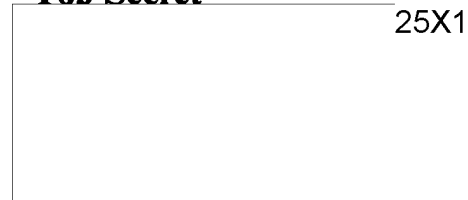




Director of
Central
Intelligence

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The War in Afghanistan: Taking Stock (U)

Interagency Intelligence Assessment

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NIJIA 87-10002C

February 1987

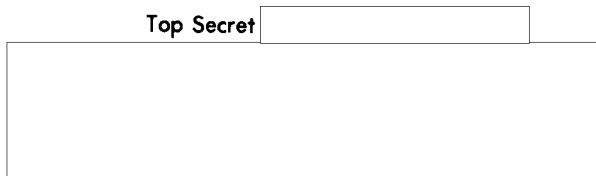
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THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN:
TAKING STOCK

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Information available as of 13 February 1987 was used in the preparation of this Assessment.



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SCOPE NOTE

This Interagency Intelligence Assessment was requested by the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia in order to prepare for a US policy review on Afghanistan initiated by the National Security Council. It is aimed at preparing US policymakers to respond to signs of recent shifts in Soviet-Afghan strategy. It evaluates the present course of the war and the comparative effectiveness of the Soviet and Afghan military and the Mujahideen, the seriousness of recent Soviet peace feelers, the willingness and ability of Pakistan to continue support to the Mujahideen, and the position of other key states in the area (Iran, China, and India). Consequently, this Assessment has a relatively short—six- to 12-month—time horizon. It has been coordinated at the working level by the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of State, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence agencies of the services. Information as of 13 February 1987 was used in the preparation of this report. [redacted]

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[redacted] the last assessment on this issue, was completed in January 1986 and, like the current assessment was written in response to a specific set of policy questions rather than as a general assessment. The Estimate concluded that Soviet hints of an increased interest in a political solution for Afghanistan were *not* authentic indications of Soviet interest in a political solution short of securing a Communist-controlled regime. The Estimate also judged that the Soviets would continue to make incremental increases in their military effectiveness and work to build a stronger regime in Afghanistan. These judgments have proved sound. While talks in Geneva have produced some compromise, the Soviets have not yielded on the basic timetable issue. Throughout 1986 the Soviets experimented with their tactics and slowly but steadily improved the firepower of their forces in Afghanistan. They also replaced Afghan leader Babrak Karmal with Najib, a choice clearly aimed at invigorating regime-building efforts and widening the regime's appeal. [redacted]

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KEY JUDGMENTS

Although both the Soviets and the Mujahideen have made significant improvements in their military capabilities, neither side has come close to pushing the war onto a winning track. Soviet improvements in firepower and tactics have not been matched by progress in strengthening the grip of the DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) regime. Similarly, the Mujahideen dramatically demonstrated enhanced capabilities in the last half of 1986 (by capturing three regime garrisons and effectively using anti-air missiles) and they have raised the costs of the war for the Soviets, though clearly not to an unacceptable level. Without either a comprehensive political solution to the war or a dramatic Soviet escalation, both of which we consider unlikely, we believe the war will continue indecisively, not only through the time frame of this assessment but probably for a significant period beyond.

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General Secretary Gorbachev's bolder handling of the Afghan issue over the past year indicates a much more sophisticated and dynamic approach and an increased desire to break the stalemate. We believe, however, that despite the latest initiatives, which go further than anything offered before, Moscow is still unwilling to leave Afghanistan under anything less than a Communist-dominated regime in Kabul. We believe that, given the current poor state of the Afghan army and regime, Moscow cannot make meaningful concessions to Pakistan or the insurgents without risking destabilization of its clients in Kabul. Nor can Moscow withdraw—certainly not within 18 months—without precipitating the swift collapse of the regime. Although Gorbachev referred to Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound" in his February speech to the Communist Party congress, we believe that the Soviets do not yet see the military situation inside Afghanistan or domestic and international pressures as compelling enough to change dramatically their approach to the conflict.

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Although we do not believe the Soviets are prepared to walk away from their commitments in Afghanistan, we believe there is significance in recent Soviet moves. The flurry of activity is aimed mainly at wooing Pakistan but also at sowing suspicion and dissension within the resistance, between the resistance and Pakistan, and between Pakistan and the United States. The Soviets are probably also trying to influence international opinion, especially in the nonaligned and Islamic world.

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Even if the Soviets do not succeed, they may hope to put themselves into a position to blame the United States, Pakistan, and the resistance for obstructing a political settlement. The Soviets may be using the negotiations process to probe for a political solution that they have yet to define precisely, even for themselves. We cannot rule out the possibility that, in addition to wooing Pakistan, the recent Soviet initiatives reflect a willingness to alter past policies significantly: We believe Moscow's minimum condition for withdrawal would be confidence that Afghanistan would remain "friendly" to the USSR—which they define as influenced, if not controlled, by the Soviets.

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Moscow can point to some military successes. Better perimeter security has made it harder for the insurgents to infiltrate men and supplies into Kabul and, to a much lesser extent, into other large cities. In addition, pressure against insurgent logistic routes has made it more difficult and expensive for the resistance to resupply its fighters and provide services to its beleaguered civilian supporters.

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Soviet efforts have not noticeably improved Kabul's control of territory, however, or brought Moscow any closer to creating a client state strong enough to survive after a Soviet withdrawal. The size, effectiveness, and reliability of the 50,000- to 55,000-man Afghan army has not significantly improved, the provision of sophisticated air defense weapons has complicated the use of Soviet and Afghan airpower, and overall urban security remains poor.

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One of the most significant problems facing the Soviets is the continued deterioration of the Afghan regime. Moscow underestimated the breadth of support for Babrak Karmal within the ruling party, and his replacement as President and Party General Secretary created new fissures and heightened infighting in the leadership and the Armed Forces. In this context, concern that the Soviets are serious about withdrawing has created pronounced uneasiness in Kabul, and we believe the risk of the regime's unraveling will be an important constraint on Soviet behavior.

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The resistance retains broad support among the Afghan population and, despite continued political differences among resistance leaders, many guerrilla groups inside Afghanistan regularly cooperate to achieve specific tactical goals. We believe this support, and the increasing military capability of the Mujahideen, will allow them to continue to deny the Soviets success in consolidating the Kabul regime. In addition, the Peshawar alliance has recently displayed increased unity and political savvy in its response to the Soviet-DRA cease-fire and national reconciliation campaign.

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The resistance still suffers from serious shortcomings that prevent it from achieving more decisive results against the regime. Some resistance groups are still poorly equipped, lack effective training, are unskilled in tactics, and have trouble moving supplies. In some areas, the increased toll of the war on civilians is eroding economic support and, to a lesser extent, the intelligence they receive from Afghans inside the country. Outside the country, the resistance alliance has had only a marginal impact in international forums and has not done all it could to press its case internationally.

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Pakistan's President Zia and Foreign Minister Yaqub continue to believe that a policy of military and diplomatic pressure combined with a firm stand at the UN Geneva negotiations is the best way to pursue a satisfactory settlement. While Zia and Yaqub remain skeptical about Soviet sincerity and were disappointed with Moscow's positions during Yaqub's early February visit to Moscow, the recent Soviet-DRA reconciliation proposals encourage them to believe that their policy is working.

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Pakistan's negotiators are likely to continue pressing for a settlement that accomplishes their fundamental objectives: (1) the removal of Soviet combat troops from Afghanistan and (2) the establishment of a government that would allow the large refugee population—now almost 3 million—to return home. Local frustration over the refugees has steadily increased, exacerbated by Soviet-DRA cross-border and terrorist attacks and stirred up by left-wing Pakistani politicians. Concerns in the military establishment that Pakistan's support for the Mujahideen could provoke Soviet military retaliation have been further heightened by fears that Pakistan could not defend two borders in the event of an Indian attack. These domestic and military concerns are *not* likely to override Islamabad's fundamental objectives during the time frame of the assessment.

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We expect Pakistani negotiators at Geneva to continue to push for as short a withdrawal timetable as possible. The new Soviet-Afghan proposals have encouraged Islamabad to believe there may be an opportunity to arrive at a solution based on having a neutral figure—possibly former King Zahir Shah—organize and head a transitional government. If such a solution should materialize, Pakistan would be more flexible about a withdrawal time frame.

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We believe Pakistan would bargain hard for a timetable of under a year but could give a bit on timing if it got concessions from the Soviets on a government of national reconciliation and/or neutrality. We believe Pakistani officials may agree to a timetable of as much as 15 months, if some concessions are made.

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All analysts believe that the US reaction and the possible loss of US aid would have a very strong affect on Pakistani calculations and that the Pakistanis would not surprise us by signing a settlement that had not previously been discussed with the United States. We are also confident that we would have warning if Pakistan's position were shifting significantly. The Community believes that while Pakistan will take into account the views of both the United States and the resistance it will allow neither a veto over a settlement it believed was in Pakistan's interest.

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The Afghan insurgents have consistently refused to deal with the regime in Kabul and rejected the Soviet-Afghan reconciliation proposals as a sham. They have publicly stated their opposition to a Geneva-type settlement, which they believe favors the Kabul side by cutting off support for the resistance immediately while allowing a phased Soviet withdrawal. They see Kabul's proposal as a trap designed to weaken the insurgency and obtain military and diplomatic advantages for Moscow. Resistance leaders are worried that the Pakistanis will sign an agreement over their heads, and that false hopes of an imminent peace will have a demoralizing impact on the insurgency.

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Iran has grudgingly acquiesced in Pakistan's pursuit of a political settlement at Geneva but is suspicious that the talks will lead to a sellout of the resistance, and has warned Pakistan that it would oppose any such solution. Iran is frequently mentioned by the Soviets as a potential obstacle to a settlement because of its refusal to guarantee, or even recognize publicly, the legitimacy of negotiations that exclude the Afghan insurgents.

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New Delhi views the recent Soviet-Afghan initiative as evidence that Moscow is looking for a face-saving way out of the conflict. It would view a political settlement favorably because it believes ending the Afghanistan war would remove a major justification for the US military and economic aid program with Pakistan.

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Beijing will continue to insist on a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan as one of the three security concerns that Moscow must address before bilateral relations can be normalized. In the final analysis, China would live with any settlement Pakistan accepts.

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Pakistan's probes for US views on the negotiations will provide us an opportunity to try to formulate a coordinated response to the Soviet overtures. Islamabad will continue to solicit US views on how best to test Soviet sincerity and to determine US willingness to endorse a neutrality agreement for Afghanistan. A major challenge to the United States in

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the near term will be to prevent Moscow's negotiating initiatives from dividing the resistance from Pakistan and from straining US-Pakistani ties. [redacted]

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The United States would encounter significant and opposing pressures in the event Pakistan obtained an agreement it considered acceptable at Geneva:

- US failure to support and ultimately guarantee such an agreement would severely strain US-Pakistani relations.
- Open differences between Pakistan and the United States would allow Moscow to blame the United States for obstructing a settlement, a charge that would find resonance in international forums.
- The resistance and its supporters will be pressing the United States not to "sell them out" by acquiescing to a Pakistani deal to which they objected. [redacted]

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There is virtually no chance of a complete breakdown in the peace negotiations. Should an impasse be reached at Geneva, the parties will almost certainly find some way to continue the dialogue, probably with another round of Geneva talks. [redacted]

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