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Carter Had Warning on Afghanistan

By his own admission, President Carter was caught off guard by the Afghanistan invasion because he trusted his summit partner, Leonid I. Brezhnev, who had blandly denied that the Soviets had aggression in mind. Afterward, Carter lamented that the Soviet leader had lied to him.

Certainly, the evidence was available to the president that the Soviets were preparing to strike across the Afghan border. Last September, a top-secret report of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee laid out the probability of a Russian military move there with remarkable clarity.

The report, prepared by three staff members, was distributed to key senators on the committee. Its contents were also communicated to the White House.

I have obtained a copy of the still-secret Sept. 21 report, titled "Developments in Afghanistan and Possible Increased Soviet Intervention." If the president had read it, he might have been less taken aback by the Russians' Christmas-week invasion.

The report notes first that the bloody coup which replaced one Soviet puppet with another earlier in September gave the Kremlin essentially two choices: increase its commitment in Afghanistan, or let a Soviet-backed regime go down the drain.

The reason the Russians faced this decision, the report explained, was the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. Noting "widespread but uncoordinated insurgencies in all parts of the country," the report added: "Ex-

tensive Soviet material support, together with several thousand military 'advisers,' have enabled the regime to retain a tenuous hold on power. The government's position continues to erode, however."

The report cited intelligence warnings of "the somewhat increased readiness of one Soviet airborne division in a Soviet military district adjacent to Afghanistan," and speculated that the Russians were concerned about the possible need to protect or evacuate 5,000 to 6,000 Soviets.

But the report also raised the possibility that the Russians' increased military readiness in the area might reflect "an unfolding coherent plan to intervene massively to support [Afghan President Hafizullah] Amin." In this instance, of course, there was a massive intervention, but one that resulted in President Amin's overthrow and execution.

The committee report listed five factors that were "pushing Moscow toward deeper military involvement" in Afghanistan:

- Traditional Russian designs on its neighbor dating back to the czars.
 - Hopes that a Marxist ally might add to Soviet influence on Pakistan, India and Iran.
 - Desire for a buffer against China.
 - The need to show the United States that the Soviets would not let its hands be tied by detente.
 - "The creeping military logic" that the Afghan rebels could be beaten by a little more Russian involvement.
- Three factors "influencing Moscow to be very cautious" were also listed in

the report: Soviet fears that they'd be unable to control Amin, that they might get bogged down in a Vietnam situation, and that the United States might show "assertiveness" by taking counteraction elsewhere, or maybe killing the strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT II).

In addition to the Senate committee report, another knowledgeable source gave the Carter administration a solid early warning of the Soviet attack. In October, Pakistani Foreign Minister Agha Shahi told the Senate committee and Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance "flat out that the Soviets were building up for a move into Afghanistan and then Pakistan," sources told my reporters Dale Van Atta and Hal Straus.