

## **THE SOVIET MILITARY INVASION AND INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN, 1979-1988**

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*Abstract* – This article examines the causes behind the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and the continued involvement of the USSR until the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988. The conflict is often seen in global terms, as part of the latter stages of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's desire to maintain international prestige and strength (Barfield 2010, Yapp 1982). This argument, in focusing on the global nature of world politics in this period, subsequently negates the local agents which contributed to the onset of the conflict. However, it is also argued that the Soviet involvement was due to the instability of the Kabul led regime and vested interest of the USSR in Afghanistan, thus highlighting more regional concerns for Moscow (Arnold 1993, Malik 2010). Although academics such as Galeotti (2001) have attempted to balance these views, suggesting that Cold War tensions were played out through regional instability, a deeper analysis of the factors that led to the Afghanistan War, 1979-1988, are required through the assessment of various primary and secondary documents to reach any further conclusions. This article is an attempt to add to the academic debate surrounding the topic.

*Keywords* – Afghanistan, Soviet Union, Cold War, Kabul, Moscow, Middle East.

The 1979-1988 war in Afghanistan was the last major conflict in which the Soviet Union was directly involved. The Soviet invasion in 1979 and their continued involvement in the region hold international significance as it marked the end of a period of détente in the global Cold War (Rasanayagam 2010, 91). However, this period is also characterised by the gradual decline of the USSR as a global super power throughout the 1980s (Arnold 1993, 121). As a result, the war in Afghanistan can be seen in the context of regional issues pertaining to the Middle East, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, as well as in the context of the international situation throughout the 1980s. Consequently, the reasons for the invasion and prolonged military involvement in Afghanistan have been the source of an active academic debate.

There are two major schools of thought pertinent to this topic, although each has its own subdivisions. The first, as argued by Bradsher, is that the Soviet-Afghan war was fought in the context of the Cold War (1999, 75-6). This argument focuses on the perceived expansionism of Soviet foreign policy and, as Kakar suggests, the quasi-imperial nature of the military policies of the

USSR (1995, 50). However, this line of argument does not fully explain the causes behind the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, as it does not take into account factors which directly involve the Kabul-Moscow relationship. Freedman suggests that the Soviet invasion was inspired by the instability of the Afghan regime and the fear of an anti-communist government emerging which bordered the USSR (1991, 71-3). This argument, explored further by Rasanayagam, accounts to some degree for the local agency of the Afghan government in requesting military assistance from Moscow, as well as displaying the regional fears of the USSR prior to and during the invasion, as major factors in the decision of the politburo (2010, 88-90). The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 can be seen through both of these academic schools of thought, and therefore the factors pertaining to each of the arguments must be considered.

The school of thought that postulates that the military involvement of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, 1979-1988, can be seen in terms of regional causes as opposed to global and Cold War factors has a basis in the problems facing the Kabul government prior to the invasion. The unstable nature of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1979 stemmed from the deep ethnic divisions within the Afghan state (Galeotti 2001, 3). Historically, rural provinces had been semi-autonomous whilst under the rule of central Afghan politics and consequently local *ulema* (Muslim legal scholars) and tribal leaders rejected the centralising attempts of successive governments based in Kabul (Galeotti 2001, 4). Resistance to the government in Kabul had been rising throughout the 1970s after the failure of Prince Daoud's republic to tackle these problems of authority within the central government and in the wider regional dimension of Afghan politics (Galeotti 2001, 4). The PDPA coup in 1979, which overthrew the Daoud regime in favour of a socialist government, inherited these problems and therefore continued to find gaining popular support a recurring difficulty. The support that the PDPA did garner prior to the coup d'état, largely from the military and Afghani middle classes, became alienated as Nur Muhammad Taraki attempted to impose radical social reforms with regards to the education of women upon rural and traditional communities (Galeotti 2001, 6). The Soviet leadership was aware of these social problems in their geographical neighbour, and through the use of KGB agents began assessing the danger that a popular Afghan insurrection would pose to the USSR (Galeotti 2001, 6-9). This shows that the invasion was based on local security fears rather than global foreign policy.

A major factor in the development of populist Afghani unrest was the growth of Islamic fundamentalism across the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia (Rubin 1997, 184). Although Islamic radicalism was born out of the traditional schools of the Muslim Indian, Pakistani and

Egyptian writers throughout the mid-twentieth century, Afghani Islamism had roots in opposing the perceived standardisation of atheism throughout the periods of the sustained influence of communist literature from the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the Tudeh Party of Iran (Kakar 1995, 80-1). The Islamist movement in Afghanistan became an attempt to undermine the leftist ideology that had emerged throughout the 1960s and 1970s from the Kabul led intelligentsia, whilst establishing a state and society based on the teachings of the Koran (Kakar 1995, 81). As such, political Islam in Afghanistan was formed with these long-term goals and, as Kakar points out, 'did not end with the repulsion of the invasion' by the Soviet Union (1995, 80). Gibbs suggests that it was the revolution and 'policies of Iran which destabilised Afghanistan' and the Middle East, and hence increased Soviet fears of Islamic radicalism in the region (1987, 375). The gradual collapse of the PDPA throughout 1979 and the invasion of the Soviet Union allowed the growth and development of Islamic groups, such as the Jamaat-i Islami, to gain popular and American support in Afghanistan and declare a *jihād* (holy war) against the military forces of the USSR throughout the 1980s (Rubin 1997, 187). Kakar suggests that the gradual rise and development of this radical form of politics prior to and during the invasion of Afghanistan created instability within the state and provided a continued form of opposition to Soviet forces (Kakar 1995, 80-91). Therefore, the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union can be seen as an attempt to maintain the stability of Central Asia through the suppression of Islamism in nations bordering the USSR.

Soviet fears of unrest in Afghanistan were confirmed in March 1979 with the popular revolt and mutiny in Herat. This was a direct result of Taraki's policy regarding the education of women, and was incited by conservative tribal and religious leaders (Galeotti 2001, 7). Estimates for the number of deaths vary, with a minimum of 5,000 people killed including at least 100 Soviets (Kakar 1995, 34). The popular nature of the insurrection and defection of entire Afghan military units to the rebels caused an immediate politburo meeting to discuss the possible responses to the 'deterioration of conditions in Afghanistan' (Rasanayagam 2010, 84). A conversation between Kosygin and Taraki in March 1979 shows that the politburo felt that Afghanistan needed substantial military assistance to counter the growing dissent among the population and avoid the total collapse of the Afghan state (Kosygin 1979). The outcome of the situation in Herat had confirmed to the Soviet leadership that the Kabul government was in a weak position and there was a growing possibility of losing an allied power along her southern border (Freedman 1991, 71).

The Herat uprising had repercussions within the PDPA alongside these considerations in Moscow.

The weaknesses which were exposed within the Kabul regime as a result of the insurrection in Herat, allowed the rise of Hafizullah Amin to a position of significant power and prestige within the Afghan leadership due to the political disillusionment with the Taraki regime (Kakar 1995, 35-6). This exaggerated existing divisions between the Khalq and Parchan factions that had previously existed within the PDPA, and led to an increase in the frequency with which Taraki requested Soviet military support to secure his power within his party to counter the growing popular insurgency (Rasanayagam 2010, 85). The divide within the PDPA culminated in the assassination of Taraki and the ascension of Amin to power in late 1979. Despite the initial reluctance of Brezhnev to commit Soviet troops to Afghanistan, the Herat uprising showed the ultimate weakness of the Taraki regime and reinforced the idea that Afghanistan must be kept under Soviet influence (Rasanayagam 2010, 89).

The military coup which saw Amin, who was perceived to be under the influence of the CIA, ascend to power in late 1979 raised new concerns within Moscow prior to the invasion of Afghanistan. Brezhnev was particularly wary of Kabul's apparent shift towards the United States through Amin's international policy, and Kakar suggests that this challenge to Soviet authority in the region acted as a catalyst to the invasion of Afghan territory (1995, 42). Amin attempted to gain American support due to his growing disillusionment with the Soviet Union. He perceived that Moscow was attempting to install a puppet regime in Afghanistan and failing to fully support the PDPA against the growing insurgency of the guerrilla warriors, the *mujahidin* (Kakar 1995, 41-2). This criticism of the Brezhnev regime led to the (alleged KGB orchestrated) assassination of Amin, and shows that the eventual invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet military forces was based upon the desire to protect the stability of the region (Barfield 2010, 234).

The continued involvement of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s can be justified by this argument of ensuring regional stability before the ultimate withdrawal of troops. The *jihad* declared by the *mujahidin* against the USSR ensured that the Soviet Union would become entangled in protracted war (Barfield 2010, 235). The war mobilised mass support amongst Afghan rebels and led to opposition groups, often supported by US financial and military aid, becoming increasingly cohesive and organised in their resistance to the Soviet invasion (Barfield 2010, 236-7). As a result of the growing opposition within Afghanistan, Moscow began to escalate the war through the policies of Sovietisation (Rasanayagam 2010, 98). The expansion of the war attempted to create the illusion that the PDPA was a permanent institution in Afghan politics and hoped to exhaust the capabilities of the opposition (Barfield 2010, 237). This move failed, due to the determination the *mujahedeen*

and the inability of the PDPA leadership to take a proactive attitude towards dealing with the counter-revolution. This resulted in the war becoming locked in a stalemate which neither side could withdraw from without facing a loss of prestige in regional and international terms (Barfield 2010, 238). This supports the idea that the internal collapse of the PDPA regime throughout 1979 led to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and their continued involvement in the region through to 1988.

The military tactics of the Afghani *mujahidin* against the Soviet invasion prolonged the war. The resistance to Soviet troops was divided between various Islamist political parties, often based in the border region of Peshawar. The political parties concerned consisted of the Jamaat-e-Islami; the Hizbi-Islami; the Ittehad-e-Islami; the Harakat-e-Inquilab-Islami; and other splinter groups often Islamist in ideology and relying on territorial allegiances for popular support (Rasanayagam 2010, 103-4). Rasanayagam suggests that the lack of unity among these parties led to the absence of a cohesive military strategy to counter the offensives of Soviet troops in Afghanistan (2010, 110). Despite the popular support of these groups, and the manpower available to them, the power struggle between these groups allowed Soviet troops to remain in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s (Rasanayagam 2010, 110-1). This displays that the continued involvement of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan can be attributed in part to the divided nature of the resistance that they were presented with.

Events outside the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan impacted upon the decision to defend the Kabul based regime against the growing *mujahidin* in rural parts of the state. The fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, and the ascension of a volatile and anti-Soviet leadership was unwelcome news to Moscow, despite the Iranian government also harbouring anti-American feeling (Yapp 1982, 427). The breach of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 led to an increased American presence in South West Asia, with a particular build up of naval units in the Persian Gulf (Freedman 1991, 74). This was justified by an American fear of Soviet expansion in the region and the threat that an unstable Iran posed to American aims within the Middle East (Yapp 1982, 426-7). Freedman suggests that, despite this build up of American presence in the region, the relatively weak response of the Carter administration to the situation in Iran gave Brezhnev and his cabinet confidence that an invasion into Afghanistan would go relatively unchallenged by the international community (Freeman 1991, 73).

Although this early confidence preceded and contributed to events in Afghanistan, Soviet military action in Afghanistan did not go unchecked by their rival super power. Prior to and during the Soviet

invasion, Afghan Islamist parties had received covert American aid through regional and international powers (Rasanayagam 2010, 83). The US provided the majority of this support on the basis that emerging radical and Islamic parties were increasingly anti-communist, and the US belief that these ideas would spread to the Central Asian republics under Soviet influence (Rasanayagam 2010, 83). This support was directed through the governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and provided the financial aid which allowed the continued resistance of the *mujahidin* to Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Barfield 2010, 236). Support from Pakistan was channelled towards political groups who shared Pashtu cultural ties in the form of military arms (Talbot 2009, 267-8). Pakistan also provided sanctuary to the leaders of Afghani rebel groups, allowing the *mujahidin* to build operations from the safety and security provided by Pakistani borders (Talbot 2009, 268). Although Pakistan's involvement can be seen as a pragmatic policy, due to the significant gains in financial and military aid they received from America in this period, their motives can also be traced to more ideological factors. The aiding of Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan, and the ability to use US aid to prevent Indian dominance in the region, were major factors contributing to the support which the Islamabad government showed to the counter-revolutionaries in Afghanistan (Barfield 2010, 236). The support for the Afghan rebels from regional powers was provided despite political pressure exerted by Moscow to quell this development throughout the 1970s. This suggests that the Soviet Union sought to achieve a regional stability in central Asia, rather than to fight a proxy war with the USA and end the period of détente. The Brezhnev regime attempted to exploit the rifts between Pakistan and the USA over Zia ul-Haq's nuclear programme and openly accused the CIA of covert operations in the area to arm Afghan rebels through Iran (Freedman 1991, 72). By December of 1979, a Soviet directive explicitly approved the use of military aid to counter the 'anti-Afghan actions from neighbouring countries' (Orgarkov 1979). This displays Moscow's perception of the instability in the Middle East and the impact this had upon the Afghan state. Therefore continued resistance from regional powers against the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) and instability in the Middle East necessitated the continued involvement of Soviet troops to uphold the PDPA government of Kabul throughout the 1980s.

Moreover, regional concerns in Central Asia and Afghanistan were compounded by the Soviet Union's vested economic interest in the region. Fiscal ties between the USSR and Afghanistan dated to the establishment of the Daoud regime in 1953. Daoud attempted to implement plans of state development for Afghanistan and conceded that external financial backing would be essential to this process (Maley 2009, 18). Concurrent events in 1953, notably the ascendancy of Khrushchev in Moscow and his progressive economic policies towards Asia and the Non-Aligned Movement, led to

the USSR becoming the primary supplier of external funding to Kabul throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Estimates suggest that in 1979 the Kabul government received \$1.265 billion in economic and military aid, compared to \$32.4 million in 1956 (Maley 2009, 18). The primary aim of this aid was to develop a stable and friendly border state alongside industry, to assist in the growth of the Soviet economy (Maley 2009, 19). This indicates that, directly prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, policy makers in Moscow were concerned that the aforementioned instability across Central Asia would negatively affect their economic plans for the development of Afghanistan. Thus, it becomes clear that the invasion of Afghanistan and the prolonged involvement of Soviet troops were precipitated by a fear of economic instability, alongside the aforementioned political factors.

These factors conclusively show that the Soviet Union fought the war in Afghanistan based on their own regional concerns and the internal collapse of the PDPA within Afghanistan. The growth of social unrest in Afghanistan, the development of political Islam, and the factionalism of the PDPA prior to and throughout the invasion, were crucial factors in the involvement of Soviet forces to counter this regional uncertainty. Payind argues that the realisation that the Kremlin could no longer 'adequately influence the direction of domestic developments and foreign policy of Afghanistan' led to the military involvement of the USSR from 1979 onwards (1989, 108). These arguments, when placed alongside the wider context of unrest across the Middle East and Central Asia, and particularly the support offered to the Afghan *mujahidin* to sustain opposition to the Soviet Union, allow the conclusive postulation that the war in Afghanistan was fought with regional concerns at the forefront of Soviet decision making.

These arguments convincingly emphasise the locality of the Afghanistan War; however, they fail to fully acknowledge the global aspects of Soviet foreign policy in this era. The basis for the arguments, which suggest that Soviet involvement in Afghanistan was inspired by the desire for communist expansion, has roots in the Brezhnev doctrine of the 1960s. The doctrine from the Brezhnev regime stated that the Soviet Union would not allow any socialist state to succumb to counter revolutionaries and, through the support of Moscow, communist governments would be upheld (Rasanayagam 2010, 83). Although this policy was initially promulgated in the Soviet-bloc countries of Eastern Europe as a security measure against Western capitalism, it soon spread to cover the post-colonial regions of Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia (Rasanayagam 2010, 84). The successful enforcement of the Brezhnev doctrine in areas such as Czechoslovakia in 1968, Iraq in 1976, Angola in 1976 and Ethiopia in 1978, gave Soviet policy makers confidence that providing financial and military assistance to favourable governments was a viable option to support the

expansion of communism on a world scale (Freedman 1991, 72). By 1979, Brezhnev felt that intervention in Afghanistan would follow a similar pattern and any counter-revolution could be suppressed with relative ease (Freedman 1991, 72). This confidence in the defence of a global ideology can therefore be seen to have directly led to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Bradsher 1991, 75).

The influence and legacy of this doctrine outlived Leonid Brezhnev himself, as the continuation of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan stemmed from the desire to uphold the personal and international prestige of the subsequent premiers of the USSR throughout the 1980s (Galeotti 2001, 16). The rapid escalation of the war from 1984-1985 by Chernenko, and the subsequent refusal of the Soviet Union to 'lose' the war by 1988, displayed the continued ideological drive behind the sustained military presence in Afghanistan (Galeotti 2001, 16-8). The 1980s also saw a period of internal uncertainty within the Soviet Union. The death of three leaders in quick succession and the eventual collapse of the Union in 1989, led to a period of internal crisis which ran concurrently with the war in Afghanistan (Arnold 1993, 121). The instability within the Kremlin provided the justification to Soviet premiers of maintaining the appearance of strong leadership in times of unrest and therefore legitimised the continued Soviet involvement in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s (Galeotti 2001, 18). The desire to hold onto a degree of Soviet prestige also precipitated the withdrawal of troops by Gorbachev in 1988, as he perceived the prolonged involvement of the USSR in Afghanistan to be detrimental to his wider political and domestic aims.

The Cold War and the ideological battle that ensued can also be seen as a major factor in the continued involvement of the Soviet Union in suppressing the counter-revolution of Afghanistan. The immediate condemnation of Soviet actions following the initial invasion, spearheaded by the United States of America, fuelled the desire in Moscow to uphold their international prestige (Rasanayagam 2010, 91). The Reagan administration continued to fund the Afghan rebels, and by 1985 financial and military aid, in the form of weapons from the USA to the *mujahidin*, had exceeded \$4 billion (Galeotti 2001, 18). Contemporary Soviet propaganda used this covert US support for the Afghan rebels to justify the 1979 invasion on the grounds that the growing unrest in Afghanistan, facilitated by CIA support, necessitated the involvement of the USSR to defend against the spread of the 'imperialist yoke' of capitalism (Ashitkov 1986, 56). This clearly shows the Afghanistan War to be a conflict of the Cold War and therefore supports the notion that Soviet expansionism can be attributed as a major cause of the USSR's invasion and involvement through to 1988.



This battle with the USA was also fought outside Afghanistan throughout this period. The Reagan administration felt that the Soviet Union was expanding their nuclear capability through the invasion of Afghanistan, by accessing potential uranium reserves in the region (White 1983, 123-4). As a result the USA felt obliged to fund the resistance against the military forces of the Soviet Union to prevent the onset of nuclear war, and the perceived necessity to 'deter a Soviet first strike' in nuclear terms (White 1983, 123). This reveals that the arms races and nuclear proliferation played an important role in influencing the superpower commitment to Afghanistan throughout the 1980s.

The condemnation of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan came through the medium of the Union Nations Security Council, and resulted in immediate trade and high-level technological sanctions imposed upon the USSR. The Soviet Union responded with a view to limit the damage these sanctions would have on Moscow by attempting to garner support from countries that did not fully back the UN decisions (Rasanayagam 2010, 91). This assistance came from various sources such as: appealing to countries within the Non-Aligned movement; capitalising on pre-existing divisions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, particularly emphasising the grievances and disillusionment of France and Turkey with America; attempting to appeal to communist China and disrupt the trend of Sino-American rapprochement; and by supporting the anti-American sentiment in Iran and the Middle East (Rasanayagam 2010, 91-2). This policy of damage limitation by the Soviet Union in response to the international condemnation of the war in Afghanistan was successful in limiting direct American involvement in the region, and allowed for the continuation of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan (Rasanayagam 2010, 92). This demonstrates the determination and willingness of the Soviet Union to uphold their position in Afghanistan and their refusal to allow the fall of a socialist government in the region, supplementing the arguments which propose that global spread of communism was the driving force behind Soviet foreign policy.

The fear of losing influence in a country which bordered the Soviet Union and ultimately losing influence in the Central Asian region can be seen to have influenced decisions prior to the invasion of Afghanistan (Freedman 1991, 72). The promulgation of the Carter Doctrine, to support anti-communist movements in Asia, exacerbated this fear and Barfield argues that this became a particularly prominent fear of Moscow after the military coup of Hafizullah Amin in 1979 (Barfield 2010, 233-4). The Soviet Union claimed that the Afghan state under the leadership of Amin was unstable, and to prevent the total collapse of Afghanistan and the possible rise of an unfriendly regime, military intervention was unavoidable (Bradsher 1999, 78). Moscow modelled the invasion on previous operations in Czechoslovakia and anticipated a short military campaign to restore a

strong socialist government and boost the international prestige of the Soviet Union (Barfield 2010, 235). Bradsher argues that as a result of these factors, the Soviet invasion was planned and orchestrated from the Kremlin, despite requests from Kabul for military assistance, and concludes that Afghanistan was a proxy war which was fought to uphold Soviet military and international prestige in the Cold War system of global politics (1999, 77-82).

Although this argument focuses on the Cold War as a primary reason behind Soviet expansionism, and by extension the invasion and military occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 until 1988, it has also been argued that these expansionist policies were influenced by a fear of military encirclement by hostile governments in this period. The major contributory factor in this argument is the growing Sino-Soviet split and the repeated border clashes prior to the invasion of Afghanistan (Rasanayagam 2010, 83). By the 1980s the ideological battle between the communist super powers of the USSR and the People's Republic of China was at its height (Gray 2002, 320-3). This split in international relations had been developing since the late 1950s and global political developments, such as the Cuban Missile crisis and the Indo-Chinese War of 1962, had exacerbated divisions between Beijing and Moscow (Gray 2002, 320-3). Rasanayagam suggests that this split in allegiance, and the possibility of a Beijing-Washington axis being formed from the 1970s onwards, alerted Moscow to the threat which she faced along her borders. This made the Soviet Union determined to uphold friendly governments along her natural border and hence the invasion of Afghanistan was an attempt to uphold communist power and influence in Central Asia (Rasanayagam 2010, 83).

The pragmatic protection of Soviet borders can be seen in the build up and placement of military divisions along the Afghan border prior to the invasion, coupled with the deployment of experienced military officers to Kabul to deal with the growing counter-revolution in Afghanistan (Rasanayagam 2010, 88). This pre-emptive military planning can be seen in the context of the grand scheme of Soviet expansion and the protection against the growing formation of a band of anti-Soviet, Islamic nations along the USSR's southern border in Iran, Pakistan and hypothetically Afghanistan (Freedman 1991, 73). As Gorbachev took power in 1985, Soviet involvement was losing support on the home front. This led to a gradual withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and a humiliating loss of influence over the regime in Kabul. Barfield argues that this withdrawal was forced upon Moscow by the anti-war sentiment within Soviet borders, although Gorbachev did not want to concede to losing a war so close to geographical borders (2010, 238-9). This shows that alongside the expansionist policies of the Moscow government, there was a perceived geo-political threat to the Soviet Union should a hostile government take power in Kabul. This led to the sustained Soviet involvement in

Afghanistan, despite the ultimate, and arguably reluctant, withdrawal of troops in 1988.

These factors do explain Soviet foreign policy in Afghanistan to some extent in this period. The argument that the conflict in Afghanistan was a proxy war fought in Cold War terms, rather than one based in regional and local concerns for the Soviet Union, holds weight when considering the strength of the Brezhnev doctrine and the desire to spread communism prior to 1979. The ideological battle that the USSR faced with the USA, and the growing rift with the PRC, impacted upon Soviet policy in this period and by the late 1970s had a direct implication on the decision to use military force in Afghanistan. The Cold War context, seen in conjunction with the fear of military encirclement and the development of the Sino-Soviet split were factors which directly contributed to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The inherent weakness of this argument lies in the fact that it negates the local agency of the war and, as previously discussed, Soviet policy was also influenced by a growing regional concern throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the extensive range of factors which impacted the decision of Soviet leaders to invade and continue to stay involved in Afghanistan from 1979 until 1988, historians have been able to draw firm conclusions regarding this topic. Barfield conclusively states that the Soviet invasion was inspired by Moscow's desire to display their international strength in the Cold War power struggle with the USA by supporting communist regimes as outlined in the Brezhnev doctrine (2010, 238). Historians of general Middle Eastern history, such as M. Yapp, support this theory and suggest that the prolonged involvement of the USSR in Afghanistan was due to the ideological ties Moscow held with the PDPA (1996, 46). These arguments postulate that Afghanistan was crucial to 'Soviet global policies' in the context of the Cold War throughout the 1980 (Goldman 1984, 384). However, this theory is rebutted by the scholarly idea that the war in Afghanistan has roots in the USSR's Central Asian policies and the instability of the Kabul regime prior to the invasion. Arnold strongly suggests that the need to establish a friendly regime to maintain regional stability along the Soviet Union's southern border was the major factor which caused the war in Afghanistan (1993, 105). Malik supports this view and proposes that the invasion and continued involvement of Soviet forces in Afghan territory came out of the necessity to support a weak and fledging socialist regime in Kabul, and to quell the insurrection and counter-revolution in Afghanistan (2010, 83). This argument emphasises the locality of the war and the pragmatic rather than ideological nature of Soviet foreign policy with regards to Central Asia. Although these arguments have a firm evidential basis, the polarised nature of the theories fails to encompass the complexity of the origins of the Afghanistan War from a Soviet perspective. Galeotti suggests that it was a combination of Soviet expansionism

and the insecurity of the PDPA regime in Kabul, which ultimately led to the Soviet invasion in 1979, and involvement thereafter (2001, 11-2). This argument balances the importance of the Brezhnev doctrine and the global nature of the conflict with factors specific to Soviet-Afghan relations. An evaluation of all the factors and relevant historiography pertaining to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, clearly display that the war was based upon regional concerns in Moscow and the desire to support the PDPA government, despite the Cold War rhetoric that was used to publically justify the USSR's involvement.

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