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# The Soviet Leadership: Second Thoughts on Afghanistan

**An Intelligence Memorandum**

**Top Secret**

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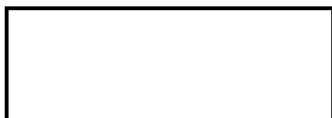
February 1980

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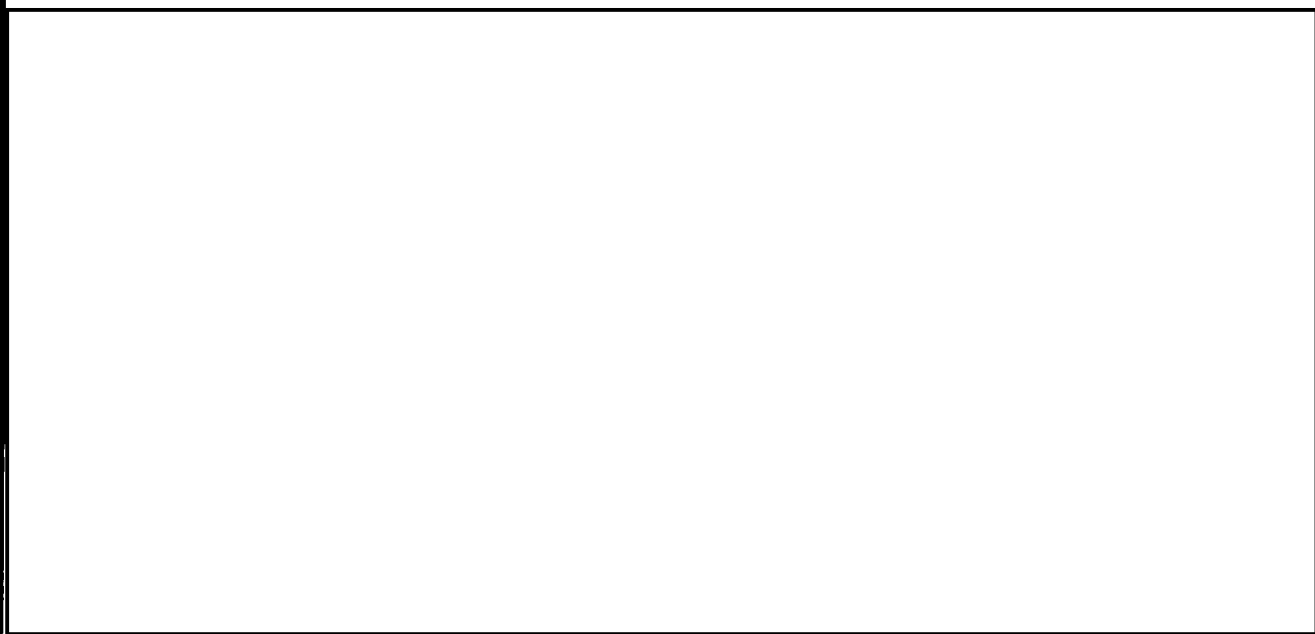


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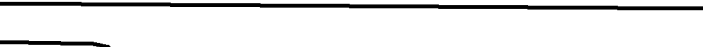



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**The Soviet Leadership:  
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
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**Summary**

 some Soviet  
officials   
 are disturbed about the impact of the Soviet  
invasion of Afghanistan on Soviet foreign and domestic policy. Although  
some of this concern may stem from initial reservations, the evidence  
suggests more that it reflects their unhappiness with, and perhaps surprise  
at, the price the Soviets have had to pay for this action. 

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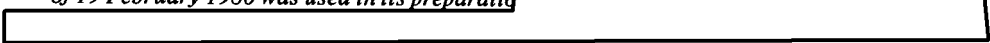
While misgivings may have arisen within the leadership, a change in policy  
is not yet in prospect. Brezhnev has clearly approved the invasion, and other  
leaders who have spoken out publicly have all rallied behind him. Such  
support will make it difficult for any of them to advocate a change in policy  
or to use this issue against Brezhnev or other senior leaders in the future. 

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*This memorandum was prepared by  the Office of Political Analysis  
USSR - Eastern Europe Division and has been coordinated with the National Intelligence  
Officer for the USSR-EE and with the Office of Central Reference. Information available as  
of 19 February 1980 was used in its preparation*



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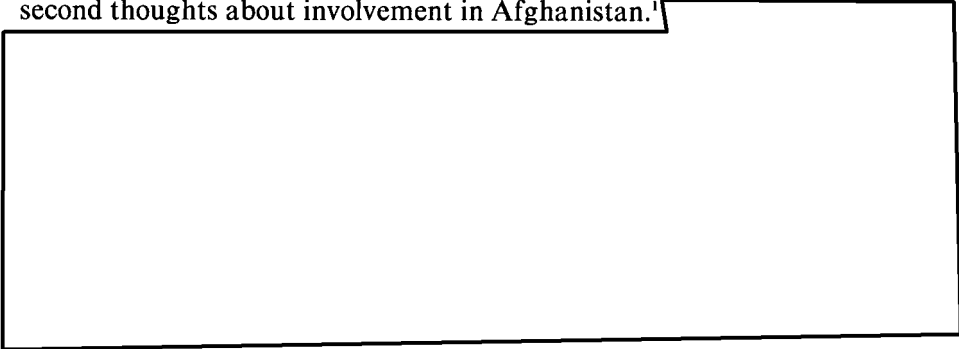
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**The Soviet Leadership:  
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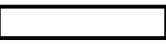
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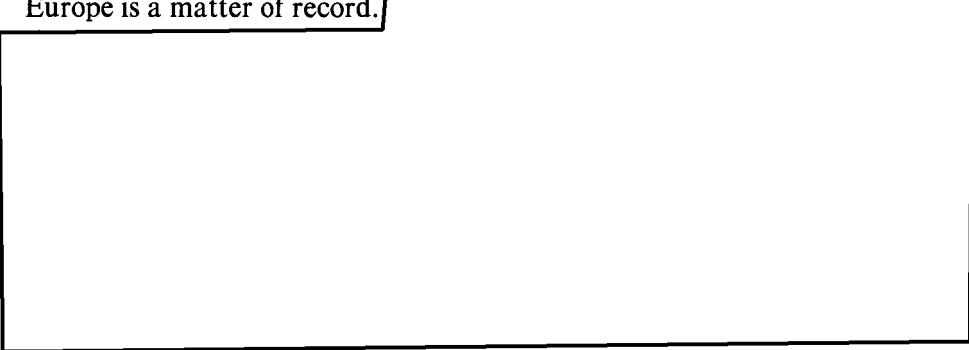
Second Thoughts

 that some leading Soviet officials have had second thoughts about involvement in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>



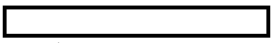
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 concern about both the general state of the Soviet economy and the consequences of a deterioration in East-West detente for Soviet policy in Europe is a matter of record.




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
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Konstantin Chernenko, a party secretary and Brezhnev protege, hinted in a 15 February election speech that he shares  concern about the consequences of the invasion for relations with the West. Over the past year, Chernenko has been one of the Politburo's most ardent defenders of detente. Although he does not appear to oppose the Afghan involvement per se, he clearly wants to limit the damage to other Soviet policies. In a comment probably intended as much for his leadership colleagues as his

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<sup>1</sup>This memorandum is a preliminary assessment 

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 that suggest certain Soviet leaders are now concerned about the negative consequences for other Soviet foreign and domestic policies of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Some of the information used in this memorandum, in addition, comes from abridged versions of public speeches given by some Soviet leaders prior to the Supreme Soviet elections. Because only excerpts were available, and because not all of the top Soviet leaders have yet spoken, the judgments in this memorandum must necessarily be tentative and speculative. A further assessment will be offered when this other information becomes available. 

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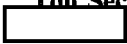
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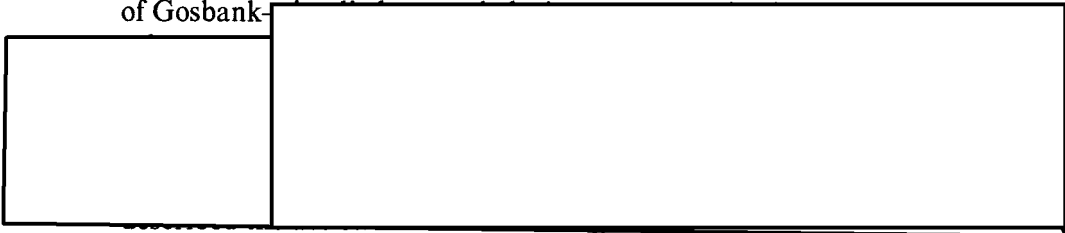
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constituents he argued that under present circumstances it was necessary to keep "cool and calm heads" and noted that "aggressive forces would very much wish us to respond in kind, with a similar ruthlessness," a statement suggesting that some of his colleagues might wish to do just that. He further asserted that the Soviet Union still seeks cooperation and hopes through equal negotiations to ensure "political settlements to the difficult problems existing between states. [redacted]

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Some lower level officials have expressed their view that the invasion of Afghanistan was a mistake. Several senior government representatives connected with the foreign trade establishment—including Minister of Foreign Trade Nikolay Patolichev, and Vladimir Alkhimov, the Chairman of Gosbank-



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Patolichev and his governmental associates would not be expected to welcome the prospect of long-term disruption of their efforts to get Western, and particularly US, technology [redacted]

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The Foreign Ministry, too, would probably only reluctantly endorse Soviet policies that might increase cohesion within NATO and place the USSR in a diplomatically defensive position. Its own objective appraisals aside, the Foreign Intelligence Directorate of the KGB may want to protect itself from any charges that it did not properly assess the consequences of developments in Afghanistan, and KGB officials in Afghanistan would probably prefer to keep events there under their control. [redacted]

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**Soviet Miscalculation**

[redacted] the Soviets are experiencing significant difficulties in normalizing the situation in Afghanistan and are being battered by worldwide condemnation. The mechanics of the coup against Amin appear to have been botched, the Soviet Army has not performed all that well, and Moscow's Afghan clients have not been able to establish any legitimacy in the country. The insurgency, rather than winding down, has grown—partly due to the mass defections from Afghan Army units [redacted]

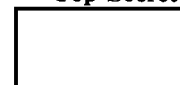
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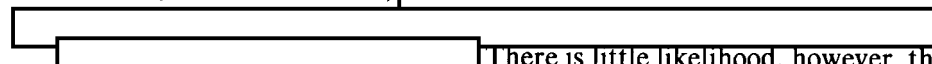
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The foreign reaction evidently has also been more negative than Moscow anticipated. The Soviets have responded by increasing the role of their military forces somewhat, [redacted]

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[redacted] There is little likelihood, however, that these efforts will be successful in the near term. The Soviets now contend with the prospect of a prolonged involvement in the face of continuing international opprobrium. While some would like to move relations with the West back to a less confrontational mode, they appear at a loss as to how to accomplish this. [redacted]

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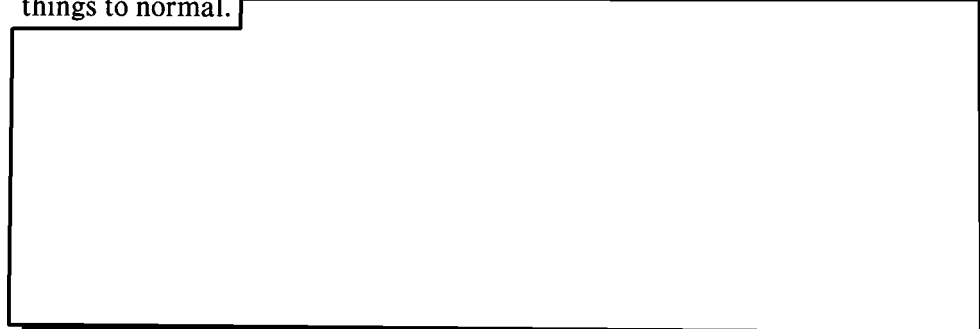
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[redacted] frustration [redacted] convey the definite impression that someone misjudged the difficulties Moscow would encounter in Afghanistan and the economic and foreign policy cost it would have to bear [redacted]

[redacted] miscalculation was involved, but suggested that US restraint would be helpful in returning things to normal. [redacted]

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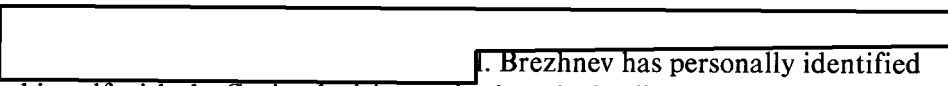


**Leadership Divisions**

[redacted] a power struggle is under way in the Kremlin. [redacted] few details, however, and are not very convincing. The list of so-called hawks now said to be in charge is limited to party secretary Mikhail Suslov and the military (read Ustinov), while the alleged doves usually go unnamed. [redacted]

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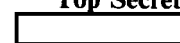


[redacted] Brezhnev has personally identified himself with the Soviet decision and taken the leading role in justifying it to the Soviet public and the world. He alone signed the letter congratulating Babrak on his "election" (a possible indication that the ailing Kosygin did not support the decision). Brezhnev's 13 January "interview" in *Pravda*, moreover, has become the standard reference for Soviets who discuss this issue [redacted]

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Brezhnev, to be sure, may have believed that endorsement of and support for the decision was necessary to cover his political flanks. But, if so, his actions have so identified him with the invasion that the policy must be considered as much his as any other leader's

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It is very unlikely, moreover, that Brezhnev stands alone on this issue. Bureaucratically, it is difficult to imagine how the decision could have been put together without Ustinov's active participation

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Andropov and Gromyko, wearing their KGB and MFA hats, surely were also deeply involved, even if their institutional role may have made them initially cautious

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Suslov pushed for the invasion, and his known concern for preserving "revolutionary gains" lends credence

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With this group of senior political and institutional leaders probably in agreement on the final decision and with Kosygin (a likely focal point for Kremlin moderates) silenced by illness, others in the Politburo would no doubt have found the decision difficult to oppose at the outset. Not only did they probably not have the necessary facts and arguments, most would have deemed such opposition politically unwise. Many of these men, moreover—especially Kirilenko, Shcherbitskiy, Romanov, Masherov, and Grishin—appear inclined in general to support a tough approach in foreign policy and may have perceived the Afghan decision in that light.

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In any case, since the decision, those other Soviet leaders who have spoken publicly have endorsed the action. In their election speeches they have routinely cited Brezhnev's *Pravda* "interview" justifying the Soviet role in Afghanistan, effusively praised Brezhnev's leadership, and endorsed the decision. This uniformity of response suggests that the Politburo has adopted an agreed upon line for leaders to follow in discussing Afghanistan. Even if some leaders have reservations about the policy, it will not be easy—in view of the defensive position into which the Soviet Union has fallen and their own public comments—to reverse their stand. Rather, they will probably argue—as Chernenko already seems to be doing—that they must not let the negative foreign reaction drive the USSR into a policy of confrontation across the board

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A prolonged involvement in Afghanistan, of course, probably will increase the economic and foreign policy costs to the Soviet Union. As a result, dissatisfaction may well increase within the ranks of some Soviet bureaucracies adversely affected by these costs. Indeed, we may be already witnessing the development of serious differences within the leadership over how now to proceed.

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There is little in the evidence available that suggests how the apparent concern of Ponomarev and perhaps others will manifest itself politically. To the extent that its expression serves to excuse these leaders from responsibility for the more difficult situation in which the USSR now finds itself and shifts to the West the onus for the deterioration of detente, their views may have no further political consequence. If their expressions are, however, more than a protective reaction to events, it could suggest in addition that these leaders are the ones who are advising against a significantly greater Soviet investment to pacify Afghanistan and are attempting to define Soviet objectives there as narrowly as possible. These officials might even advocate gestures, foreign and domestic, that would enervate the Western will to retaliate.

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In this environment, it is conceivable that an ambitious, younger leader in the Kremlin might seize upon the Afghanistan issue to challenge the position of senior policymakers. Yet, such a move would be risky and more likely to succeed after Brezhnev and, perhaps, Suslov have left the scene. For now, the Politburo leaders appear to have rallied once again behind Brezhnev on the correctness of the initial decision to intervene.

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