**THE**[**SOVIETS**](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Union-of-Soviet-Socialist-Republics/105999#42038.toc)**IN AFGHANISTAN**

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Brzezinski’s fears that the U.S.S.R. would take advantage of the arc of crisis seemed justified when the Soviet army invaded [Afghanistan](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Afghanistan/106010) in 1979. It is likely, however, that the Soviets were responding to a crisis of their own rather than trying to exploit another’s. Remote and rugged Afghanistan had been an object of imperialist intrigue throughout the 19th and 20th centuries because of its vulnerable location between the Russian and British Indian empires. After 1955, with India and Pakistan independent, the Afghan government of [Mohammad Daud Khan](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Mohammad-Daud-Khan/384571) forged economic and military ties to the U.S.S.R. The monarchy was overthrown by Daud Khan in 1973 and was succeeded by a one-party state. The small Afghan Communist party, meanwhile, broke into factions, while a fundamentalist Muslim group began an armed insurrection in 1975. Daud Khan worked to lessen Afghanistan’s dependence on Soviet and U.S. aid, and he reportedly had a heated disagreement with Brezhnev himself during a visit to Moscow in April 1977. Leftists in the Afghan officer corps, perhaps fearing a blow against themselves, murdered Daud Khan in April 1978 and pledged to pursue friendly relations with the U.S.S.R. Thus Afghanistan, under the rule of [Nur Mohammad Taraki](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Nur-Mohammad-Taraki/384575), was virtually in the Soviet camp. When Taraki objected to a purge of the Afghan Cabinet, however, the leader of a rival faction, [Hafizullah Amin](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Hafizullah-Amin/384572), had him arrested and killed. These intramural Communist quarrels both embarrassed the Soviets and threatened to destabilize the Afghan regime in the face of growing Muslim resistance. In the fall of 1979 the Soviets built up their military strength across the border and hinted to American diplomats that they might feel obliged to intervene. On December 25, 1979, the Soviet army began its occupation, and two days later a coup d’état led to the murder of Amin and the installation of [Babrak Karmal](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Babrak-Karmal/384573), a creature of the KGB who had been brought into the country by Soviet paratroops.

The Soviets would probably have preferred to work through a pliant native regime rather than invade Afghanistan, but Amin’s behaviour and Moscow’s unwillingness to risk a domestic overthrow of a Communist regime forced their hand. The invasion, therefore, appeared to be an application of the Brezhnev Doctrine and was all the more pressing given that the Central Asian provinces of the Soviet Union were also vulnerable to the rise of Islāmic [fundamentalism](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/fundamentalism/390025). The United States was tardy in responding to the 1978 coup despite Carter’s concern over the arc of crisis and the murder of the U.S. ambassador in Kabul in February 1979. At the same time, the Soviet invasion aroused American suspicions of a grand strategy aimed at seizing a warm-water port on the Indian Ocean and the oil of the Persian Gulf. Over the course of the next decade, however, the puppet Afghan regime lost all authority with the people, Afghan soldiers defected in large numbers, and the Muslim and largely tribal resistance, armed with U.S. and Chinese weapons, held out in the mountains against more than 100,000 Soviet troops and terror bombing of their villages. More than 2,000,000 Afghans became refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Western observers soon began to speak of Afghanistan as the Soviets’ Vietnam.

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### AFGHANISTAN

The resolution of regional conflicts at the end of the 1980s extended to Asia as well. In [Afghanistan](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Afghan-War/3923) the [Soviet Union](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Union-of-Soviet-Socialist-Republics/105999#42038.toc) had committed some 115,000 troops in support of the KGB-installed regime of President [Najibullah](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Najibullah/384574) but had failed to eliminate the resistance of the mujahideen. The war became a costly drain on the Soviet budget and a blow to Soviet military prestige. In the atmosphere of glasnost even an antiwar movement of sorts arose in the Soviet Union. A turning point came in mid-1986, when the United States began to supply the Afghan rebels with surface-to-air Stinger missiles, which forced Soviet aircraft and helicopters to suspend their low-level raids on rebel villages and strongholds. In January 1987 Najibullah announced a cease-fire, but the rebels refused his terms and the war continued.

In February 1988 [Gorbachev](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Mikhail-Gorbachev/37405) conceded the need to extract Soviet forces from the stalemated conflict. In April, Afghan, Pakistani, and Soviet representatives in [Geneva](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Geneva/109424) agreed to a disengagement plan based on Soviet withdrawal by February 1989 and noninvolvement in each other’s internal affairs. The Soviets completed the evacuation on schedule but continued to supply the [Kabul](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Kabul/44257) regime with large quantities of arms and supplies. The regime abandoned its strategy of seeking out the mujahideen and instead pulled back into strong defensive bastions in the fertile valleys, maintaining control of roads and cities. The rebels lacked the tanks and artillery to launch major offensive operations, and internal feuds among the rebel leaders also inhibited their operations. Thus, the predictions of Western journalists that Kabul would soon fall were proved wrong; the Soviets’ client state in Afghanistan survived into the 1990s.

Notes:

Explanation of arc of crisis:

Carter reacted to the crisis by adopting Brzezinski’s formula that the Middle East and South Asia constituted an arc of crisis susceptible to Soviet adventurism. In his State of the Union address of January 1980 he enunciated the [Carter Doctrine](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Carter-Doctrine/605345), declaring that any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf would be viewed as an attack on the vital interests of the United States, and he pledged to form a Rapid Deployment Force to defend the region. Whether the U.S. military was truly capable of sustained combat in that remote region was doubtful.

Explanation of Brzezinski’s fears:

Instead, the world after the 1960s saw a proliferation of violence at every level except war among developed nations, a world financial structure under tremendous strain, the worst economic downturn since the 1930s and reduced growth rates thereafter, recurrent fears of an energy crisis, the depletion of resources and concurrent global pollution, famine and genocidal dictators in parts of Africa and Asia, the rise of an aggressive religious fundamentalism in the Muslim world, and widespread political terrorism in the [Middle East](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Middle-East/52543) and [Europe](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Europe/106055). The superpowers never ceased to compete in the realms of strategic weapons and influence in the Third World and thus failed to sustain their brief experiment with détente. As President [Jimmy Carter](http://school.ebonline.com/levels/high/article/Jimmy-Carter/20545)’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, concluded: “The factors that make for international instability are gaining the historical upper hand over the forces that work for more organized cooperation. The unavoidable conclusion of any detached analysis of global trends is that social turmoil, political unrest, economic crisis, and international friction are likely to become more widespread during the remainder of this century.”