

“Counter Measures”
A Textual Analysis of the Soviet Union’s Invasion of
Afghanistan

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Abstract

In terms of ensuring their security, do states seek to bend the international system in their favor, or do they seek to preserve the status quo? This paper looked at one event, the former Soviet Union’s 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. This paper found that contrary to popular belief, the Soviet Union was motivated to action by the latter rather than the former. In short, this paper found that the Soviet Union was motivated by defense and the need to preserve the status quo rather than offense and the need to bend the international system in their favor. As a means of reaching this conclusion, this paper employed a textual analysis approach and examined a series of declassified Soviet documents.

Introduction

In terms of ensuring their security, what motivates a state to action? Do states ensure their security by going on the offensive, by attempting to maximize their power relative to that of their competitors? Do states ensure their security by simply working to maintain their position in the system, by going on the offensive only when their position in the system is threatened? In other words, do states seek to continually bend the system in their favor, or do they accept and seek to preserve the status quo? This paper looks at one event, the former Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, in an attempt to illustrate an instance in which a state was motivated to action by the latter rather than the former. In order to accomplish this task, this paper examines a series of declassified Soviet documents. As a landmark event of the Cold War era, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan presents itself as an important case in the evaluation of prominent theoretical approaches within the field of international relations.

According to David N. Gibbs, the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan has traditionally been viewed through an offensive lens. Gibbs writes that the invasion has often been described as an act for which the Soviet Union "sought to use Afghanistan as a strategic springboard for further offensive action."¹ In short, explanations of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan have commonly been rooted in theories of power maximization through expansion and conquest. However, declassified Soviet documents released in the aftermath of the Cold War suggest a different story. These documents indicate the Soviet Union's motivations could have been rooted in defense rather than offense. More to the point, these documents indicate that the Soviet Union was less concerned about expansion and more concerned about protecting important national interests, namely their position in the system.

¹ David Gibbs, "Reassessing Soviet Motives for Invading Afghanistan: A Declassified History," *Critical Asian Studies* 38.2 (2006): p. 240.

Therefore, this paper asks, *what were the real motivations behind the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan? Did the invasion constitute an offensive or defensive action?* These become crucial questions with the introduction of new evidence suggesting that reality potentially differs from some of the more traditional accounts of Soviet motivations for invading Afghanistan.

Background: The Seeds of the Soviet Invasion

The road to invasion was first opened to the Soviet Union in the spring of 1978. On April 27th of that year, the pro-communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), via a coup, successfully seized power in Afghanistan. According to Minton F. Goldman, the ousted Afghani regime was looking to "limit Soviet influence" in Afghanistan, and although Goldman asserts that there is no evidence that the Soviet Union orchestrated the aforementioned coup, he does note that the event was carried out with the support of "Soviet-trained army officers and politicians" from the PDPA.²

However, the presence of the new Soviet friendly regime in Afghanistan "triggered a large scale rural rebellion against the new government, leading to a major insurgency by the end of 1978."³ The new regime in Afghanistan was never able to garner popular support among the people there and this resulted in PDPA dependence on Soviet military aid in an attempt to put down the rebellion.⁴ As Gibbs writes in a 1987 article, "The Soviets sent military aid to the revolutionary government soon after the seizure of power, and this aid increased as the PDPA lost popular support, as the insurgency grew, and as the Party itself

² Minton F. Goldman, "Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan: Roots & Causes," *Polity* 16.3 (Spring 1984), p. 385.

³ Gibbs, 2006, p. 240.

⁴ The new Afghan regime repeatedly requested military aid. Soviet policymakers were willing to give military aid, but were unwilling to use Soviet military personnel to directly engage insurgents. For example, in a document dated March 20, 1979, then Afghan President N.M. Taraki requested Soviet battle helicopters and Soviet crew members to fly combat missions. Soviet policymakers would only agree to send maintenance divisions.

became more divided.”⁵ Gibbs goes on to note that by May of 1979, one year after the PDPA seized power in Afghanistan, there were 1,000 Soviet military advisors in Afghanistan and no less than 4,000 Soviet military personnel there, all to assist the new regime but not directly engage the insurgents.⁶

With the new regime came Nur Mohammad Taraki, who replaced Mohammad Daoud as president, and Hafizullah Amin, who ascended from PDPA Secretary to Prime Minister in 1979.⁷ Both the above mentioned insurgency and the relationship between Taraki and Amin would eventually play a major role in the Soviet Union’s final decision to push their way into Afghanistan. Therefore, from the events of April 1978 came the initial seeds for the Soviet Union’s invasion. Although the Soviet Union had a long-standing interest in keeping Afghanistan within the communist and Soviet sphere of influence, the events of April 1978 and the seizure of power by a Soviet friendly regime in Afghanistan opened the road for what would later become a Soviet invasion in the final days of 1979.

Divided Views: The Literature on the Soviet Invasion

As Selig S. Harrison writes, “When the Red Army invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, the conventional wisdom was that Soviet forces would eventually move onward to their real target: the Persian Gulf oil fields.”⁸ This conventional wisdom was common to many world leaders as well. For example, former Australian Prime Minister Malcom Fraser remarked during a May 1980 speech that:

The most powerful and largest land army in the world has moved for the first time outside what had been accepted as the Soviet bloc, the Soviet power grouping. That places the Soviet Union in the position potentially to exert pressure and influence, or even control, over the supplies of oil which are vital

⁵ David N. Gibbs, “Does the USSR Have a ‘Grand Strategy’? Reinterpreting the Invasion of Afghanistan,” *Journal of Peace Research* 24.4 (December 1987), p. 372.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 372.

⁷ Goldman, p. 385.

⁸ Diergo Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 13.

to countries such as Japan and European countries and which are of great importance to Australia and many other countries.⁹

According to the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a formerly influential non-partisan policy group built around the communist threat, the Soviet Union sought to control oil resources in an attempt to maximize their power relative to that of their Western rivals. In a series of policy papers entitled Alerting America, the CPD noted that, “Particular attention is paid to energy resources, especially oil. The USSR wishes both to make oil more costly (in part to profit from its own oil exports) and more importantly to be in a position to control oil supplies necessary to the West and thus to be able to exert political and economic pressure.”¹⁰ The CPD went on to add that:

The Soviets regard the Middle East as a most important geopolitical target. They believe that control over space, the waterways, and the oil of the region would be a major and even decisive weapon in permitting them to dominate Europe, Africa, and large parts of Asia. They are tempted by the oil they expect to need in the 1980s and by the pressure that denial or threat of denial of oil to the West can put on Europe, Japan, and the United States.¹¹

The CPD likely subscribed to what Gibbs called the Grand Strategy School (GSS), a school of thought understanding the Soviet Union to be an expansionist minded power. Gibbs notes that in regards to Soviet behavior in general, and specifically in regards to the invasion of Afghanistan, the GSS offered three interpretations. First, the Soviet Union was engaging in “unrestrained, global expansion” in the third world.¹² The CPD supported this notion, writing that, “In the Third World, the Soviet Union aspires to socialist leadership and supports “wars of liberation.”¹³ Second, the Soviet Union felt free to expand at will because the United States offered little to no resistance, which, according to the CPD, stemmed from America’s

⁹ Old Parliament House National History Challenge, Text of Speech: Prime Minister Malcom Fraser to House of Representatives, Parliamentary Debates of the First Session of the Thirty First Parliament, 19-22 May 1980.

¹⁰ Charles Tyroler, ed., Alerting America: The Papers of the Committee on the Present Danger (Washington D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers, 1984), p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 44.

¹² Gibbs, 1987, p. 365.

¹³ Tyroler, p. 44.

experience in Vietnam. Lastly, the GSS held that the Soviet Union's expansion into the third world was threatening to the United States and its allies.¹⁴

Goldman offers a similar view of Soviet behavior in regards to Afghanistan, stating that the Soviet Union expected little in the way of resistance from the United States, and because of that, "Soviet leaders may have thought that it would be foolish not to take the opportunity of gaining physical proximity to the Persian Gulf region with its vast oil reserves or not to bolster a new client regime in Kabul in danger of being overthrown by its domestic anticommunist opponents."¹⁵ Although Goldman's statements seemingly support the notion that by positioning themselves in close proximity to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union would be that much closer to important oil fields and could then project their power across the region, Goldman's statement also hints at the notion that the anti-communist and anti-Soviet insurgency in Afghanistan presented a major problem for Soviet policymakers and served as a motivating factor behind the invasion. The latter portion of this statement lends itself well to the idea that the invasion was motivated by defensive concerns, that the insurgency in Afghanistan threatened the Soviet Union's position in the system. Yet the first half of the statement supports the idea that the Soviet Union was looking to expand its sphere of influence by making gains at the expense of others.

For the most part, Goldman focuses on potential defensive motivations for the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. In fact, Goldman writes that, "The Kremlin's decision to intervene in Afghanistan certainly could be considered defensive."¹⁶ According to Goldman, if the insurgents were successful in causing yet another regime change in the country, Afghanistan would have more than likely shifted away from the Soviet sphere of influence. These problems were compounded by the Soviet Union's view of Amin, who orchestrated the

¹⁴ Gibbs, 1987, p. 365.

¹⁵ Goldman, p. 384.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 403

assassination of Taraki in October of 1979 and ascended to the presidency. The Soviet Union found Amin to be rather inept and incapable of squelching the rebellion. As Goldman writes, “They [Soviet Union] feared that if the Muslim insurgents should succeed in overthrowing him [Amin], they might then install a conservative Islamic government in Kabul not unlike the one in Islamabad. Such a government would likely be anticommunist and anti-Soviet. It would probably move Afghanistan closer to other Islamic countries and, later, perhaps even to the United States.”¹⁷ This potential shift would have obviously resulted in an increase in the number of anti-Soviet forces in Central Asia.¹⁸

Goldman also writes that Soviet policymakers were concerned that any success enjoyed by the insurgents in Afghanistan could lead to similar insurrections in the Soviet Union’s other predominately Muslim territories. Goldman notes that, “The Soviets had to consider the possibility that the revolt against communism and Soviet power in Afghanistan could exert a destabilizing influence on their own central Asian republics.”¹⁹ This concern is a simple territorial integrity argument. Here this argument centers on the idea that problems in one region are easily exported to regions elsewhere. However, Goldman does see room for offensive motivations, writing that, “The Soviet move may also be viewed as offensive partly because of its importance to Soviet expansionist objectives in West Central Asia, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Persian Gulf.”²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 389.

¹⁸ Although never explicit in why this was the case, it was clear that Afghanistan was important to Soviet policymakers. In a document issued sometime between March 17 and 19, 1979, former Soviet Premier Alexey Kosygin remarked that, “All of us agree – we must not surrender Afghanistan. From this point we have to work out first of all a political document, to use all political means in order to help Afghanistan strengthen itself, to provide the support which we’ve already planned, and to leave as a last resort the use of force.” This indicates that The Soviet Union saw Afghanistan as being crucial to their sphere of influence, but were inclined to find other means to solve the issues in that country before employing the use of force.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 403

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 389.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 403

Gibbs confirms Goldman's suspicions regarding defensive motivations and seeks to dismiss the notion that the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was rooted in offense. In fact, Gibbs writes that, "Soviet leaders did not foresee any strategic advantages to an occupation of Afghanistan except defensively, to protect their southern frontiers from western encroachment."²¹ Afghanistan became crucial to the Soviet Union's efforts to maintain their position vis-à-vis the anti-communist and anti-Soviet worlds. For Gibbs, invading Afghanistan was not about Soviet expansion, but was instead about protecting national interests. As reported by Gibbs, former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko once remarked that, "under no circumstances may we lose Afghanistan. For sixty years now we have lived with Afghanistan in peace and friendship. And if we lose Afghanistan now and it turns against the Soviet Union, this will result in a sharp setback to our foreign policy."²²

For Gibbs, what might have weighed the most on the minds of Soviet policymakers was the role of the United States in Afghanistan and American intervention there.²³ Goldman's work supports this idea and also notes interference from Pakistan, Iran, and China as well.²⁴ For example, as Goldman illustrates, where the United States had a "particular interest in undermining Afghanistan's friendship with the Soviet Union," the Soviets were convinced that, "the Chinese were ready to make trouble for it [Soviet Union] wherever they could."²⁵ Furthermore, Goldman writes that, "The Kremlin wanted to strengthen its hand with neighbors, notably Pakistan and Iran, which were openly hostile toward Soviet policy not only in Afghanistan but elsewhere in Asia."²⁶

In the end, the Soviet Union had several concerns regarding Afghanistan. It was not necessarily true that Afghanistan itself was important, but at a time when the Soviet Union

²¹ Gibbs, 2006, p. 258.

²² Ibid, p. 250.

²³ Ibid, p. 254-255.

²⁴ Goldman, pp. 390-395.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 392 and 395.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 390

needed to maintain their position in a bipolar world aligned along communist and anti-communist lines, losing Afghanistan was not an option. Some scholars contend that the Soviet Union felt unrestrained and was looking to expand into the Middle East where they could gain control over important global resources and exert pressure and hold leverage over their rivals. However, other scholars contend that the invasion was far more defensive in nature. First, the Soviet Union was attempting to put down a local rebellion. Second, the Soviet Union was attempting to put an end to interference from external actors in Afghanistan. Third, the Soviet Union was attempting maintain territorial integrity. With this in mind, we can construct two primary hypotheses regarding just why the Soviet Union was motivated to action in Afghanistan. These hypotheses will be discussed in the following section.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper examines 56 declassified Soviet documents originally issued over a 132 month period, ranging in date from May 31, 1978 through May 13, 1979. By selecting these 56 documents, it becomes possible to identify what motivated the Soviet Union to action in Afghanistan. As part of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, these documents have been made available through the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP).²⁷ The CWIHP holds a great many documents on the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, ranging in date from May of 1978 through April of 2004. Therefore, the population of documents examined here represents only a sampling of the total number of available documents.

The reason for selecting this sampling can best be explained in the words of Cameron G. Thies, who writes that, "The first thing to realize as you begin to select your primary sources is that in many ways they have selected you, unless you have the time and money to travel to a

²⁷ These documents can be found online at the CWIHP website, located at: http://wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.home or directly in a pre-compiled e-Dossier available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

particular repository.”²⁸ Researchers employing primary source materials can utilize only what is available to them at the time. In terms of the primary source documents used here, what has been provided by the CWIHP represents a large number of the available declassified Soviet documents regarding the invasion of Afghanistan. Gibbs refers to documents from both the CWIHP and the National Security Archive in Washington D.C. as being deemed by historians to be “authentic” and “authoritative.”²⁹ However, in terms of accessibility, this author found those documents housed in the CWIHP to be the most accessible. Thies also writes that, “some of the sources maybe in a language unfamiliar to you, requiring interpretation if you are to use them.”³⁰ This sample was driven not only by what was available, but also by what was available in an English language format. It was important to draw as many documents as possible from the available pool. These documents needed to be dated both before after the invasion. However, this process was indeed affected by the number of available documents and the number of documents translated into English by the CWIHP. Because of these factors, this paper utilizes documents found in a pre-prepared e-Dossier made available by the CWIHP.

This paper utilizes a textual analysis approach, examining the aforementioned documents for evidence in support of two competing hypotheses. This paper and the hypotheses and concepts contained within seek to somewhat replicate previous work conducted by Gibbs. The documents selected are among those selected by Gibbs in his 2006 article cited throughout. The concepts employed in this paper emanate from those works and ideas cited in the preceding literature review. However, this is not a complete endeavor in replication, as Gibbs simply reviews the documents but fails to utilize any specific methodological technique. This

²⁸ Cameron G. Thies, “A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 3 (2002), p. 356.

²⁹ Gibbs, 1987, p. 240.

³⁰ Thies, p. 356.

is an exercise in textual analysis, which makes this paper inherently different from the work conducted by Gibbs.

In order to consider whether or not the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was either offensive or defensive, it is necessary to place the invasion within the proper theoretical framework. This paper suggests two frameworks that serve to guide the creation of two competing hypotheses and the subsequent concepts used to test these hypotheses. These two frameworks, both residing within the home of structural realism, are known in the international relations (IR) field as offensive realism and defensive realism.

Although there are exceptions, most scholars within the field of IR, regardless of their paradigmatic persuasion, see the international system as being anarchic. This is not to say that the system exists in complete disarray, but as John J. Mearsheimer explains, it is that "the system comprises independent states that have no central authority."³¹ Where scholars differ substantially is within the area of implications, or the consequences of anarchy. For Mearsheimer, a noted offensive realist, in an anarchic world states seek to maximize their relative power in the pursuit of hegemony.³² It is only hegemony, or the power acquired in the pursuit of hegemony, that can ensure security for states.³³ Furthermore, Mearsheimer notes that states often use war as a means of maximizing their relative power, writing that, "War is the main strategy states employ to acquire relative power."³⁴ From this we can follow a path that lays out **Hypothesis I**. *With nobody to restrain their behavior, Afghanistan presented an opportunity for the Soviet Union to expand and maximize their relative power vis-à-vis the United States and the anti-Soviet camp.*

³¹ John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 30.

³² Ibid, p. 22.

³³ Ibid, p. 35.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 138.

Offensive realism can be contrasted with defensive realism, or the notion that states tend to be happy with the amount of power they have and look to maintain the current balance of power above all else.³⁵ In regards to defensive realism, Mearsheimer notes that states are not seen as being naturally aggressive, but instead simply want to survive in an anarchic world where security is scarce. For Kenneth Waltz, who Mearsheimer labels a defensive realist, states simply want to “maintain their position in the system.”³⁶ This lends itself well to the idea that the Soviet Union was protecting their interests rather than seeking to expand and maximize their relative power. In short, where offensive realism predicts that states are “revisionist” and look to alter the system in their favor, defensive realism predicts that states are status quo powers and simply want to retain the power they already possess.³⁷ For Waltz, the condition of anarchy leaves states in a “self-help” world and because of this condition states “worry about their survival, and that worry conditions their behavior.”³⁸ For Waltz, states worry about relative gains, particularly when they favor others. However, Waltz is also clear in that states pursuing a greedy agenda will be punished by the system in the form of counterbalancing alliances.³⁹ From this we can follow a path that lays out the competing **Hypothesis II**. *The Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan was motivated by the need to maintain their position in the system and combat possible anti-Soviet rule in Afghanistan and prevent the destabilization of territories.* Table 1 summarizes these two competing hypotheses.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

³⁶ Kenneth Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 126.

³⁷ Mearsheimer, p. 22.

³⁸ Waltz, p. 105.

³⁹ Ibid, 106.

Table 1: Summary of Competing Hypotheses Regarding the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

Independent Variable	Linkage	Hypothesis
Maximization of Power	Maximization of power → Invasion	<p>I. With nobody to restrain their behavior, Afghanistan presented an opportunity for the Soviet Union to expand and maximize their relative power vis-à-vis the United States and the anti-communist and anti-Soviet camp.</p> <p>II. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was motivated by the need to maintain their position in the system and combat possible anti-communist and anti-Soviet rule in Afghanistan and prevent the destabilization of other Soviet territories.</p>
Maintain Position	Maintenance of Position → Invasion	

Source: Scanlon

Furthermore, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan might be considered a preventative action. This type of logic ultimately reflects what is known in international relations as windows logic, or the notions of both windows of opportunity and windows of vulnerability. In defining these two terms, Steven Van Evera writes that, "The former is a fading offensive opportunity, the latter is a growing defensive vulnerability."⁴⁰ For the Soviet Union, the decision to invade appears to be the end result of a realization that Afghanistan represented an increasing window of vulnerability, and that the use of force was the only way to protect vital national interests.⁴¹ Van Evera contends that there are two causes of windows, fluctuations in the relative power of states and what is often referred to as the offense-defense balance.⁴² In regards to the former, Van Evera writes that, "Any factor that affects states' relative strength can open windows."⁴³ Afghanistan itself did not pose a threat to the Soviet Union, but instead it was the idea of losing Afghanistan that motivated the Soviet Union to action. In regards to the offense-defense balance, it is often noted that "military power at any

⁴⁰ Steven Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 74.

⁴¹ Refer back to footnote 18.

⁴² Ibid, p. 103-104.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 103.

point in time can be categorized as favoring either offense or defense.”⁴⁴ Traditionally it is thought that when power favors defense, the use of force as a means of conquest is an unlikely scenario, but when a state has an offensive advantage, the opposite tends to be the more likely scenario.⁴⁵ In the case of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan, evidence suggests that it was not an aggressive and expansionist-minded agenda that guided Soviet policy at the time. This eliminates the offense-defense balance as being the primary explainer of what the Soviet Union saw as an increasing window of vulnerability. Instead, the Soviet Union was motivated by the need to protect national interests and remain strong in the face of their Cold War rivals. This seems to indicate that the Soviet Union’s prevailing sense of vulnerability was the product of, or at least influenced by, fluctuations in the relative power of Cold War actors and their potential decline. In other words, losing Afghanistan could have weakened their position in the system

Motivated to Action: Evidence from the Archives

According to David Silverman, textual analysis entails “establishing categories and then counting the number of instances when those categories are used in a particular item of text, for instance a newspaper or report.”⁴⁶ As a means of testing the aforementioned hypotheses, this paper, as already mentioned, examines the content of 56 declassified Soviet documents. A total of six concepts were created in an attempt to measure the presence of either Hypothesis I or II. The first four concepts measure Hypotheses II, while the remaining two concepts measure Hypothesis I.

⁴⁴ Mearsheimer, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴⁶ David Silverman, Interpreting Qualitative Data 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006), p. 160.

In regards to Hypothesis II, the first concept established was that of *insurgency*. This was rooted in the belief that the Soviet Union was concerned about the growing insurgency in Afghanistan and recognized the insurgents as being a potentially destabilizing element within Afghanistan. As a means of data collection, this examination counted every sentence in the aforementioned 56 documents referring to the importance of the insurgency. Often times these sentences contained specific words such as insurgents, insurgency, rebels, or counter-revolutionaries. Second, this examination looked for evidence regarding what can be called *interference*, or the idea that other states, particularly the United States, Pakistan, Iran, and China, were interfering in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan in an attempt to decrease the Soviet Union's influence there. Collecting this evidence was accomplished by counting every sentence in which an external actor was mentioned as being actively engaged in subversive behavior either in, or aimed at, Afghanistan. Third, this examination looked for the importance of *territorial integrity* throughout the documents, or the idea that losing Afghanistan to insurgents would result in a domino effect in which other Soviet territories with large Muslim populations would also begin to rebel. This was accomplished by counting each sentence that referred to the insurgency and its impact on other Soviet territories. Fourth, as a means of measuring whether or not the Soviet Union was engaging in an offensive or defensive action, this paper counted each sentence in which Soviet policymakers expressed *reservation* or concern for their *image*. In other words, this paper counted the number of sentences that expressed concerns about the negative consequences of establishing any sort of military presence in Afghanistan. This would include sentences referring to how other states in the system might view such an action, or concerns about just who the "enemy" would be if such an action was to be deemed necessary. Together, *insurgency*, *interference*, *territorial integrity*, and *reservation/image* all exist under the umbrella of "maintaining their position"

and Hypothesis II. Any significant presence of these concepts would suggest that Hypothesis II should be accepted.

The remaining two concepts test Hypothesis I. Here it was first necessary to collect evidence pertaining to *relative gains*, or the idea that Soviet policymakers sought to gain something from invading Afghanistan other than ensuring the Soviet Union's security and protecting national interests. Collecting this evidence was accomplished by counting each sentence in which a material gain was mentioned. This could include enhanced geographic proximity to important resources or waterways, or simply the importance of the acquisition of territory. Second, this examination looked to establish the presence of *unrestrained behavior* on the part of the Soviet Union. This is defined opposite of *reservations/images*. Here the Soviet Union would not give consideration to how other states might view or respond to the invasion. Locating this evidence was accomplished by counting each sentence that referred to actions in Afghanistan as being inconsequential, or at the very least, where the perceived costs of how other states would react failed to outweigh the perceived benefits of taking such an action. If evidence of either *relative gains* or *unrestrained behavior* is present in significant numbers, it might suggest that Hypothesis I should be accepted rather than rejected. Table 2 displays the results of the process described above.

Table 2: Categorization of concepts related to Hypothesis I and II		
Concept	Number of Sentences	Percentage of Total Sentences
Insurgency (HII)	58	.234
Interference (HII)	146	.589
Territorial Integrity (HII)	0	N/A
Reservation/Image (HII)	44	.177
Relative Gain (HI)	0	N/A
Unrestrained Behavior(HI)	0	N/A
Total Mentions	248	

Source: Scanlon

The examination conducted here yielded interesting results, which partially affirm Hypothesis II and completely reject Hypothesis I. Throughout the examination of the 56 declassified Soviet documents, Soviet policymakers repeatedly voiced a combined concern for both the insurgency in Afghanistan and interference on the part of external actors. For example, in a document dated April 12, 1979, it was reported that:

The enemies of the revolution are acting not only from within the country but from abroad, the opponents of the new order have emigrated. According to our sources, Western special services, particularly American and Chinese agencies, are involved in the organization of the struggle against the government inside the country. They have taken advantage of the fact that Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan and Iran are practically open. Not only subversive and terrorist groups, but also large armed bands are sent across the border.⁴⁷

What this suggests is that for Soviet policymakers the insurgency was closely tied to interference from external actors. In short, external actors were “fanning the flames.” This is why the number of sentences related to *interference* significantly outnumbers those sentences mentioning *insurgency* without any mention of external actors. This was especially true of those documents issued after the invasion, where the number of sentences mentioning the insurgency without mentioning the role of external actors decreased and the number of sentences referring to the role of external actors in Afghanistan increased. The number of sentences relating to *interference* went from 63 before the invasion to 72 after the invasion. It is clear that what was weighing most on the minds of Soviet policymakers was the role of external actors interfering in Afghanistan's daily affairs and tilting Afghanistan away from the Soviet Union. In short, opening up a window of vulnerability in which the Soviet Union's relative strength and position in the system would be threatened.

⁴⁷ CWIHP, “Extract from Protocol #150 of the CC CPSU Politburo Session” (April 21 1979), Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4, available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

The most pervasive concepts found in this examination were those of *insurgency* and *interference*, which together account for over 80 percent of the total number of sentences counted. Although *interference* was the dominant concept, it was closely related to the concept of *insurgency*. In many ways, these two concepts could be combined. A key consideration, however, is how the notion of *interference* changed in the lead-up to the invasion. Rather than being concerned with uninvited interference, the Soviet Union became concerned with Amin's attempt to reconcile with the West. In a document issued in early December 1979, it is noted that, "At the same time, alarming information started to arrive about Amin's secret activities, forewarning of a possible political shift to the West."⁴⁸ Yet this was a concern for Soviet policymakers even before December of 1979. In a document dated October 29, 1979, the month in which Taraki was assassinated and Amin ascended to power, a Central Committee meeting report of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union mentioned that:

Recently there have been noted signs of the fact that the new leadership of Afghanistan intends to conduct a more "balanced policy" in relation to the Western powers. It is known, in particular, that representatives of the USA, on the basis of their contacts with Afghans, are coming to a conclusion about the possibility of a change in the political line of Afghanistan in a direction that is pleasing to Washington.⁴⁹

The evidence taken from these documents suggests that the Soviet Union was concerned with the influence of external actors in Afghanistan and the potential for those actors to turn the country away from the Soviet sphere of influence. It should be noted that in the decision to invade came only after the assassination of Taraki and Afghanistan's apparent move to the West. Such a move would have been detrimental

⁴⁸ CWIHP, "Personal Memorandum, Andropov to Brezhnev "(Early December 1979), Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4, available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

⁴⁹ CWIHP, "Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to CPSU CC" (October 29, 1979), Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4, available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

to the Soviet Union's position in the system. Protecting their position could very well have been at the heart of the Soviet Union's decision to invade Afghanistan in December 1979. In fact, in a document dated December 31, 1979, Soviet policymakers made it clear this was a national security issue, stating that:

In this extremely difficult situation, which has threatened the gains of the April revolution and the interests of our national security, it has become necessary to render additional military assistance to Afghanistan, especially since such requests had been made by the previous administration in DRA. In accordance with the provision of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1978, a decision has been made to send the necessary contingent of the Soviet Army to Afghanistan.

The third most pervasive concept found was that of *reservation/image*. On several occasions Soviet policymakers expressed concern for how direct Soviet action in Afghanistan would be received in the international community. Through the fall of 1979, Soviet policymakers continued to resist the overtures from PDPA officials who were calling for direct military assistance from the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ In regards to deploying troops to Afghanistan upon the request of PDPA officials, Soviet policymakers continually reaffirmed their position that the Soviet Union “cannot do that,” and the Soviet Union “cannot take such measures.”⁵¹ One statement that best captures this notion of *reservation/image* was made by Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko, who at the time was the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, and reads as follows:

To this time we still don't know how the Afghan army will behave. And if it does not support our measures or remains neutral, then it will turn out that we have used our forces to occupy Afghanistan. In doing this we will create for ourselves an incredibly difficult complication in our foreign policy. We would largely be throwing away everything we achieved with such difficulty, particularly détente, the SALT-II negotiations would fly by the wayside, there would be no signing of an agreement, there would be no meeting of Leonid Llych with Carter, and it is very doubtful that Giscard

⁵⁰ Many documents previous to the invasion dealt with aid, and much of that aid was at the request of PDPA leaders. For example, refer back to footnote 4.

⁵¹ CWIHP, “Boris Ponomarev, Reports from Kabul (excerpts)” (July 17-19 1979), Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4, available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

d'Estang would come visit us, and our relations with Western countries, particularly the FRG would be spoiled.⁵²

The Soviet Union was indeed concerned with the affects that direct action in Afghanistan would have on their foreign policy goals and objectives, and how other states would perceive such actions. It was not until it appeared that the Afghan leadership was moving towards the West that the Soviet Union was motivated to action. Although only 44 sentences were counted relating to *reservation/image*, such statements as the one quoted above carry significant weight and make a strong point. It becomes clear that the Soviet Union had significant concerns regarding the invasion of Afghanistan and the Soviets were indeed apprehensive about taking such action.

Throughout the examination, there was no mention of *territorial integrity* or any sentences relating to how the concept was employed here. At no point was there any identifiable concern for instability in Afghanistan spilling over into other Central Asian territories within the Soviet sphere of influence. There was no mention of other Central Asian states (with the exception of Pakistan) or that Muslim territories under Soviet control would rebel at the first signs of success by insurgents in Afghanistan. Additionally, there was no mention of either *unrestrained behavior* or *relative gains*. In terms of the total number of sentences counted, *territorial integrity*, *relative gains*, and *unrestrained behavior* are absent from the documents reviewed here. In this case, the absence of evidence to support the existence of these concepts is akin to the absence of variables in an experiment. In fact, without the evidence these concepts disappear and significantly weaken the strength and overall scope of the original independent variables and hypotheses. In the end, the absence of evidence might speak louder than the presence of evidence.

⁵² CWIHP, "Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Session on Afghanistan" (March 22 1979), Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4, available at: http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/e-dossier_4.pdf

Conclusion: What it All Means

Obviously the problem with any research project is often deciphering ‘what it all means.’ The findings detailed here are meaningful in that they have serious consequences for the proposed hypotheses. There was no mention of the Soviet Union feeling unrestrained or seeking to make relative gains at the expense of others. However, the evidence suggests that the Soviet Union had several reservations regarding direct military action in Afghanistan. Chief among those reservations was how other states would perceive the invasion and how the action would affect the Soviet Union’s foreign policy goals and objectives. Together, the concepts designed to support Hypothesis I accounted zero percent of the total mentions. Therefore, based on the sample population, Hypothesis I can be rejected, as there was no evidence found here indicating that the Soviet Union was trying to maximize their power relative to their Cold War rivals. Put another way, there was no evidence suggesting that the Soviet Union was ensuring their security by maximizing their relative power through war and in the pursuit of hegemony.

Hypothesis II can be affirmed, but not as it is stated. The evidence does indeed suggest that the Soviet Union was motivated to action by a need to protect national interests and “maintain their position,” but not to the extent that was previously asserted. There was no mention of *territorial integrity* and no overt concern for further destabilization within the Soviet Union’s Central Asian sphere of influence.⁵³ The absence of evidence to support this concept speaks loudly here. Therefore, we can reject this notion based on the available evidence in these documents. We can then begin to revise Hypothesis II in that there was no concern regarding territorial integrity. Together, *insurgency* and *interference* account for over 80 percent of the total sentences counted. Through this examination, it can be suggested that the Soviet Union

⁵³ It seems that Afghanistan was always the overwhelming concern for Soviet policymakers. In a September 20, 1979 document, it is said that, “Right now our mission is to preserve our positions in Afghanistan and to secure our influence there.”

was motivated to action by the need to put down the insurgency and prevent anti-Soviet elements from gaining a foothold in Afghanistan. Obviously both a successful insurgency combined with an Afghanistan aligned with anti-Soviet forces would have had the potential to weaken the Soviet Union's influence in the important Central Asian region. Ultimately, the evidence collected here indicates that Afghanistan represented a growing window of vulnerability. This could also explain why there were fewer mentions of *reservation/image*, as the consequences of invasion paled in comparison to the consequences of losing Afghanistan to a new regime that could have very well aligned itself with the anti-Soviet camp. The concerns over these issues were evident in the documents examined here, as Pakistan, Iran, China, and the U.S., all rivals of the Soviet Union at the time, were repeatedly mentioned as supporting the insurgents and their efforts. Therefore, Hypothesis II can be revised and subsequently accepted. The independent variable remains the same, as does the causal linkage. However the new hypothesis simply reads as follows: *The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was motivated by the need to maintain their position in the system.* There is no need for the mention of territory, but only a need to state that the Soviet Union was concerned that losing Afghanistan would weaken their position in the system.

Appendix A
Documents Reviewed
May 31, 1978 – October 13, 1978

Document	Date	Insurgency	Interference	Image	Territorial Integrity	Relative Gains	Unrestrained Behavior
Political Letter from USSR Ambassador to Afghanistan A. Puzanov to Soviet Foreign Ministry, "About the Domestic Political Situation in the DRA," 31 May 1978 (notes)	May 31, 1978	0	2	0	0	0	0
Record of Conversation, Soviet Ambassador A.M. Puzanov and Taraki	June 18, 1978	0	0	0	0	0	0
Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan A.M. Puzanov and Taraki	July 18, 1978	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information from CC CPSU to GDR leader Erich Honecker	October 13, 1978	1	5	2	0	0	0

Appendix B
Documents Reviewed
January 7, 1979 – December 31, 1979

CPSU CC Politburo Decision on Afghanistan	January 7, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Discussions on Afghanistan	March 17 or 19, 1979	17	27	22	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decisions on Afghanistan	March, 18 1979	0	2	0	0	0	0
Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin and Afghan Prime Minister Nur Mohammed Tarki	March 17 or 18, 1979	0	1	2	0	0	0
Meeting of Kosygin, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Ponomarev with Taraki in Moscow	March 20, 1979	4	12	4	0	0	0
Record of Conversation of L.I. Brezhnev with N.M. Taraki	March 20, 1979	3	3	1	0	0	0
Transcript of CPSU CC Politburo Session on Afghanistan	March 22, 1979	0	1	1	0	0	0
Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan A.M. Puzanov and Taraki	March 22, 1979	0	2	0	0	0	0
Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee	April 1, 1979	14	6	1	0	0	0
Report of the chief of the Soviet military advisory group in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. L.N. Gorelov, with H. Amin	April 14, 1979	1	0	0	0	0	0
Extract from protocol #150 of the CC CPSU Politburo session	April 21, 1979	2	0	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision and Instruction to Soviet Ambassador in Afghanistan	May 24, 1979	1	0	1	0	0	0
Record of Conversation Between Soviet Ambassador A.M. Puzanov and Taraki	June 9, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to CPSU CC on the Situation in Afghanistan	June 28, 1979	1	0	0	0	0	0
Boris Ponomarev, Reports from Kabul (excerpts)	July 19-20, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan A.M. Puzanov and H. Amin	July, 21 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conversation of the chief of the Soviet military advisory group in Afghanistan, Lt. Gen. Gorelov, with H. Amin	August 11, 1979	0	0	1	0	0	0

Appendix B Continued
Documents Reviewed
January 7, 1979 – December 31, 1979

Report from Soviet Deputy Defense Minister Army Gen. Ivan Pavlovskii, during visit to Afghanistan	August 25 1979	0	0	1	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decisions on Afghanistan	September 13, 1979	0	0	1	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision, report by Gromyko, Ustinov, and Tsvigun	September 15, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cable from Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko to Soviet Representatives in Kabul	September 15, 1979	1	0	0	0	0	0
Information from CC CPSU to GDR leader Erich Honecker	September 16, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Excerpt from Transcript, CPSU CC Politburo Meeting	September 20, 1979	0	0	0	0	1	0
Excerpt from Transcript, Meeting of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Afghan Foreign Minister Shah-Valih, New York (excerpt)	September, 27 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information from CC CPSU to GDR leader Erich Honecker	October 1, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transcript of Brezhnev-Honecker Summit in East Berlin (excerpt on Iran and Afghanistan)	October 4, 1979	0	4	0	0	0	0
Information of KGB USSR to CC CPSU International Department	October 10, 1979	0	0	0	0	1	0
Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report to CPSU CC	October 29, 1979	0	2	0	0	0	0
Record of Conversation Bwtween Soviet Ambassador Puzanov and Amin	Novemember 3, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov, Report to CPSU CC on Mission to Afghanistan of Deputy Defense Minister Army-Gen. I. G. Pavlovskii	Novemember 5, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Record of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan F.A. Tabeev and H. Amin	December 6, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Extract from CPSU CC Politburo Decision	December 6, 1979	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personal Memorandum, Andropov to Brezhnev, n.d.	Early December, 1979	0	5	0	0	0	1
Andropov-Gromyko-Ustinov-Ponomarev Report on Events in Afghanistan on 27-28 December 1979	December 31, 1979	2	2	0	0	0	0

Appendix C
Documents Reviewed
January 4, 1980 – May 13, 1989

Message of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Afghan Foreign Minister Shad Mohammad Dost	January 4, 1980	0	5	0	0	0	0
CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt)	January 17, 1980	0	0	1	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo decision (excerpt)	January 17, 1980	0	0	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision, 28 January 1980, with Report by Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Ponomar	January 27, 1980	1	8	2	0	0	1
CPSU CC Politburo Decision, 1 February 1980, with telegrams to Soviet Ambassador to West Germany (for Willy Brandt) and Finnish Social Democratic leader K. Sorsa (not printed)	February 1, 1980	1	14	4	0	0	0
Andropov Report to CPSU CC on Talks with Afghan Leaders	February 5, 1980	0	0	0	0	0	0
CC CPSU Politburo transcript (excerpt)	February 7, 1980	0	1	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decisions on Afghanistan	February 7, 1980	0	0	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision on Soviet Policy on Afghanistan, with Report on Proposal by Fidel Castro to Mediate between Afghanistan and Pakistan and Approved Letter from L.I. Brezhnev to Castro	March 10, 1980	0	8	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision on Afghanistan with Report from Gromyko-Andropov-Ustinov-Zagladin	April 7, 1980	5	3	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decision, with Politburo Commission Report, and Approved Cable to Soviet Ambassador in Kabul	May 6, 1980	0	3	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo decisions	June 19, 1980	0	1	0	0	0	0
Information from CC CPSU Erich Honecker	June 21, 1980	0	4	0	0	0	0
CC CPSU Plenum	June 23, 1980	0	2	0	0	0	0
Information from CC CPSU to Erich Honecker	July 18, 1980	0	1	0	0	0	0
Report by Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov to CPSU CC on "Foreign Interference in Afghanistan"	October 2, 1980	0	18	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo transcript	March 10, 1983	1	1	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Transcript	March 20, 1986	0	0	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo transcript	November 13, 1986	2	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix C Continued
Documents Reviewed
January 4, 1980 – May 13, 1989

CPSU CC Politburo Decisionwith Attached Report	January 24, 1989	1	2	0	0	0	0
CPSU CC Politburo Decisions with Report by Zaikov-Shevardnadze- Yazov-Kryuchkov	May 13, 1989	0	1	0	0	0	0

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