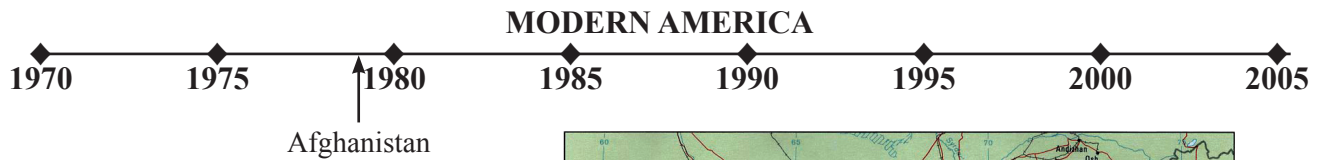


LESSON 2: SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

Student Handout 1: Problem



It is 1979, and you are President Jimmy Carter. This year, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, a country in central Asia. The U.S. has been fighting the Cold War against the Soviets and their communist allies for more than 30 years. You have tried to ease tensions with the Soviets, attempting to negotiate an agreement (SALT II) with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in both countries. While some progress has been made, Brezhnev would not agree to the deal.



If the Soviets take Afghanistan, they could threaten the oil-producing states to the south, including Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Apparently, the pro-Soviet leader of Afghanistan couldn't hold out against a rebel group called the *mujahideen*, a group to which you've already been giving some aid. The Soviets decided to send in more than 80,000 troops to support the communist government. The *mujahideen* fight fiercely, but the Soviets have more modern weapons and communications. Premier Brezhnev denies that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, stating that its leader asked for their presence there. However, the Afghan leader was killed right after the invasion, and the Soviets installed a new leader. The occupation resembles how the Soviets took over eastern European countries after World War II.

At home, many people see you as too weak to stand up to the Soviets. You cut spending on the B-1 bomber and the neutron-bomb program; both cuts made sense, since the new stealth bomber outperforms the B-1, and since many in western Europe (where it's most likely to be used) oppose the development of the neutron bomb. Republicans claim that cuts to the military budget have made the U.S. appear weak and thereby brought about the invasion. A recent public-opinion poll shows that a majority of Americans wants you

to take a tougher stance in your dealings with the Soviet Union. Many Americans oppose continued negotiations, saying that further negotiation only leads to a greater weakening of American power and prestige.

The Soviet invasion came six weeks after American citizens were taken hostage in Iran, a country in the same region as Afghanistan. So far, the American public has rallied around you in a show of unity against the Iranians. Eventually, however, the public will want you to take action in both Iran and Afghanistan.

How will you respond to the Soviet invasion? Make a list of options and underline the ones you choose.



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Student Handout 2: Options

Which of the following options would you choose in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan?

- A. **Do nothing:** This isn't America's concern, so don't do anything
- B. **Boycott the Olympics:** The summer Olympics are scheduled for 1980 in Moscow. A U.S. boycott would damage the prestige (and income) that the Soviets would gain from the games. It would hurt them even more if other countries join the boycott.
- C. **Negotiate with the Soviets:** Ask for a meeting with Premier Brezhnev to discuss his reasons for invading Afghanistan and how to resolve the situation peacefully
- D. **Raise defense spending:** Higher defense spending would better prepare the American military to defend U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf. It would also send a message to the Soviets that American leaders take this invasion seriously.
- E. **Increase forces in the Persian Gulf:** Send more military to the Persian Gulf area (but not directly into the fighting in Afghanistan) as a show of force and to allow for military action, if needed
- F. **Postpone the SALT II talks:** The U.S. shouldn't ratify a treaty limiting nuclear weapons with a nation that has invaded a sovereign country and threatens American security
- G. **Embargo American grain exports:** The Soviets need American grain. An embargo would hurt them economically.
- H. **Unite world opinion:** Get the United Nations to vote to condemn the invasion to help turn world opinion against the Soviets
- I. **Threaten military action:** Send a warning to Brezhnev, telling him to quit Afghanistan within 48 hours, or the U.S. will attack the Soviet Union
- J. **Aid the rebels:** The U.S. is already sending aid to the *mujahideen*, but additional aid may shift the balance in the war, allowing them to make progress against the Soviet army and weakening the Soviet Union overall. It would represent a reversal of the situation in the Vietnam War, in which the Soviets sent aid to communist forces to fight the American army.
- K. **Airstrikes on Soviet troops in Afghanistan:** One way to help the rebels without risking American ground troops is to bomb Soviet positions. That would turn the tide in the war.
- L. **Carter Doctrine:** Make a public statement that the U.S. would use military force, if necessary, to prevent outside powers from gaining control of the Persian Gulf region
- M. **Send American troops:** Send American troops into Afghanistan to directly help the rebels fight the Soviets. This would demonstrate the U.S. commitment to defending the Persian Gulf.

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Student Handout 3: Outcomes

President Carter chose these responses to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan:

- B. **Boycott the Olympics:** He had the U.S. boycott the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow; eventually, 64 other countries joined the boycott. The boycott crushed many athletes who had been training for years for their chance to compete. Critics decried using athletes as political tools, adding that Carter was violating the spirit and mission of the Olympic Games—to bring the world’s best athletes together despite conflicts between countries. Unfortunately for Carter, Britain and other leading countries didn’t join with the U.S. Supporters nonetheless called the boycott a blow to Soviet prestige.
- D. **Raise defense spending:** He increased the level of defense spending, making the U.S. a more formidable military power and thereby a greater threat to the Soviets
- E. **Increase forces in the Persian Gulf:** He boosted naval, air, and ground forces in the region
- F. **Postpone the SALT II treaty:** President Carter decided to withdraw the SALT II treaty from consideration by the Senate for the time being. Given the Soviet invasion, the treaty would have seen defeat anyway. The president wanted to wait for a more favorable time to submit it for a vote.
- G. **Embargo American grain exports:** He imposed an embargo on exports of wheat and corn to the Soviet Union. The embargo mainly hurt American farmers, who voted against President Carter in the 1980 election *en masse*. It had a minor impact on the Soviet Union.
- H. **Unite world opinion:** American diplomats worked hard to get other countries to state their public opposition to the Soviet invasion
- J. **Aid the rebels:** President Carter and Congress sent a small amount of aid to the *mujahideen* through 1981. The Reagan Administration helped turn the tide in the war in Afghanistan by supplying them with Stinger anti-aircraft missiles in 1985. American leaders were delighted that the Soviets had presented them with an opportunity to support a rebellion, as the Soviets had done in the Vietnam War. However, the aid strengthened the rebels, who were Islamic radicals. Eventually, these same fighters, led by Osama bin Laden, would take actions against U.S. interests.



A *mujahid* holding a surface-to-air missile

- L. **Carter Doctrine:** He stated that the U.S. would use military force, if necessary, to prevent outside powers from gaining control of the Persian Gulf region. In this way, he indirectly threatened the Soviet Union. He did not, however, **threaten to attack** within 48 hours if the Soviets did not withdraw (Option I).

The President did talk with Secretary Brezhnev but he never **negotiated** a resolution to the Afghanistan conflict (Option C). He also did not **bomb** Soviet troops (Option K) or send in American **troops** (Option M), both of which would have made the situation worse. The *mujahideen* managed to defeat the Soviets without any American troops or pilots killed. Why risk a larger war when the U.S. could defeat the Soviets without fighting directly?

Many countries supported President Carter's actions—the grain embargo, the Olympic boycott, and the defense build-up. Most European countries, on the other hand, felt that President Carter was overreacting to the invasion. They felt that the Soviets, while having taken the wrong tack, invaded to prevent the spread of radical Islam into the Soviet Union, not as part of a plan to take over the region or to spread communism.

U.S. efforts, especially the decision to supply Stinger missiles in 1985, helped defeat the Soviets, who withdrew from the country completely in 1988. In the long run, however, the strengthened *mujahideen*, especially under Osama bin Laden, became enemies of the U.S.

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Student Handout 4: Unintended Consequences

For each proposed response to the Soviets, an intended consequence is listed. Add a possible *unintended* consequence:

| Proposal | Intended consequences | Unintended consequences |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Do nothing | U.S. won't get involved in a far-off conflict | |
| 2. Boycott the Olympics | Soviets would suffer economically and in prestige | |
| 3. Embargo grain | Soviets would be hurt, since they need the grain | |
| 4. Threaten military action | Soviets will back down and withdraw | |
| 5. Aid the Afghan rebels | The rebels would defeat or cripple the Soviets | |
| 6. Send in U.S. troops | U.S. troops would defeat the Soviet military | |