redacted]

12. At the November summit with President Reagan, Gorbachev spoke at some length about Afghanistan and related Third World themes:

- He energetically defended Soviet views regarding the Third World, saying the USSR would

stick by its friends, denouncing what he said was a mistaken and dangerous proclivity by the United States to see Third World conflicts in East-West terms, and citing local socioeconomic conditions as their cause rather than the "hand of Moscow."

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- He charged that the United States wants to keep the Soviet Union engaged in Afghanistan, thereby implying that Moscow regards the Afghan war as politically costly. Although he generally attacked US support for anti-Communist resistance movements, which he termed "anti-popular forces," he did not specifically attack US support for the Mujahedin. He denied that the USSR had strategic interests in Afghanistan relating to warm-water ports, bases, or oil.

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- While not specifically mentioning Soviet troop withdrawal, he altered the usual order of Soviet conditions for a settlement, placing an end to the fighting before guarantees of nonintervention, along with the return of the refugees and reconciliation "around" Afghanistan. The latter formulation conveys Moscow's insistence that what happens inside Afghanistan is no one else's business and suggests that the changed order of political conditions for a settlement was not deliberate, but resulted from Gorbachev's practice of speaking without notes.

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- Finally, he repeated Soviet willingness to discuss Afghanistan and other regional conflicts with the United States, suggesting there is room for significant US-Soviet cooperation in a political settlement.

These nuances, when noted publicly by US officials and possibly amplified by Soviet press backgrounders, excited media speculation about new Soviet flexibility. [redacted]

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13. Gorbachev's Geneva press conference and subsequent Supreme Soviet speech, however, offered no clues of a policy change. He reaffirmed Moscow's longstanding line on the need for a political settlement of the situation "around" Afghanistan. And he reiterated the standing position that only when the USSR has guarantees of noninterference in Afghan internal affairs will the question of Soviet troop withdrawals be resolved. [redacted]

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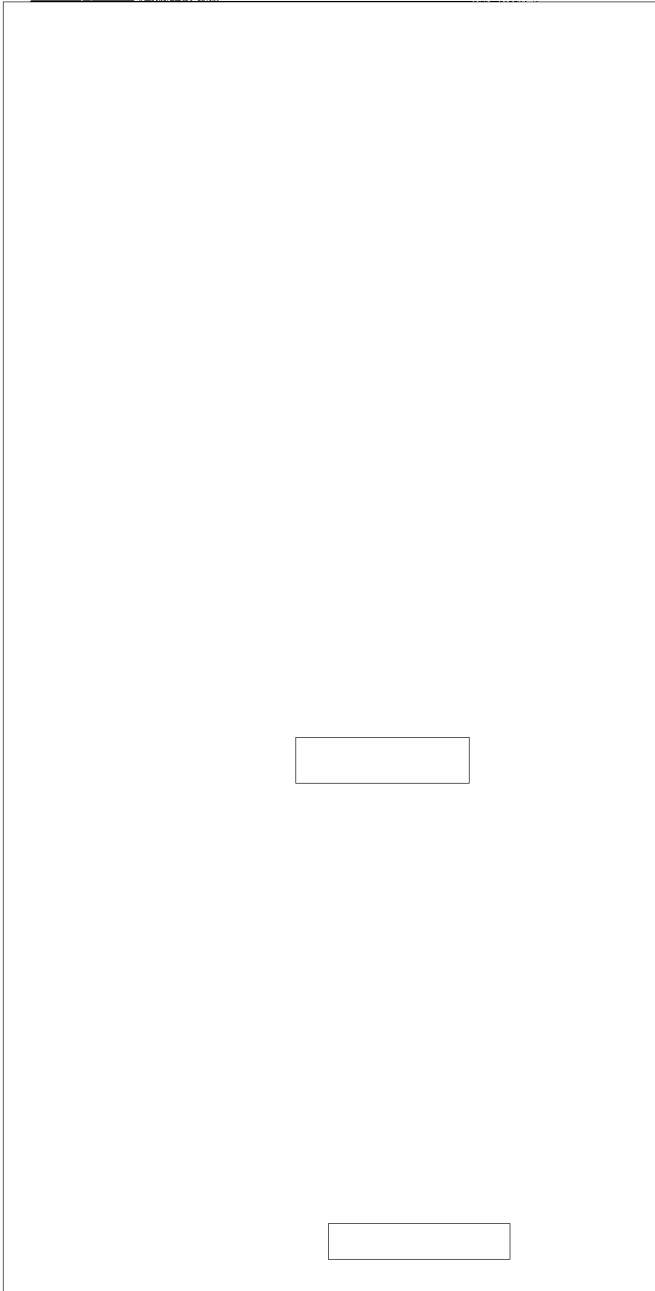
14. During November and December the Afghan regime made internal moves that were billed by a leading Soviet academic expert on Afghanistan as a new effort at reconciliation with its opponents. In fact, they were aimed only at those not actively opposing

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the regime or at those willing to lay down their arms and support the government. Not surprisingly, they attracted few takers. The new government, presented at the end of the year as containing many nonparty figures, was a reshuffled version of the old government. [redacted]

15. Round VI of the Geneva talks held in late December witnessed a new fillip on Soviet troop withdrawals but indicated that the USSR's Afghan allies were continuing diversions to avoid confronting this central question (see inset). [redacted]



16. Western press stories speculating in mid-December that Gorbachev invited French mediation toward a political solution during French National Assembly President Mermaz's visit to the USSR appear unfounded. In any event, when Gorbachev addressed the Moscow diplomatic corps at the end of the year, he reiterated a call for settlement of numerous regional conflicts, including the situation "around" Afghanistan. This excited fresh press speculation by Western reporters who were either encouraged by Soviet back-grounders to indulge in it, or had not read Gorbachev's wording carefully. [redacted]

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17. In the US Embassy's first exchange of 1986 with the Foreign Ministry on Afghanistan, the responsible Soviet department chief claimed the Afghan regime enjoyed ever-increasing popular support, characterized Pakistan's recent stance during the UN talks as unconstructive, and reiterated the Soviet position that there could be no troop withdrawals until after all interference (read resistance) ceased. [redacted]

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What Are the Soviets Up To?

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[redacted] authoritative Soviet officials have described confusing the enemy as the name of this signaling game. One top-level adviser to the regime was described as positively gloating over the confusion caused in the United States by Soviet tactics in the pre-summit period, noting how they issued deliberately contradictory statements on human rights, arms control, and Afghanistan. The Soviet said the USSR would continue pursuing this approach up to the 1986 summit. Another Soviet official said the Soviets had adopted the tactic of giving public hints that they are more willing than previously to talk about various issues, including Afghanistan, the aim being to support their claim in the UN Proximity Talks that the inflexibility of others is keeping their troops in Afghanistan and to buy time for Soviet decisionmaking. [redacted]

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19. The intent of the "confusion" the Soviets seek to sow is to weaken the relative unity, mutual trust, resolve, and effectiveness of the coalition combating them in Afghanistan. They aim, we believe, to achieve all or some of the following effects:

- To persuade elements in the United States and Pakistan that continued or increased support for the Mujahedin will thwart a political solution that may lie just around the corner.
- To entice compromise suggestions about a solution from their adversaries, from which the Soviets can select new tactical ploys.

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— To excite disruptive suspicions among their several adversaries that a “deal” may be struck by some at the expense of others, which the latter should preempt by making deals of their own

20. A case can be made that the Gorbachev regime *should* be interested in a real political solution that ends the Afghan war. Although the political, economic, and military costs of the war do not oblige Moscow to change course, some of these costs are rising, specifically the military and attendant economic costs of more vigorous operations. The burden of the war for Soviet foreign policy has in fact lightened over the years as sanctions have eroded and the international community has adjusted to the reality of the war. Nevertheless, it is still an inhibiting factor in Soviet efforts to encourage a shift toward detente in US-Soviet relations that would reduce the US challenge to Soviet interests and increase Soviet influence with US allies. It is still an inhibitor in Sino-Soviet rapprochement. It inspires mistrust of the USSR among Arab States but did not prevent Soviet diplomatic advances in the Persian Gulf in 1985. Moscow might expect these foreign policy burdens to increase in the future if the war continues to intensify. The Gorbachev regime may worry that such intensification could heighten the pressure on it to expand or escalate the war, with the risk of a larger East-West confrontation. Increased Soviet internal propaganda indicates that domestic unhappiness about the conflict may have deepened and has certainly become more worrisome to the new Kremlin leadership.

21. We believe these considerations at present play a role in stimulating the Gorbachev regime to try harder in pursuit of a “political settlement” in Afghanistan on Soviet terms—namely, outside acceptance of a Soviet victory. We do not believe they have inspired current Soviet interest in a settlement on any other terms. Beyond Soviet motives cited above, we rest this assessment on the following evidence and reasoning.

22. None of the reported hints about Soviet flexibility contains any substantive suggestion as to how the Soviet position might have changed or may change in the future. Were the Soviets truly interested in a settlement on terms other than a victory, we believe they would make more inviting proposals. Their failure to do so conveys a lack of seriousness as well as fear that more forthcoming proposals would undermine their image of resolve and the stability, such as it is, of the Kabul regime.

23. The Soviets probably appreciate better than much of the outside world that their invasion, military and security operations, and political tactics inside Afghanistan have essentially destroyed for years to come any political basis for a compromise settlement somewhere between their victory or defeat—most important, a Kabul government that could survive on its own and also be acceptable to the USSR. A Soviet pullout any time soon would lead to the destruction of the Kabul regime and to a defeat for Soviet power that would resound throughout the Soviet Bloc and the outside world. On no policy front has Gorbachev shown any willingness to reappraise Soviet interests so sweepingly or to accept such a grievous blow to Soviet superpower status. On the contrary, he has built his political platform on the premise that established Soviet internal and external aims can be achieved by more effective leadership. He has indicated that he intends to sustain, reinforcing where necessary, Soviet efforts to support Marxist-Leninist clients in the Third World.

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24. Gorbachev has presided over an intensification of the Soviet war effort. Although this may signify as much a response to necessity as confidence in future success, it does not indicate flagging Kremlin resolve. During the past year, we judge that intensified fighting with higher losses on both sides has yielded neither side real net gains. Although we doubt that Moscow is getting only good news on the war, there is fragmentary evidence that the Soviet Military Advisory Group in Kabul may think they are doing better than we believe they are.

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[Redacted]

Gorbachev might conclude that at last the war is going in the Soviets’ direction. Moreover, the Soviets appear to believe recent regime-building moves have actually strengthened the Kabul government, although we doubt this will prove out.

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25. Increased Soviet domestic propaganda in support of the war—which most recently included an hour-long TV documentary vividly depicting its brutality—by communicating the legitimacy of the campaign in the face of clear costs also communicates the regime’s resolve to continue with the campaign.

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The Impact of Moscow’s Political Tactics

26. Soviet political gamesmanship surrounding the Afghan war in recent months, through the diplomatic

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Afghanistan in 1985

In 1985 the Afghan resistance was better armed and trained than ever before. During the course of the year, it demonstrated improved capabilities to plan and coordinate its military operations, and it scored some notable successes. For instance, in June [redacted] Panjsheri resistance forces captured the Afghan garrison at Peshghowr and seized enough weapons to supply themselves for a year. The same month, some 5,000 men from various insurgent groups began an offensive against the Afghan garrison at Khowst in Paktia Province that ended when the Soviets launched their major operation in Paktia Province in August-September. The resistance also demonstrated greater proficiency in destroying aircraft in the air and on the ground, achieving in 1985 the highest totals of any year of the war. [redacted]

The Soviets deployed an additional 4,000 men—about half Spetsnaz troops, half regular motorized rifle troops—and launched more major campaigns than they have in the past. The new commander of the Southern Theater of Military Operations, General Zaytsev, became much more active in directing operations. Two major operations were along the Pakistani border and resulted in higher numbers of cross-border artillery strikes and air violations. The Soviets also continued trying to negotiate cease-fires with some insurgents, especially Panjsheri resistance leader Masood and the tribes along the border with Pakistan. Although Masood is still talking to them, the overall results of their tribe-buying efforts do not appear to have been very successful. Resistance supplies are still getting through, albeit with greater difficulty. [redacted]

Politically, the Soviets tried some new gambits—such as local elections—to demonstrate that Babrak Karmal has genuine popular support; but their efforts were undercut by the continuing ineffectiveness of the Afghan Government, party, and military. Few were won over to the government by either the sham elections for local government or the two tribal jirgas. The poor performance of the Afghan Army continues to be the major obstacle to the Soviet strategy. [redacted]

A review of Babrak's speeches in 1985 suggests he remains preoccupied with hanging on to power and preventing any of his Communist rivals from attracting Soviet support. [redacted] Moscow intervened when Babrak tried to get rid of the leader of the Khalqi faction of the party in June. It probably also was responsible for the promotion to the ruling Politbu-ro of the Khalqi Defense Minister in November. [redacted]

and media speculation it has stimulated, has had some detectable effect, not all of it positive from Moscow's point of view, and as yet without a tangible influence on the course of the war. [redacted]

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27. *The Resistance.* Some elements in the Afghan resistance, which has long been sensitive to developments that could be interpreted as signs of slackening US support, are concerned about an impending deal on Afghanistan. Fundamentalist resistance leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is convinced that the United States, Pakistan, and China have approved a deal that keeps Babrak in power, sets up a safe area for the refugees, and deploys a peacekeeping force made up of Pakistani, Libyan, Syrian, and South Yemeni forces as the Soviets gradually withdraw. And he persists in this belief despite US Embassy efforts to disabuse him of it. [redacted]

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28. Moscow will try to exploit this psychological climate in its effort to negotiate various resistance groups out of the conflict. As long as arms support continues to arrive, however, we believe these efforts will generally fail. [redacted]

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29. *The Afghan Regime.* There has been some negative effect in Kabul from Moscow's political rumormongering. As happened in 1982-83 when the Soviets were putting it about that Andropov wanted a political settlement, the Afghan Government and party became concerned. [redacted] members of the Khalqi faction are trying to contact the resistance to save themselves from the effects of a deal they would not otherwise survive. As in the past, the Soviets may have to issue public and other reassurances that undercut the credibility of their "peacefeel-ers." They can probably never maintain a reputation for complete reliability. Although the Afghan Communists have no place to go, their nervousness is a continuing burden to the Soviets. [redacted]

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30. *Pakistan.* Some Pakistani officials appear to have been genuinely encouraged by their session with Korniyenko in August. Afghan stonewalling in the UN talks and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's standard defense of the Soviet position in his September meet-ing with Yaqub should have lowered Pakistani expec-tations. [redacted]

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[redacted] US statements about what happened at the summit, the Afghans' behavior at the last round of the UN talks, and their beliefs about the rising costs of the USSR's Afghan venture are still encouraging

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them to believe that there will be real movement in the Soviet position once Gorbachev gets the Party Congress behind him. [redacted]

31. Thus far, Pakistani President Zia has taken Soviet hints of flexibility as evidence that his Afghan policy is correct. In the future, he may have to expend effort reassuring his supporters, particularly those suspicious about US steadfastness. He may face increased demands from his political opposition to take Soviet "peacefealers" seriously and not increase support to the resistance. Opposition criticism, however, is not likely to force Zia to change his Afghan policy. [redacted]

32. *China.* There is some indication the Soviets have been sending deliberately misleading private signals to the Chinese. [redacted]

[redacted]

33. We believe the Chinese will not take Soviet "peacefealers" very seriously unless the rhetoric acquires considerably more substance or is seen to be influencing Washington or Islamabad. [redacted]

34. *Saudi Arabia.* We believe Riyadh is also concerned that Washington will reduce its support for the resistance in the interest of better Soviet-US relations. The issue remains crucial for them because they [redacted] support to the resistance so as to discourage Soviet meddling closer to home and burnish their Islamic credentials. In the Arab world, rumors about an Afghan deal orbit about in the company of even more excited tales of US-Soviet condominium in a Middle East peace pact. As the Soviets increase their ties in the Gulf region, the Saudis may see more reason to waffle on their support to the Afghan resistance. This would be particularly true if they felt in danger of being left isolated by a US-Soviet "deal." [redacted]

35. *Iran.* Tehran has tailored its support for the resistance to serve its parochial interest in Afghanistan's Shias. But Iran does not want to see the Soviets win in Afghanistan, and, in the past, has been concerned about rumors of "deals" that might promote a

Soviet victory. We see no current evidence of Iranian concern on this score and suspect Iran would respond to such concern by trying to stiffen Pakistan's resolve. [redacted]

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36. *India.* The Indians have not responded positively to the latest round of Soviet "peacefealers," probably because of their experience in the summer of 1985. We believe Prime Minister Gandhi, fearing manipulation, will not want to get out front in any peacemaking diplomacy unless he gains confidence that real concessions by the Soviets or the other parties are in the offing. If he acquires that confidence, he may try to play a role to bolster Indian pretensions to be a regional superpower. [redacted]

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Conclusions, Outlook, and Implications for the United States

37. We believe, as we did last March, that the Soviets remain fixed on their objective of creating a viable Communist-controlled regime in Afghanistan and are determined to pursue their political and military campaign toward that end. We remain skeptical, however, that their current strategy will be sufficient to put them on a convincing path toward victory. If the resistance continues to get the required arms support, the record of the past five years and current evidence suggest they will be able to keep pace with any improvements in the Soviet combat performance. This judgment does not rule out the possibility that at some future point Moscow could substantially escalate its campaign or move toward withdrawal. [redacted]

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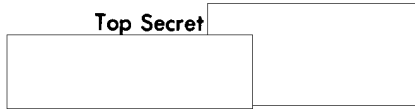
38. We expect Gorbachev periodically to play on international hopes for a settlement, particularly in the period leading up to the next summit. He evidently believes he can reduce Soviet difficulties in Afghanistan by feigning a more flexible diplomatic position internationally. The objective of this effort will be to get the USSR off the defensive diplomatically and break up the coalition that supports Pakistan and the Afghan resistance. But he must be wary of the counterproductive effects of undermining the Kabul regime and encouraging his adversaries by his "peacefealers." [redacted]

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39. The Soviets will attempt particularly to buoy Pakistani hopes for a political settlement. At the same time, to heighten Pakistan's need for a political settlement even on Soviet terms, we expect them to continue their efforts aimed at intimidating and destabilizing Pakistan, particularly through overt pressures on the border, subversive operations among the border

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tribes, and political actions within Pakistan. The Soviets will continue to use the Proximity Talks to provide a political fig leaf for their strategy of victory, and as a venue for atmospherics. But the irreconcilable positions of each side in these talks currently precludes any outcome unless one side gives in to the other's demands.

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40. Soviet political tactics are likely to achieve effects worrisome to the United States and its partners in opposing the Soviets in Afghanistan. During a period of more active US-Soviet dialogue on strategic and regional matters, accompanied by conflicting atmospheric trends in the superpower relationship and a great deal of confusion as to what is really happening, Soviet-inspired and purely spontaneous rumors about a "deal" over Afghanistan and other issues will inevitably gain credence. All parties to the opposing coalition will wonder what the others, especially the United States, are doing. We believe Pakistan's political resolve, which has been very solid, could become more vulnerable in this period.

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41. US partners in the campaign to resist the Soviets will be most reassured by tangible US actions to sustain support for the Mujahedin and for Pakistan's security. Official US statements about continued opposition to Soviet aims will have some reassuring value; but this could be outweighed by the suspicions created if there are official or credible indications of US interest in a compromise short of early Soviet troop withdrawals.

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42. We expect to be able to track the political action campaign around Afghanistan that the Soviets are very likely to conduct, at least as to its real intent and broad outlines. But the Soviets' capacity for

outright duplicity and their access to a multitude of communication channels plus the likelihood of spontaneous rumors, make it likely that the United States will be obliged to run a steady fire-brigade to keep suspicions and false hopes under control.

43. We continue to believe that we would receive convincing and timely indications of a major shift in the USSR's Afghan military strategy. Although we would not immediately detect a Soviet decision to escalate or expand the conflict, we could be alerted by developments in Afghanistan to anticipate such a decision, and we are very likely to see the military and logistic moves to implement such a decision well before they effectively changed the scope of the war or seriously increased the threat to Pakistan.

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44. In the less probable event the Soviets made a decision to withdraw from Afghanistan or to move toward a settlement that would oblige withdrawal, the initial indicators might be ambiguous or contradictory. However, we believe that we would quickly begin to see more convincing evidence on the scene—such as retrenchment of offensive military operations, concessionary bargains with resistance groups, and extraction of valued Communist cadres for a future campaign in the country. We believe a Soviet diplomatic effort to assist an authentic move to withdraw from Afghanistan would have much more convincing content than we have seen so far. The Soviets will not, however, decide their Afghan strategy on the basis of diplomatic bargains. Rather, they will decide their strategy—whether or not to continue the present course, escalate, or withdraw—on the basis of a broad assessment of political and military costs, risks, and prospects for success. They will tailor their diplomacy to support their chosen strategy.

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