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MEMORANDUM

OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

December 28, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
DAVID AARON

FROM: MARSHALL BREMENT *MB*

SUBJECT: Response to the Soviets Regarding
Afghanistan: A Menu of Possible Actions

To emphasize the outrageous and unprecedented nature of the Soviet coup in Afghanistan would be to belabor the obvious. Any failure to respond adequately on our part would be perceived as glaring weakness by our Allies, by the non-aligned, and especially in the Persian Gulf. The domestic near-consensus on Iran could evaporate over Afghanistan. It is therefore imperative that we not only act to counter what the Soviets have done in Afghanistan, but that we are perceived as having done so.

The speciousness and bald-faced arrogance of the Soviet action can hardly be exaggerated. There was no need, for example, to announce Amin's immediate execution, which gives the lie to the Soviet assertion that they were invited in by the Amin government. Furthermore, the use of the recently-signed Friendship Treaty with Afghanistan as the juridical basis for their actions creates a logical implication that the Soviets could equally undertake the overthrow of any of the ten governments with whom they now have such treaties, e.g. India. Equally to the point, would Sadat and Siad have thrown out the Soviets so cavalierly if they had felt that one serious Soviet option was to fly in an army and set up their rivals in power?

I. The Public Posture

We have no real option of downplaying the significance of the Soviet action. We need a clear, sharp and unequivocal response, which should be given full play by all our communications media. The themes we should stress are as follows:

a. The fact that Amin was assassinated within two days of the Soviet invasion makes a mockery of Moscow's claims that it was invited in by the Amin Government. That Amin's family was killed along with him shows the kind of people we are dealing with.

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b. The fact that the Soviets cite their Friendship Treaty with Afghanistan as the basis for interference in the Afghans' internal affairs implies that the Soviets have a similar right in all other countries with whom they have friendship treaties.

c. This is the first use by the Soviets of their armed forces in a combat situation outside the Soviet Bloc since the Second World War and is therefore an extremely ominous precedent. Do the Soviets claim such universal rights in all other areas? How can this be squared with the UN Charter?

d. Afghanistan had been the classic buffer state for the past 150 years. The Soviets had no legitimate national interest in taking such actions. The fact of the matter was that the Amin Government was, by any reasonable standard, pro-Soviet, as was the Taraki Government which preceded it. Furthermore, the Afghan Government which existed before the April 1978 coup was not anti-Soviet in nature and maintained cordial state-to-state relations with Moscow. All the military needs of that regime, for example, were supplied by the Soviets.

e. Does the Brezhnev doctrine apply to the entire Third World? What are the limits to the Brezhnev doctrine? As Soviet force projection capabilities increase over the coming decades, they will have the capability to mount such an action anywhere in the world. Is this a tolerable situation for the international community?

f. We are extremely concerned at the human toll which the Soviet-supported combat is taking. There are 350,000 refugees now in Pakistan, and we would not be surprised to see that number rise to half a million in the near future. Thus, as in Cambodia and in so many other countries since World War II, the Soviets are creating another enormous refugee problem, this time in South Asia and among an overwhelmingly Muslim population. The United States is prepared to do its utmost to assist the Afghan refugees with humanitarian aid.

g. The Soviet Union is atheistic by doctrine and has published enormous amounts of anti-religious and anti-Muslim literature. The US, on the other hand, firmly believes in religious freedom and enshrines it in our Constitution. Three million Muslims practice their religion freely in the US. In the USSR, Muslims have been persecuted, mosques have been closed, and religion has been discouraged. In Soviet Azerbaijan, for example, there are only 24 officially recognized mosques now operating, whereas before the Revolution of 1917 there were several thousand in operation.

h. In sum, replacement of one government by another through the use of armed force, as done by the Soviets in Afghanistan, is an egregious violation of normal international standards of behavior, sets a very dangerous precedent, and is regarded by the US as reckless adventurism. We call on all nations, and particularly nations with significant Muslim populations, to appeal to the Soviet Union to allow the Afghan people to settle its own problems in line with the principle of no interference in the internal affairs of other nations.

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II. Other Possible Actions

1. Dispatch a high-level mission to give the Pakistanis the kind of assurance they need to bolster their confidence and to assist us in our support of the Afghan insurgents.
2. Dispatch a mission to investigate conditions in the refugee camps in Pakistan, which would presumably result in additional US and international assistance to support the refugees.
3. Explore with all pertinent governments the stepping up of covert assistance to the insurgents and in the process commit ourselves to maximizing such assistance.
4. Form a special committee in NATO to examine threats to the peace outside the Treaty area.
5. Liberalize our arms sale policy to the sub-Continent.

III. Other Possible Actions in the US-Soviet Context

The above actions might be enough domestically and in world opinion if the Soviets are basically unsuccessful in tamping down the insurgency and thus become mired in a Vietnam-type situation. But if they are successful, these actions will not be sufficient and we will look weak and ineffectual. In any case, the Soviet action in Afghanistan almost demands that we take specific bilateral steps to indicate our abhorrence. Among those steps which the President might consider (and it is too early to make definite decisions on this score) are the following:

1. Withdrawal of SALT. If, after consultation with Byrd and others, it is determined that SALT no longer has a chance of early passage, the Administration could consider withdrawing it unilaterally, while waiting for a better climate, although still committed to the fact that the Treaty is in our basic interest and still favoring ratification by the Senate.
2. Grain Sales. The Administration could suspend the US-Soviet Grain Agreement or simply suspend all sales of grain to the USSR for the indeterminate future. This would require Congressional authorization to purchase and store the excess grain.
3. Technology Transfer and Licensing. We could announce a much tougher policy regarding technology transfer to the USSR and a closer look at licenses for petroleum-related exports.
4. MFN. We could announce that we do not intend to introduce legislation giving MFN to the Soviet Union during the current session of Congress.

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5. Postponement of US-Soviet Trade Council. We could announce the postponement of the next session of the US-Soviet Trade Council, scheduled to meet in Washington April 16.

6. Tighten Up COCOM Procedures. We could announce that we are undertaking with our Allies a review of current COCOM procedures with a view to tightening them.

7. Expulsion of a Large Group of Soviet Agents. We could identify and arrest 50 to 100 Soviet KGB agents in the US, making clear to the Soviets that any retaliatory action on their part would mean further expulsions by us at a rate of two Soviets for one American, i.e. the current ratio of Soviet Embassy personnel in the US to Americans in the USSR, leaving out the 550 Soviets at the UN (which makes one-for-one expulsion entirely unsatisfactory and unreciprocal to us).

8. Withdrawal of Ambassador. We could (and probably should) recall Watson for consultations. (Dobrynin's absence is obviously not entirely medical in nature.)

9. Broaden Security Relationships. The US could undertake new security relationships with Oman, Somalia, and Turkey, i.e. three Muslim countries.

10. Broadcasting. The US could announce increased broadcasts to Western Asia and to the Muslim portions of the USSR.

11. China. In conjunction with the Brown visit, the US could let it be known that we have agreed not only to the sale of certain high technology items to China, but to the sale of over-the-horizon radar and anti-tank missiles -- clearly defensive weapons -- as well. We could explain that this was done explicitly in light of the Soviet action in Afghanistan. Future arms sale to China, we could add, would be on a case-by-case basis.

12. Removal of Inhibitions on Covert Actions. The US could ask for revision of all of the legislative inhibitions on our ability to conduct covert actions anywhere in the world.

In sum, Soviet negative reaction to various protests and expostulation including ours, is completely predictable. These were taken into consideration by the Soviets before they made their move. This is an event of such importance that a strong and vivid US response must be made to it, and not just in terms of Soviet action in Afghanistan itself, but in terms of overall US-Soviet relations. The Soviets must be made to understand that this was a very expensive invasion and that it should not set a precedent for future action. The American people and the Congress should be sympathetic to tough responses by the President, especially if the Soviet actions in Afghanistan are cast in the proper light, i.e. the Soviets have kicked us while we were down, and we do not intend to stand for it.

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