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The Invasion of Afghanistan: Implications for Soviet Foreign Policy

An Intelligence Assessment

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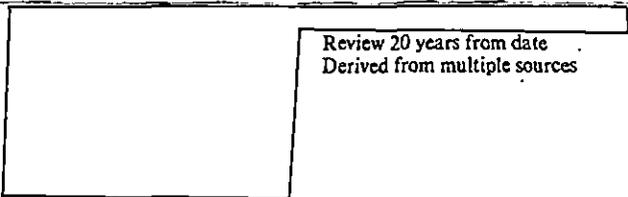
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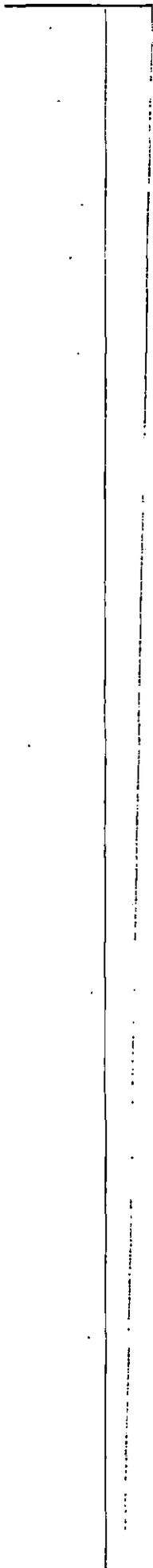
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This assessment was prepared by [redacted]
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**The Invasion of Afghanistan:
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Key Judgments

Soviet decisions on the scope and timing of the intervention in Afghanistan were dictated largely by the situation in that country, but—once Moscow decided to invade—it presumably anticipated geopolitical gains that extended beyond Afghanistan. The naked display of Soviet military strength, moreover, will generate opportunities and costs that will affect Soviet foreign policy on a global basis.

In moving into Afghanistan, Moscow probably calculated that, in view of the decline in Soviet-American relations in recent years, it did not have much to lose in its relations with the United States. The Soviet leaders knew that they would have to pay a price in their relations with the West and that their actions would create deep suspicions about Soviet policy within the Third World. Past precedents, however, probably gave the Soviet leaders—most of whom participated in the decision to invade Czechoslovakia—ample reason to believe that, over time, their willingness to use military force in Afghanistan would enhance their efforts to extend their worldwide influence.

Moscow will attempt to show that it can wait out any US retaliation by turning to third country suppliers of embargoed or restricted goods. It may also undertake some retaliatory steps of its own, such as increased pressures on dissidents, harassment of US citizens in the USSR, and efforts to isolate the US politically from its allies and from the Third World on the issue of Afghanistan. In the face of increasing US pressures, it might take further steps—in Cuba, Berlin, or on arms control—to exacerbate relations with the United States.

In the near term, Moscow will seek to consolidate its gains in southwest Asia and attempt to minimize the costs elsewhere. To date the Soviets appear surprised by the forcefulness of the US response which, together with the general outrage expressed by most non-Communist nations, may be giving Moscow reason to believe it underestimated the wider effects of its actions in Afghanistan.

There is no reason to believe that foreknowledge of these responses would have altered the Soviet decision to intervene, but Moscow may have to give more attention than it had thought necessary to its relations with the world community. In Europe, for example, we would expect the Soviets to appear

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to be more accommodating on disarmament issues while portraying the United States as the principal obstacle to progress. In the Middle East, Moscow will attempt to divert Arab attention away from the Soviet attempt to crush a Muslim insurgency and back toward American support of the Egyptian-Israeli peace process. Elsewhere in the Third World, the Soviets will try to counter the damage to their image among the nonaligned states. The Afghan invasion has already embarrassed Moscow's Cuban surrogates and caused Havana's withdrawal from consideration for a seat on the UN Security Council.

From Moscow's point of view, the most worrisome potential consequence of its Afghanistan adventure is the prospect of closer Sino-American security cooperation. Soviet actions in Afghanistan will make the soon-to-resume Sino-Soviet talks even more difficult. Moscow will also be watching for signs of a more aggressive Chinese stance toward Vietnam now that the USSR has, for the first time, invaded a country that borders China.

The foreign policy fallout of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan will be mixed. A long-term Soviet presence in Afghanistan and continued involvement in the conflict will probably lead to increasingly unfavorable reverberations for Moscow's standing throughout the Islamic world, particularly among Afghanistan's neighbors who are opposed to a change in the balance of power in the area and are apprehensive about the dangers inherent in Soviet-American rivalry being played out in their region. Indeed, the longer the Soviets remain in Afghanistan, the greater the temptation will be for Moscow to take more active steps to influence the behavior of Iran and Pakistan. Similarly, a long involvement in Afghanistan might alter the terms of detente in a way that could tempt the Soviets to challenge US interests in the Middle East and the Caribbean more aggressively.

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Weighing the Costs to Detente

Moscow undoubtedly realized that the introduction of Soviet forces into Afghanistan would poison the atmosphere for detente. In deciding to go ahead, therefore, Moscow appears to have concluded that many of the objectives which it had sought under detente (for example, relaxation of US strategic programs and increased trade) had not been achieved and were not likely to be realized in the foreseeable future even if the USSR adopted a less malignant policy toward Afghanistan. Soviet commentary in recent months has suggested, for example, that relations with the United States have become increasingly arid and that little change in these relations can be expected before 1981 at the earliest. This commentary has placed the blame on the United States, and Moscow's public statements show no recognition that Soviet actions have contributed to this situation. Instead, Moscow argues that the United States, by commission and by omission, has undermined the bases of detente established in the early 1970s and that the USSR has little reason to expect that the United States will soon seek to reestablish a cooperative relationship.

Soviet statements, moreover, suggest a conviction that SALT was in deep trouble in the US Senate and that the objectives sought in arms control negotiations were not attainable under present circumstances. Ambassador Dobrynin may have reinforced this appraisal when he returned to Moscow on 6 December. We do not believe that Moscow's decision to invade Afghanistan means that it has written off SALT II, but the Soviets may have concluded that NATO's Long Term Defense Program, the MX, Trident II, cruise missiles, and NATO's decision to deploy long-range TNF in Europe had all gravely undercut Moscow's objectives in pursuing arms control negotiations. Moscow had hoped the negotiating process during the 1970s would

inhibit Western arms modernization programs and particularly American strategic programs. By now Moscow may have concluded that these goals have been gravely impaired in the short- to medium-term and that its actions in Afghanistan would not, therefore, set back any immediately attainable objectives in arms control talks with the United States.

Economic relations with the United States have been another source of disappointment for the Soviets. The trade boom that Moscow thought would accompany detente has not materialized. The Soviets were counting on access to US technology, as well as participation by US firms in major development projects—financed by US Eximbank credits—and most-favored-nation (MFN) tariff status. The Eximbank window, however, was open only for two and a half years in the early 1970s, MFN trade status was never granted, and most of the big projects have never materialized.

Moscow by now must have little hope of obtaining US trade benefits. Moreover, the Soviets have been able to meet nearly all of their needs for nonagricultural imports in Western Europe and Japan, where governments have lent strong support for trade with the USSR. The Soviets have minimized their dependence on US sources to blunt the impact of abrupt changes in US trade policy, such as the August 1978 controls on energy equipment exports.

Since the USSR thus appears to have resigned itself to the failure of arms control to limit US military programs and to the failure of economic relations to develop, it probably decided that it had little to lose from its actions in Afghanistan. The Soviet leaders may have also calculated that another result of the general decline of detente was to lessen Soviet susceptibility to US pressures. Moscow may have estimated that since SALT II was moribund and trade and technology transfer were unsubstantial, there was not

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much that the United States could do to punish the Soviet Union for its actions in Afghanistan. Moscow may have believed that domestic political and legislative constraints would make it difficult for the United States to cut off grain shipments to the Soviet Union in retaliation for Soviet actions in Afghanistan.

Those arguing in Moscow for intervention in Afghanistan may have supported their case by citing the effect on the West of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union was able to overcome relatively quickly the opprobrium it earned in August 1968. In fact, those leaders favoring action against Afghanistan may have argued that positive steps in the early 1970s, such as the Quadripartite Agreements, SALT I, West Germany's reconciliation treaties with the USSR and Poland, plus the whole atmosphere of detente, were facilitated by the decisive stabilization of Moscow's position in Central Europe achieved by the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The USSR may have calculated that its intervention in Afghanistan would strengthen its position in South Asia over the longer term, particularly against the interests of the United States. The Soviet leaders may have reasoned that rebellion in Afghanistan invited Western exploitation of the situation there and thus could have weakened Moscow's international position. Decisive action was probably thought necessary to strengthen that position, especially in view of Soviet inaction during China's incursion into Vietnam earlier last year.

The China Factor

Moscow probably anticipates that China's response to the invasion of Afghanistan will be potentially most troublesome over the long term. The Soviets undoubtedly recall that their invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 led, at least indirectly, to Sino-Soviet armed clashes along the Ussuri River the following year and contributed to the Sino-US rapprochement that began in 1971. Moscow's expanded presence in Afghanistan—which shares a small segment of border with China—presumably will be even more alarming than the Czechoslovak experience for Beijing and is certain

to become another major irritant in Soviet relations with their most intractable geopolitical opponent. The Soviets surely anticipated that Afghanistan would dominate the discussions during Secretary of Defense Brown's visit to Beijing, and during Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua's visit to Pakistan later this month.

The Kremlin must be concerned that in the aftermath of Afghanistan both Washington and Beijing will be more inclined to agree on security cooperation as well as infusions of US technology directly helpful to China's military efforts. Washington's decision to seek MFN status for China separately from the USSR had previously fueled Moscow's suspicions that the United States had overcome its earlier ambivalence about playing the "China card." Only a year ago, President Brezhnev had cautioned President Carter that the USSR would "closely follow" whether the US assurances of its benign intentions in establishing relations with Beijing were kept in practice.

The Soviets could also be concerned that Beijing might decide to take advantage of Moscow's preoccupation in Afghanistan by launching a second invasion of Vietnam. Since the first Chinese invasion in February 1979, the Soviets have increased their involvement in Vietnam in order to deter another Chinese attack. The Commander of the Soviet Navy, Admiral Gorshkov, recently visited Hanoi to add credibility to this deterrence and presumably to gain increased access to Vietnam's naval and air facilities.

Moscow's actions in Afghanistan will make Sino-Soviet negotiations more difficult than they already are, particularly the political talks that are supposed to redefine the Sino-Soviet relationship following Beijing's abrogation of the Friendship Treaty last April. These talks are expected to resume in the spring. The river navigation talks are tentatively scheduled to begin in February, and the annual trade talks ordinarily get under way in March or April. Any unpleasantness at the navigation talks would increase chances for incidents on the river frontier, and the abandonment of a comprehensive annual trade agreement would create a dismal atmosphere for the Sino-Soviet political talks.

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Ever since the border clashes in 1969, the Soviets have spent a certain amount of political capital maintaining a dialogue with Beijing. The Soviets see some advantage in portraying themselves as conciliatory as possible with the "intransigent" Chinese, and they have long wanted to paper over their differences with China in order to strengthen Moscow's hand in dealing with the United States and others. But although China apparently is trying to insulate its bilateral relations with the Soviets from the rapid shifts in political atmospherics in the region; Chinese hostility toward the USSR is bound to become even more implacable, if possible, in the wake of the Afghan invasion. Sino-Soviet relations will also suffer if the United States and China find a way to cooperate on getting military assistance to Pakistan. In any case, Moscow's position within the Sino-Soviet-US triangle will become even more vulnerable, and the terms governing the triangular relationship itself will become more unstable.

South Asia

Apart from the Middle East, India has long been the most important target of Soviet attention in the Third World, both to help contain China and as a cornerstone of Soviet influence with the nonaligned movement. The return of Indira Gandhi to power will be reassuring to the Soviets, who will expect the new Indian government to express continued interest in close ties with the USSR and opposition to the United States. Any Indian Government would be apprehensive about Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, but Indian dependence on the Soviets for economic and military aid remains considerable and should mute Indian criticism of Soviet actions—as long as Soviet territorial ambitions are confined to Afghanistan.

Over the long run, however, the removal of Afghanistan as a buffer between the USSR and South Asia could cause the Indian political elite to explore alternatives to its dependence on the USSR. This attitude might be reflected in a desire to reduce Indian arms dependence on the USSR or to reexamine the Soviet-Indian friendship treaty in view of Moscow's use of a similar treaty with Afghanistan to justify the invasion. Although increased concern with the Soviets will not drive New Delhi into the arms of the United

States, even Indira Gandhi's government might be moved to improve relations with the United States, or to reopen the dialogue with China, as it did before.

India, however, will be far more sensitive to any signs of change in US-Pakistan relations as a result of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. India fears that greater superpower involvement in the region—particularly significant US arms sales to Pakistan—would increase prospects for regional instability and conflict. New Delhi has already expressed "grave concern" over the possibility of new US arms deliveries to Pakistan, but might acquiesce in limited US arms aid and might itself be willing to provide some arms aid to Pakistan. A Gandhi government might also recognize the importance of reducing tensions with both Pakistan and Bangladesh as a result of a protracted Soviet presence in Afghanistan and increased superpower involvement in the Indian Ocean.

Whereas Moscow is counting on India's dependence on Soviet military and economic assistance to limit New Delhi's reaction to the expanded Soviet presence in Afghanistan, it is probably assuming that its show of force will serve generally to intimidate neighboring countries—particularly those, such as Pakistan, that are preoccupied with internal problems. The Soviet invasion will certainly increase Islamabad's fear of the USSR, and the Soviets will probably resort to a combination of blandishment and pressure to discourage Pakistan from increasing aid to the Afghan insurgents. Moscow is already trying to persuade Islamabad that it is "not too late" for Pakistan to cease all aid to the rebels, and Soviet officials in Pakistan have threatened that Islamabad's security position will be difficult if it does not.

Soviet success in discouraging Pakistani aid to the insurgents will be determined in part by actions taken separately or jointly by the United States and China. If Washington and Beijing supply large amounts of military assistance, the Pakistanis will be more likely to resist Soviet pressure and probably will increase aid to the insurgents. Pakistan will exercise extreme

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caution, however, and will be careful to ensure that its own security concerns are guaranteed before committing itself to supporting the insurgents. In the absence of such guarantees, Islamabad may flirt—as it has in the past—with a policy of improved relations with Moscow.

The Soviets, for their part, are likely to take advantage of the weak central authority in Pakistan. If the Pakistanis opt to increase aid to Afghan insurgents, Moscow may try to intimidate the Pakistanis by encouraging the Afghans to heat up the campaign for an independent Pushtunistan or by encouraging the ambitions of such anti-Pakistani tribal groups as the Baluchis. Pakistani Baluchistan has been in periodic rebellion against the central government for decades, and some Baluchis reportedly believe that Moscow may now be more interested in supporting their efforts to secure an independent Baluchistan. A long-term Soviet military presence in Afghanistan will mean greater tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which will, in turn, increase the Soviet temptation to use the Baluchi and Pushtunistan issue against the Islamabad government.

The Middle East

Most Third World states are physically and psychologically far removed from Afghanistan, but the brutality of the Soviet takeover—particularly the execution of Prime Minister Amin—should have some negative resonance among Soviet clients, particularly those that accommodate a Soviet military presence and/or have concluded a friendship treaty with the USSR. A prolonged and presumably ruthless Soviet effort to destroy the Islamic insurgency in Afghanistan would have continuing repercussions on the perceptions of these states, particularly those that are Muslim.

The Islamic community is clearly divided in its response to the Soviet invasion. Most conservative Arab states either signed the initial request for an urgent Security Council meeting or have expressed indignation in some other form; Egypt is reportedly preparing to take some anti-Soviet measures, such as reducing the size of the Soviet diplomatic mission in

Cairo. Among radical Arab states, only South Yemen and Syria have sent congratulations to the new regime in Kabul.

The Soviets are probably counting on radical Arab opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, and suspicion of the US sponsorship of that process, to preclude public opposition to the invasion. The creation of a Palestinian state is still more important to these Islamic states than events in Southwest Asia, another factor mitigating against criticism of the USSR. Algeria and Libya are remote from the area and are dependent on the USSR for military assistance, and are therefore unlikely to criticize publicly the use of Soviet weapons, even against Muslim insurgents. Syria, which shares these concerns and is also faced with internal instability and renewed enmity with Iraq, presumably feels too isolated to risk alienating the USSR and needs Soviet support against the current peace process. Nonetheless, basic Syrian suspicions of Soviet intentions will have been fortified, and Syria is even less likely in the wake of the Afghan coup to conclude a treaty of friendship with the USSR—a long a Soviet objective.

Iraq's strong public condemnation last week of the Soviet invasion is an indication of the basic apprehension in the area over Soviet intentions toward the Near East. Iraqi suspicions of the USSR will be further strengthened by a revival of antigovernment activity by the Iraqi Communist Party, which follows a recent decision by the party's Moscow-based leadership to begin rebuilding its shattered organization. The Iraqis are also reportedly angered by their belief that the Soviets are providing indirect support to the Kurdish movement. Baghdad may decide to reexamine the language of its own treaty with the USSR as a result.

Iraq, as well as other Arab states, may become even more opposed to current efforts by the Soviets to consolidate their position in the Yemens. For the Arabs in general, the Soviet move in Afghanistan could, over the long term, make the USSR a less attractive alternative to the United States. Such a shift in

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attitude could lead to some softening of the anti-Egyptian posture adopted by most of the Arab world and a relaxation of the post-Camp David polarization.

Iran's initial reaction has been less anti-Soviet than Moscow might have feared. After strongly condemning the intervention and resuming media criticism of the Soviets, Tehran has made it clear that the United States remains Iran's main enemy. Over the longer term, however, Soviet problems with Iran could be more severe. Ayatollah Khomeini is not in a position to conduct a two-front crisis with both the United States and USSR, but his distrust of the Soviets and antipathy for Communism will have been reinforced by the Soviet action in Afghanistan. If and when Iran emerges from its confrontation with the United States, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan—particularly if the Soviets are conducting operations against Islamic guerrillas in that nation—may well prevent the reconciliation with Iran that the Soviets have sought.

Europe

The Soviet action in Afghanistan could damage Moscow's efforts to cultivate and promote an inclination among West European states to pay greater deference to Soviet interests in all-European affairs and in the framing of national security policies. Some West Europeans may conclude that the Afghan invasion marks the end of the era of detente and a return to a period resembling the cold war. This attitude might lead some Europeans to view the USSR's actions in Afghanistan as evidence of the need for greater support for NATO's modernization programs for theater nuclear forces. Moscow's actions could also complicate the USSR's proposals on European security issues that it intended to set forth at the CSCE session scheduled for Madrid later this year.

Initial West European reaction belies this thesis, however. The allies insist that detente is still alive and that arms control progress must parallel theater nuclear force (TNF) modernization. As Afghanistan fades from memory, the cost of the arms race and the fear of hostilities could in fact complicate NATO's efforts to gain public support for weapons procure-

ment. Leftwing parties in West Germany and the Netherlands as well as many West European socialists and Communists will continue to insist on the primacy of arms control despite the Soviet presence in Kabul.

The Soviets will do their best to capitalize on this sentiment. They will attempt to persuade West Europeans that detente with the Soviet Union in Europe is after all compatible with defense against the Soviet Union in Europe. As a result, Moscow may be more accommodating than it has been in the past to the French proposal for a separate conference on disarmament in Europe subsequent to the Madrid meeting.

From the initial reactions of the major Eurocommunist parties, it does not appear that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan will produce the kind of traumatic split that occurred among European Communist parties following the invasion of Czechoslovakia or even the differences that followed Soviet support for the invasion of Kampuchea. The West European Communist reaction has been mixed and does not portend an ideological struggle for the Soviets in coming months. The French Communist Party has echoed the Soviet line on Afghanistan and has dispatched party leader George Marchais to Moscow—moves that reflect the evolution in the French Communist position toward Moscow in recent years. The Spanish Communists have buried their criticism of the Soviets in broad polemics assaulting recent US and NATO activities. The Italian party, while more forthright in attacking Soviet actions, has tried to explain them in terms of general global tension, including the TNF decision. This line will reinforce fears among Italians regarding the Communist party's reluctance to break its ties with Moscow on fundamental foreign policy issues.

In Eastern Europe, the Soviet invasion has revived the same fears that are aroused whenever Soviet troops march across national borders. These concerns are easier to detect in Yugoslavia and Romania, but the same unease is probably present in every country of the Warsaw Pact. The Yugoslavs have condemned the invasion openly and forcefully; Milos Minic, the

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member of the Yugoslav party presidium responsible for foreign affairs, reportedly told a group of associates that he views the Soviet action as a "blueprint" of what could happen in Yugoslavia after President Tito dies. The Romanians have expressed their concern and opposition in private conversations with US diplomats, and President Ceausescu—without directly referring to the Soviets—unmistakably criticized the USSR in his annual New Year's message to the diplomatic corps in Bucharest.

Poland and Hungary have been less supportive of the Soviet invasion than East Germany and Czechoslovakia, probably because of their generally favorable relations with the United States as well as their special sensitivity to the prospect of increased Soviet pressure on their own delicate internal situations. Even Bulgarian spokesmen have expressed the hope that Sofia would be allowed to stay out of the line of fire on this particular East-West issue.

Prospects

Moscow presumably has given some thought to the use of retaliatory measures if the United States were to continue to take steps in response to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. These could include a reduction in Jewish emigration, increased pressures on dissidents, harassment of Americans in the Soviet Union, refusal of visas to Americans wanting to visit the USSR, and the further curtailment of economic relations. Moscow probably realizes that these measures are of limited value but nevertheless would convey the message that the Soviet Union can take steps in response to US actions and can turn to Western Europe and Japan for technological assistance denied by the United States.

Furthermore, the Soviet leaders may believe that the most effective policy instrument they have at present is the apparent indifference they have displayed about the effects of their intervention in Afghanistan on the course of US-Soviet relations. Their Security Council vote on Iranian economic sanctions will be another measure, moreover, of how far they are prepared to go in opposition to US interests in other areas. Meanwhile, the Soviet media will complain bitterly about

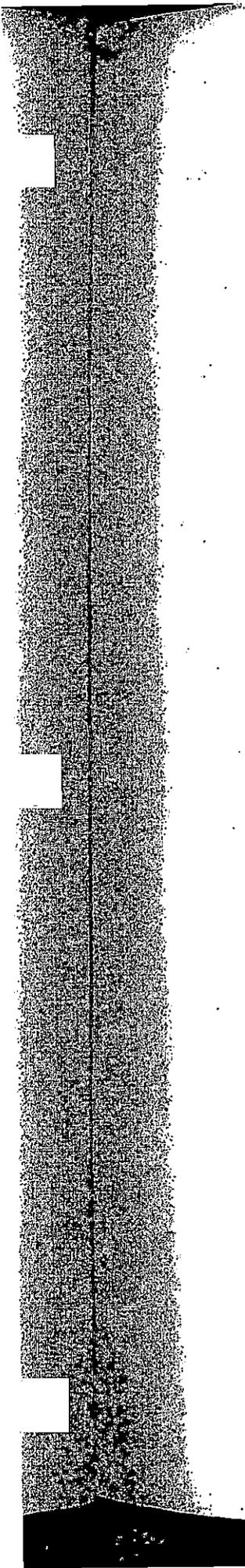
how their actions in Afghanistan are being misrepresented by Western propaganda and will attempt to present Secretary Brown's trip to China as the "real threat" to Asian nations.

Moscow will ultimately regard US actions as a challenge that must be answered in the political sphere. The Soviet response could include efforts to undermine US positions in the Middle East and South Asia. In these areas the USSR will attempt to combine Arab opposition to the Camp David process with the intimidating effect of its invasion of Afghanistan to expand its influence and undermine pro-Western regimes. Arms aid, as in the past, will be used wherever possible to expand Soviet influence at US expense.

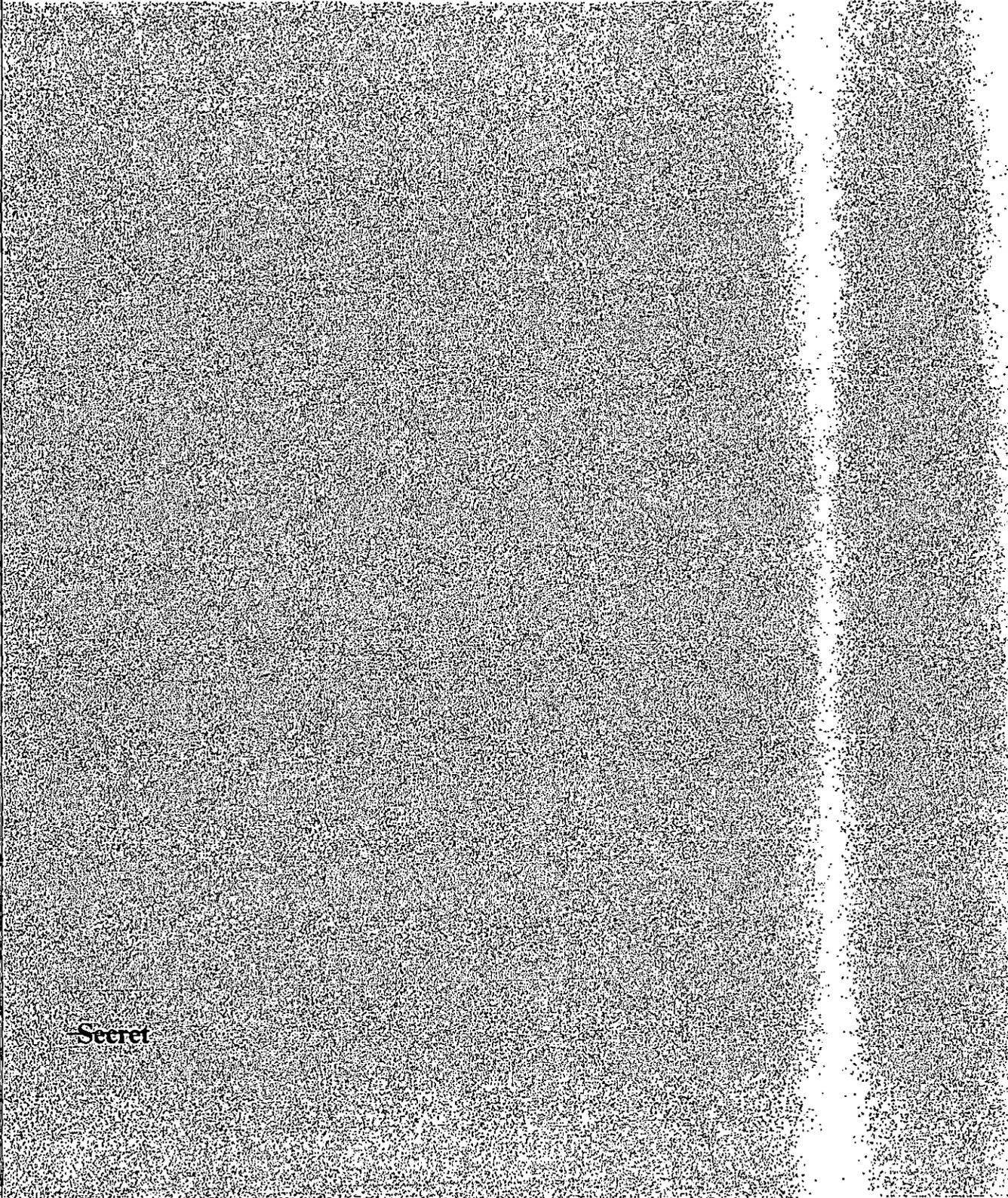
The USSR will probably also seek to separate the United States from its allies on the issue of reprisals and to hold out the prospect of significant economic and political gains to be derived from passing over the Afghan issue in silence. Moscow will also hope that it can weaken allied unity on the long-range TNF issue if it can detach the allies from the United States on the Afghan issue. Moscow could even attempt to ease relations with China in order to deny an option to the United States, but the prospects for a significant Soviet gesture toward Beijing appear remote.

If the US-Soviet bilateral relationship should significantly deteriorate, then the Soviets might take more far-reaching measures. These would include the testing of US responses to increased Soviet involvement in the Caribbean as well as threats against allied flag patrols in East Berlin. The Soviets could also threaten to ignore SALT provisions with regard to such things as dismantling of certain strategic weapons or expanding the encryption of telemetry in the testing of new ICBMs.

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