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Chapter Twelve

Invading Afghanistan

Background

On Christmas Day 1979, U.S. intelligence detected waves of Soviet military aircraft flying into Afghanistan. The next day, President Carter received a memo from his national security advisor outlining possible responses to a wide-scale Soviet intervention.¹ On the night of December 27, Soviet KGB troops dressed in Afghan uniforms attacked the palace where Afghan president Amin was hiding, executed him, and occupied strategic locations throughout Kabul in a forty-five-minute operation. A radio broadcast, purporting to be from Kabul but actually coming from Uzbekistan, announced that Amin's execution had been ordered by the Afghan People's Revolutionary Council and that a new government headed by Soviet-loyalist Babrak Karmal had been formed. Soviet ground forces and paratroopers invaded the same evening, and within five weeks, five divisions were in place. So began the Soviet-Afghanistan war.

The Soviet invasion set off a firestorm of protest and isolated the Soviet state. The 1980 Summer Olympics, which were to showcase Soviet achievements, were overshadowed by an international boycott. During the nine-year war, 620,000 Soviet troops served in Afghanistan. Almost 15,000 were killed and 54,000 wounded. The USSR completed its withdrawal of troops in February of 1989, leaving behind an Afghanistan that would be ravaged by civil war for another decade,

with the eventual victory of the Taliban. The Afghanistan war weakened the international prestige of the USSR, brought to life a human rights movement, and filled Soviet cities and towns with disenfranchised veterans, many plagued by chronic illnesses or by drug abuse.²

This is the story behind the December 1979 invasion decision as told by the official documents of the body that made the decision, the Politburo.³ The invasion was ordered by a Politburo of aging and ill leaders. Leonid Brezhnev, the party General Secretary, was incapacitated much of 1979. The Brezhnevs, Suslovs, Gromykos, Kosygin, and Andropovs, who were the principal actors in this story, represented Stalin's second generation of party leaders who replaced the first generation of "Old Bolsheviks" he annihilated during the Great Terror. They would not be around to deal with the long-term consequences of their decision, which fell to a third generation of party leaders, headed by Mikhail Gorbachev. Both Brezhnev and party ideologist Mikhail Suslov were to die in 1982. KGB head Yury Andropov, whose intelligence prompted the decision, was already suffering from a fatal kidney disease, and the head of state, Aleksei Kosygin, would pass from the scene in less than a year.

Protecting the April Revolution

After Afghanistan's "April revolution" on April 27, 1978, brought a pro-Soviet government to power, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) turned to its Soviet patrons for assistance in their battle against Muslim insurgents and warlords. The government of Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin and President Nur Mohammad Taraki sought and received Soviet economic assistance and military equipment and advisors but failed to receive ground troops despite repeated requests. The Politburo did not want to fight Afghanistan's battles while its clients sat safe in their fortified offices in Kabul.

On March 18, 1979, the Politburo created a commission comprised of Andrei Gromyko, the foreign minister; Yury Andropov, the head of the KGB; Dmitry Ustinov, minister of defense; and Politburo member Boris Ponomarev, to assess the Afghanistan situation. Their charge came after two panicked requests from President Taraki, on March 18 and 20, for ground troops to put down a mutiny in the town of Herat. Two Soviet advisors had already been killed.

In their conversation with Taraki, Politburo members, led by head of state Kosygin, made it clear that the Afghan government, like the North Vietnamese, should solve their own internal problems:

The introduction of our troops would arouse the international community, which could lead to a series of negative consequences and would give enemies an excuse to introduce hostile armed formations on Afghan territory.

Instead, the Politburo representatives recommended the Afghans engage in diplomacy “to remove the excuse of Iran, Pakistan and India to meddle in your affairs.” Taraki’s more modest request—attack helicopters manned by Soviet crews and crews to operate Soviet tanks—was also met with a cool reaction: “The question of sending our people to man your tanks and shoot at your people is a very controversial political issue.”

Any remaining hopes for Soviet troops were dashed later in the day by party general secretary Leonid Brezhnev:

We have examined this matter with extreme care and I can tell you directly: This is not going to be. It would only play into the hands of enemies—both yours and ours. You have already had a more detailed discussion with our comrades, and we hope that you accept with understanding our considerations. Of course, to declare this publicly, either by you or by us, that we are not going to do this [commit troops], for understandable reasons, does not make sense.

After these conversations, Afghan forces quelled the Herat mutiny without Soviet ground troops, and the Politburo commission went about preparing its position paper on Afghanistan. Their report was discussed and its recommendations accepted three weeks later at the April 12, 1979, meeting of the Politburo under the agenda item: “About our future course in Afghanistan.”

The eleven-page report came out unequivocally against the use of ground troops. It provided a sober assessment, garbed in Marxist language of class struggle and counter-revolutionary forces. It concluded that the Afghan socialist revolution was in difficulty. It was being applied in a primitive country without a strong working class and was

being challenged by religious fanatics, foreign interventionists, tribal warlords, and bourgeois elements. To make matters worse, the Afghan party, divided on tribal lines between the “Khalq” and “Parcham” factions, was in the midst of a power struggle. As the report complained: “The most visible leaders of the Parcham group [including the later president Babrak Karmal] have been either physically eliminated, removed from party work, or driven out of army and state administration; others have fled abroad as political emigrants.”

Under these circumstances, Soviet troops should not be committed:

In view of the primarily internal character of anti-government actions in Afghanistan, the use of our troops in suppressing them would, on the one hand, seriously harm our international integrity and would turn back the process of détente. It would also reveal the weak position of the Taraki government and further encourage counter-revolutionaries inside and outside Afghanistan to step up their anti-government activities. . . . Our decision not to honor the request of the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to send Soviet troops is completely correct. It is necessary to stick to this line and in the case of new anti-government actions to rule out the possibility of the use of troops.

Certain types of assistance were, however, to be encouraged, such as political and military training, shipments of grain and military equipments, and advice on “strengthening and raising the effectiveness of organs of state security.”

Eight months later, the same Politburo that categorically refused to commit ground troops ordered the invasion of Afghanistan from bases in Soviet Turkistan. Eventually more than a half a million troops were to serve in the Afghanistan venture. The mission of these troops changed along the way from installing and protecting a new government, to counter-insurgency operations, and then to air and ground operations.

This story is about what happened to change the Soviet leadership’s mind. It tells the tale of how an increasingly paranoid and suspicious gerontocracy accepted the KGB’s theory that imperialist forces, headed by the United States, intended to threaten its southernmost republics from Afghanistan as part of a vast conspiracy to create

a second Ottoman Empire. The final decision was made at the summer home of the ailing Leonid Brezhnev by a handful of Politburo members that did not include those most likely to raise questions about the forthcoming adventure.

The Dynamics of Afghanistan Policy

There was an eight-month interval between the Politburo's "firm" decision not to commit troops on April 12 and the invasion on the night of December 27 to 28. Initially, the Politburo continued to send out negative signals concerning the use of Soviet troops. The ambassador was instructed to tell the Afghans, who were pressing for Soviet helicopter crews, that "such attack helicopters, operated by Afghan crews, in combination with other air force detachments, can [alone] carry out the mission of suppressing counter-revolutionary actions."

Throughout the eight-month interim, Afghanistan policy was overseen by the same committee of four (Gromyko, Andropov, Ustinov, and Ponomarev) who devised the April 12 strategy. As they monitored events, they saw few signs of encouragement. In a report dated June 28, they complained about the follies and missteps of the increasingly dictatorial Afghan government. Ominously, they recommended that, in addition to senior specialists to advise the Afghan army, special KGB troops (disguised as technicians) be sent in to protect the Soviet embassy along with a detachment of paratroopers (disguised as maintenance personnel) to protect key government facilities. Presumably, the disguises were to fool Afghan government officials as the Soviets covertly built up a military presence in the country. Indeed, it was such clandestine forces of the KGB that executed Amin the night of December 27.

We do not have access to the secret reports submitted to the Politburo by KGB and military intelligence during this period, but it was the KGB, under Andropov, that began to detect signs of a vast conspiracy by the United States and its allies. The KGB's growing suspicion was prompted by a bloody coup which removed the general secretary of the Afghan party, Taraki.

In September of 1979, the simmering feud between President (and party general secretary) Taraki and Prime Minister Amin boiled over. Taraki perished in a coup organized by Amin, who was now in

sole charge and whose actions increasingly alarmed his watchers in Andropov's KGB. The KGB became increasingly suspicious as Amin sought reconciliation with opposition groups, purged the government of party members, and even made overtures to the American CIA.

The turning point came in early December with Andropov's alarming memo to Brezhnev, in which he warned that Amin's actions were "threatening the achievements of the April revolution." Specifically Andropov wrote that the situation in Afghanistan had taken an "undesirable turn for us," that Amin may be making a "possible political shift to the West," including "contacts with an American agent that are kept secret from us" and promises to tribal leaders to adopt a policy of neutrality.

Andropov offered a solution to Amin's treachery. He had been contacted by exiled Afghan communists, in particular by Babrak Karmal, who had "worked out a plan for opposing Amin and for creating 'new' party and state organs." In other words, Andropov had exiled Afghan communists lined up to take over after a coup to remove Amin. These exiled Afghan compatriots, according to Andropov "have raised the question of possible assistance, in case of need, including military." Clearly the exiles did not have enough support to overthrow Amin on their own.

Andropov went on to note that the current Soviet military presence in Afghanistan was probably sufficient to render such "assistance" but "as a precautionary measure in the event of unforeseen complications, it would be wise to have a military group close to the border." Such military force would allow the Soviets to "decide various questions pertaining to the liquidation of gangs" (presumably the liquidation of Amin).⁴

The Andropov stance became the policy mantra of the Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Ponomarev commission, which in its subsequent reports emphasized that "foreign intervention and terror against honest and loyal cadres threaten to destroy the benefits of the April revolution." The Politburo commission accepted Andropov's characterization of Afghanistan as a crisis that had to be resolved quickly.

There is a limited paper trail for the time between the Andropov memo in early December and the actual invasion. There was never a written invasion order; there were fears that the soon-to-be-deposed Amin would get wind. The Politburo began to use code words in its

own meetings, and its few official documents refer to “A” (for Afghanistan) and “measures” to denote the invasion and the associated coup against Amin.

According to the memoirs of a knowledgeable Soviet military official, a meeting was held in Brezhnev’s private office on December 8,⁵ attended by Andropov, Gromyko, Suslov and Ustinov, to discuss a possible invasion. Andropov and Ustinov purportedly cited CIA plans to threaten the USSR’s southern flank with missiles in Afghanistan, and cited the danger that Afghan uranium deposits could be used by Pakistan and Iraq. At the end of the meeting, two options were identified: (1) to remove Amin by the hands of KGB special agents and replace him with the loyal Babrak Karmal; (2) to accomplish the same by sending in Soviet troops. An invasion was still up in the air, but it was already decided that Amin had to be removed.

On December 10, defense minister and Politburo subcommittee member Ustinov ordered the chief of the general staff, N.V. Ogarkov, to prepare eighty thousand troops for the “measure.” The chief of staff purportedly objected, saying that the “measure” could not be carried out with such a number of troops, but was told to obey Politburo orders. On the same day, Ogarkov was summoned to a meeting with Brezhnev and the Politburo subcommittee where he failed to persuade the Politburo not to use force. That evening, Ustinov ordered the military leadership to prepare for the invasion, and troops were mobilized in the staging area in Turkistan.

The actual decision to invade Afghanistan was made at a meeting held in Brezhnev’s country house two days later, on December 12. The meeting was attended by four of the fifteen Politburo members (Brezhnev, Ustinov, Gromyko, and Chernenko). Andropov was notably absent [unless the attendance record is inaccurate], but he was well informed about what was going to transpire. The resolution was written by hand by Konstantin Chernenko (to ensure absolute secrecy) and was entitled “About the situation in ‘A’ [code word for Afghanistan]” and reads:

1. Confirm the measures [code word for invasion] proposed by Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko, authorizing them to make minor changes in the course of execution of these measures. Questions that require a decision from the Central Committee should be introduced to the Politburo.

2

Председательский состав тов. Л.Н. Брежнев.
 Члены: Суляев Н.А., Трубин В.А., Вилкин А.А., Волынов А.А.,
 Яковлев Д.Ф., Черненко К.У., Андропов Ю.В., Гришин А.А., Николаев Н.А.,
 Колосов Б.А. ОСОБАЯ ПАНКА

"Р. Положение в Аф."

Вопросы, связанные с переправкой
 м. м. Андропову Ю.В.,
 Гришину А.А.,
 Черненко К.У. в связи с осуществлением
 этих мероприятий, необходимо
 коррективы характерного
 характера.

Вопрос, требующий решения
 ЦК, целесообразно вносить
 в Политбюро

1. Осуществление всех этих меропри-
 ятий возложить на м. м. Андропова
 Ю.В., Черненко К.У., Гришина А.А.

2. Поручить Т.И. Андропову Ю.В.,
 Черненко К.У., Гришину А.А.
 проработать Положение ЦК
 о ходе выполнения на Северном
 направлении

1.997-м/л/а Секретарь ЦК [Signature] 17.12.79

Handwritten document with Politburo Member signatures of authorization of Afghan war.

Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko are charged with carrying out these measures. 2. Andropov, Ustinov and Gromyko should keep the Politburo informed on the execution of these measures. Signed L. BREZHNEV.

This handwritten decree was placed in a special safe.

The Politburo was comprised of fifteen members, but the decision was made, presumably in the strictest of secrecy, by only six of them, including, of course, party general secretary Brezhnev. It was not until the day before the invasion that the plan to invade was presented to the full Politburo (on December 26). With the “measures” ready to go into operation within twenty-four hours, it was clear that the full Politburo was to act as a rubber stamp. It is noteworthy that the protocols approved at this Politburo meeting continue to use veiled language and code words. After a presentation of the invasion plan by the Afghanistan commission, general secretary Brezhnev spoke in indirect language:

[Brezhnev] expressed a series of wishes to approve this plan of action, mentioned by these comrades, for the near future. It was recognized as wise for the Commission of the Politburo, given the contents and direction of the reported plan, to carefully weigh each step of its actions. Questions where it would be necessary to obtain decisions should be brought to the Central Committee on a timely basis.

At this meeting, each Politburo member was asked to sign the handwritten decree “About the situation in ‘A’” prepared at Brezhnev’s dacha on December 12. According to the dates of the signatures scrawled across the page, some had already signed off the day before, but two signed on the day of the presentation (December 26). Notably, there is no signature of Kosygin, the head of state, who was notably absent from the meeting and was a known opponent of the invasion.

Informing the Central Committee

The decision to invade Afghanistan was made by the head of the Communist Party, general secretary Brezhnev, and a four-person subcommittee of the fifteen-member Politburo. The Politburo’s job, in theory,

was to manage the affairs of the Central Committee comprised of national and regional party leaders. The head of state and Politburo member, Aleksei Kosygin, was notably absent when the final decision was made. The Soviet government, as such, did not participate in the decision. Only after the invasion did state agencies swing into action, such as negotiating the terms of the treaty for stationing troops, or the foreign ministry's presentation of the Soviet case to foreign governments and to the United Nations.

That the decision was made by Brezhnev and his Politburo colleagues is not surprising. Article Six of the 1977 USSR Constitution states that "the leading and guiding force of the Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system, of all state and public organizations, is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party, armed with Marxism-Leninism, determines the general perspectives of the development of society and the course of the home and foreign policy of the USSR, directs the great constructive work of the Soviet people, and imparts a planned, systematic and theoretically substantiated character to their struggle for the victory of communism."⁶

The constitution does not define how or who in the Communist Party makes decisions about war and peace, but, since the days of Lenin, they were to be made by the Politburo.

The Central Committee was officially informed (briefed) by the Politburo subcommittee four days after the invasion had taken place (December 31) in a report entitled "About the events in Afghanistan on December 27-28." The Politburo had instructed its Afghanistan committee to bring decisions to the Central Committee "on a timely basis." In this case, "timely" meant after the fact. The Politburo report notably did not ask the Central Committee for approval of its actions; it was simply a briefing memorandum designed to give Central Committee members appropriate talking points.

The talking points were that the Amin government had brought Afghanistan to a state of crisis. It had removed those who had created the April revolution ("murdering six hundred party members without court approval"). The Amin government had turned to a "more balanced foreign policy," which included confidential meetings with American agents. The Amin government had tried "to simplify its position by compromising with the leaders of internal counter-

revolutionary forces,” including leaders of the “extreme Muslim opposition.” A key talking point was that a reluctant Soviet Union had been invited by an opposition that had united against Amin to “save the fatherland and the revolution” and had complied by sending a “limited contingent of troops.” These troops would withdraw once the April revolution had been saved. In fact, “the wide public masses of Afghanistan welcomed the overthrow of the Amin regime with unconcealed joy and are prepared to support the declared program of the new government.”

The Battle for World Opinion

The Politburo faced an uphill public relations battle after the invasion. Its official story was full of holes. Its troops and special forces had somehow been invited to assist the Afghanistan revolution by puppet leaders appointed only after the coup. Amin was supposedly condemned to death by a fictitious Afghanistan Revolutionary Council. Radio announcements of these events had originated from within the Soviet Union, not from Kabul.

The Soviet propaganda machine sprang into full gear. The major talking points were distributed to forty-six “communist and workers parties of non-socialist parties” in a memo entitled “About the propagandistic coverage of our actions in relation to Afghanistan.” These friendly communist and socialist parties were given six points:

1. The Soviet Union sent troops at the request of the Afghanistan leadership.
2. The Afghanistan government requested Soviet assistance only for their battle against foreign aggression.
3. Foreign aggression threatens the Afghan revolution and its sovereignty and independence.
4. The request for assistance came from a sovereign Afghan government to another sovereign Soviet government.
5. The naming of the new leadership of Afghanistan was an internal matter decided by its own Revolutionary Council.
6. The Soviet Union had nothing to do with the change in government, which was exclusively an internal matter.

Although some of these points defied credibility, they were nevertheless supplied for the public discourse.

An even more urgent need was to coach the new Afghan government on how to conduct diplomacy. Already on January 4, 1980, the wily Andrei Gromyko, long the face of Soviet diplomacy, instructed the new Afghan foreign minister (Dost) on how to present the case to the Security Council of the United Nations. The “Memo of the basic points of a conversation of Gromyko with foreign minister Dost. January 4, 1980” comprises a monolog by Gromyko, rather than a “conversation” between him and Dost.

GROMYKO: I want to share with you, Comrade Minister, some thoughts about the U.N. Security Council and your forthcoming remarks. Of course, these ideas are not final, but they reflect the views of our country about the events in Afghanistan and its vicinity. First. Western powers, particularly the United States, have launched hostile propaganda against the Soviet Union and against revolutionary Afghanistan. Imperialism has decided to “blow off steam.” Second. With respect to the tone of your presentation at the Security Council, you should not act as the accused but as the accuser. I think there are enough facts for this position. Therefore it is extremely important not to defend but to attack. Third. It is essential to emphasize that the introduction of the limited military contingent in Afghanistan was done by the Soviet Union in response to numerous requests of the government of Afghanistan. These requests were made earlier by Taraki when he was in Moscow and by Amin. Carter wants to create the impression that the Soviet Union received this request only from the new government of Afghanistan, but you can decisively refute this notion using exact dates and details. Fourth. You must clearly emphasize that the limited Soviet contingent was introduced to Afghanistan only to assist against unceasingly aggressive forces, particularly from Pakistan, where refugee camps have been converted by the forces of the United States, other Western countries, and China into staging areas for foreign fighters. Fifth. The change of leadership in Afghanistan is a purely internal matter. No one has the right to tell Afghanistan what to do or how to act.

Dost's role in this conversation was to listen and then to thank Gromyko for his time and remarks.

Gorbachev: Pulling Out of Afghanistan

Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party in March of 1985. He inherited a war that had become a Vietnam-like quagmire. From its earliest days of power, the Gorbachev team, led by foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, concluded that the Soviet Union must find a face-saving way out of Afghanistan. The ineffective Babrak Karmal was replaced by the former chief of the Afghan secret police, Mohammad Najibullah, who also was unable to negotiate a national reconciliation. In 1988, the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan signed an agreement known as the Geneva Accords, which called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops with a United Nations' special mission to oversee the agreement. On February 15, 1989, the last Soviet troops were withdrawn, but the civil war continued and, in fact, never ended. By 1996, the Taliban had gained control of most of Afghanistan, although hostilities continued, and they ruled from 1996 until their ouster in 2001.

The Soviet withdrawal represented one of the low points in Soviet history. One of the last documents in the Central Committee files is a position paper prepared by Shevardnadze and five other Politburo members on January 23, 1989, three weeks before the departure of the last contingent of Soviet troops. The downbeat memo confirms the tense situation in Afghanistan as both sides awaited the February 15 deadline:

The government is holding its positions but only due to the assistance of Soviet troops and all understand that the main battle lies ahead. The opposition has even reduced its activities, saving its strength for the next period. Comrade Najibullah thinks that they are prepared to move after the withdrawal. Our Afghan comrades are seriously concerned as to what will happen. . . . They express their understanding of the decision to withdraw troops but soberly think they cannot manage without our troops.

The current situation raises for us a number of complicated issues. On the one hand, if we renege on our decision to withdraw troops by

February 15, there would be extremely undesirable complications on the international front. On the other hand, there is no certainty that after our withdrawal there will not be an extremely serious threat to a regime which the entire world associates with us. Moreover, the opposition can at any time begin to coordinate its activities, which is what American and Pakistan military circles are pushing for. There is also a danger that there is no true unity in the Afghanistan party, which is split into factions and clans.

The memo concludes that the Afghan government can hold Kabul and other cities, but expresses concern that a siege could starve out these cities. Soviet troops would be needed to keep supply lines open, but there is no way, under existing agreements, to keep them in the country.

In effect, the Gorbachev government was conceding that Afghanistan was lost and that there was nothing the Soviet Union could do to stop it. The USSR's reputation would be damaged and its influence in the region lost. Gorbachev's decision not to further prop up foreign communist regimes became the Gorbachev Doctrine of non-intervention in Eastern Europe and East Germany.

Lessons of Afghanistan

The war in Afghanistan was the USSR's "Vietnam." It de-legitimized the authority of the Communist Party. The mighty Soviet army, the victor against Hitler in World War II, was dealt a humiliating defeat. Soviet society was filled with more than a half million disenchanted Afghan veterans, many wounded, sick, drug addicted, and forming into criminal gangs. The vaunted Soviet army showed itself totally unprepared for guerilla warfare. The Afghan war gave rise to the first serious dissident movement within Russia. In the longer run, the Soviet battle against Islamic forces promoted Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and in Chechnya.

Countries go to war in different ways. Although the U.S. entry into Vietnam was without a congressional declaration of war, there was widespread debate within government circles, the press, and within society before, during, and after the war. The first and second Gulf

wars against Saddam Hussein were also the subject of public debate and discourse both in Congress and in the United Nations. There was dissent and disagreement (war opponents would argue there was too little debate), but there was a public forum for public debate.

A remarkable feature of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is that it was made by so few people with so little input from government, press, or society. Official Soviet policy, which was devised by a few Politburo members, was initially against any invasion at that time or in the future. The negative consequences were clearly understood and spelled out. Yet within the course of a few months, the same individuals changed their minds, largely due to the influence of a few Politburo members (the foreign minister, the KGB head, and the defense minister) and based on the notion of an imminent offensive challenge from the United States that did not exist.

The American decision to invade Iraq was based in part on intelligence that Saddam Hussein had massive stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. The Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan was based on the KGB's faulty intelligence that the United States had a master plan to use Afghanistan to threaten Soviet republics in Central Asia. Similarly, the U.S. intelligence community viewed the Soviet Afghan invasion as a master plan to fulfill "the age-long dream of Moscow to have direct access to the Indian Ocean" and to drive "right down on the edge of the Arabian and Oman Gulfs."⁷ Both thought they were playing defense to the other's offense.

The American Vietnam experience has shown that those who order ill-fated wars pay the political consequences, such as Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon in Vietnam. Soviet experience shows that there were no consequences of bad decision making. Yury Andropov, the head of the KGB, was more responsible than any other Soviet official for the Afghanistan invasion, which was clearly evident as a disastrous miscalculation by 1982. Yet, upon the death of Leonid Brezhnev on November 12, 1982, he was elected to the highest position—party general secretary—on the same day.

The Politburo of Leonid Brezhnev made another fundamental mistake. Although its reports mention Islamic fundamentalism, it continued to regard the United States, China, and the government of Pakistan as those controlling the levers of the conflict. Viewing

the world through the prism of Marxist thought, there was no room in their vision for a Taliban, a Mullah Omar, or an Osama bin Laden. The absence of this insight came back to haunt post-Brezhnev and post-Gorbachev Russia in Chechnya and in the growing restiveness of the Muslim populations of Central Asia. A similar U.S. miscalculation ended on September 11, 2001.