47.

KEY JUDGMENTS

The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 provided a rare opportunity to test the efficacy of the US warning system in situations involving substantial movements of the Soviets' armed forces outside their borders. Moreover, it afforded a chance to examine the behavior of the Soviet military in preparing for such an undertaking and to determine what implications this might have for the Intelligence Community's capacity to provide warning in other situations, especially one involving a Warsaw Pact move against NATO.

From the outset, it was recognized that the conclusions of this study could not be pressed too far. Both the performance of the Intelligence Community in providing warning of the invasion of Afghanistan and the applicability to other theaters of the lessons learned in that situation are very much affected by the particular circumstances involved. In contrast to a Soviet move against NATO, the situation for which the US warning system is largely designed, the invasion of Afghanistan required only a fraction of the USSR's military assets, was not opposed at the outset, did not involve a certainty of confrontation with US forces, and occurred in a region where US intelligence collection capabilities were limited.

These limitations notwithstanding, the examination of the Soviet approach to invading Afghanistan and the Intelligence Community's success in giving prior notice of this event have yielded some valuable lessons:

— Despite the unique circumstances surrounding this operation, the Soviets' behavior was essentially in keeping with US estimates of their doctrine for mobilization and the initiation of hostilities. This finding is important because the success of any warning system is dependent on the extent to which an adversary's behavior conforms to expectations.

— The system of warning indicators that is set up to detect potentially important changes in the Soviet/Warsaw Pact military posture provided a structured approach to and a sound evidentiary base for the Intelligence Community's conclusion that the USSR was preparing to introduce substantial forces into Afghanistan. The fact that the system worked in this unique

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47. (continued)

situation provides increased assurance of its usefulness in other theaters, particularly in the NATO area.

— The US intelligence collection system proved equal to the task of providing analysts with sufficiently detailed, accurate, and timely data to allow them to reach essentially correct conclusions about the military activities in the Soviet Union with respect to Afghanistan. Of particular note was the synergy of signals and imagery intelligence in this collection effort and the quality of the data collected, despite limitations on the resources available.

— The Intelligence Community's analysts met their basic responsibility in a situation of this sort by providing sufficient prior reporting to assure that no key policymaker should have been surprised by the invasion. The analysts were unable to forecast precisely the timing or the size of the Soviets' move, but gave warning at least 10 days beforehand that the USSR was prepared to invade.

In conclusion, the examination of the early phases of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan provides a basis for greater confidence in US intelligence estimates of Soviet doctrine with respect to initiating hostilities and in the capacity of the US Intelligence Community to provide warning of such hostilities.