

11. SNIE 11/37-88, March 1988, USSR: *Withdrawal From Afghanistan*
(Key Judgments only)



Director of
Central
Intelligence

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USSR: Withdrawal From Afghanistan

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

Also Participating:

The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

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SNIE 11/37-88

USSR: WITHDRAWAL
FROM AFGHANISTAN (U)

Information available as of 24 March 1988 was used in the preparation of this Estimate, which was approved by the National Foreign Intelligence Board on that date.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe Moscow has made a firm decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. The decision stems from the war's effect on the Soviet regime's ability to carry out its agenda at home and abroad and its pessimism about the military and political prospects for creating a viable client regime:

- Although Afghanistan has been a controversial issue, we believe General Secretary Gorbachev has built a leadership consensus for withdrawal. The regime is aware that its client's chances of surviving without Soviet troops are poor. We do not believe that Moscow will attempt a partition of Afghanistan or start withdrawal and then renege.
- The Soviets want to withdraw under the cover of the Geneva accords. We believe they would prefer to withdraw without an agreement, however, rather than sign one that formally restricts their right to provide aid and further undermines the legitimacy of the Kabul regime.
- In our view, the Soviets will begin withdrawal this year even if the Geneva talks are deadlocked. Under such conditions, however, the Soviet leadership would not feel constrained by the provisions of the draft accords, and withdrawal would more likely be accompanied by heavy fighting. Although the Soviets in this case would have the option of delaying or prolonging the withdrawal process, we believe that—once begun in earnest—geographic, political, and military factors would lead them to opt for a relatively rapid exit.
- There is an alternative scenario. A more chaotic situation accompanying withdrawal than the Soviets expect or a political crisis in Moscow could fracture the Politburo consensus for withdrawal and lead them to delay or even reverse course. We believe the odds of this scenario are small—perhaps less than one in five.

We judge that the Najibullah regime will not long survive the completion of Soviet withdrawal even with continued Soviet assistance. The regime may fall before withdrawal is complete.

Despite infighting, we believe the resistance will retain sufficient supplies and military strength to ensure the demise of the Communist government. We cannot confidently predict the composition of the new regime, but we believe it initially will be an unstable coalition of traditionalist and fundamentalist groups whose writ will not extend far beyond Kabul and the leaders' home areas. It will be Islamic—possibly strongly fundamentalist, but not as extreme as Iran. While anti-Soviet, it

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will eventually establish "correct"—not friendly—ties to the USSR. We cannot be confident of the new government's orientation toward the West; at best it will be ambivalent and at worst it may be actively hostile, especially toward the United States.

There are two alternative scenarios. There is some chance—less than 1 in 3 in our view—that fighting among resistance groups will produce so much chaos that no stable government will take hold for an extended period after the Afghan Communist regime collapses. We also cannot rule out a scenario in which the Kabul regime manages to survive for a protracted period after withdrawal, due to an increasingly divided resistance. The odds of this outcome, in our view, are very small. Both scenarios would complicate relief efforts, reduce the prospects that refugees would return, and increase opportunities for Soviet maneuvering.

The impact of the Soviet withdrawal will depend on how it proceeds and what kind of situation the Soviets leave behind. At home, we believe that ending the war will be a net plus for Gorbachev, boosting his popularity and his reform agenda. Nonetheless, withdrawal will not be universally popular and is sure to cause recriminations. There is some chance—if it proves to have a more damaging impact on Soviet interests over the long term than either we or Gorbachev anticipate—that the decision could eventually form part of a "bill of attainder" used by his opponents in an effort to oust him.

Moscow's defeat in Afghanistan will have significant international costs. It is an implicit admission that Soviet-supported revolutions can be reversed. It will demonstrate that there are limits on Moscow's willingness and ability to use its power abroad, tarnish its prestige among some elements of the Communist movement, and lead other beleaguered Soviet clients to question Soviet resolve.

Nevertheless, we—as well as the Soviets—believe the withdrawal will yield important benefits for Moscow. The move will be popular even among some Soviet allies. Moscow will net substantial public relations gains in the rest of the world—particularly in Western Europe—that could ultimately translate into more concrete diplomatic benefits. Gorbachev expects the withdrawal to have a positive impact on US-Soviet relations.

By enhancing the Soviet Union's image as a responsible superpower, withdrawal will present new challenges to Western diplomacy. In South Asia, US relations with Pakistan will be complicated. But Soviet withdrawal under the conditions we anticipate will also produce substantial benefits for the West:

- It will be seen as a triumph for Western policy.
- If it produces the benefits that Gorbachev expects, withdrawal will probably add impetus to the ongoing rethinking in Moscow about the utility of military power in Third World conflicts and accelerate efforts to reach negotiated solutions on other issues.

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