

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.³²

The question of what Soviet intentions were, however, has never been adequately addressed. The invasion was a major departure from Soviet foreign policy. It marked the first time that Moscow had used its own troops outside the Warsaw Pact area since the end of World War II and it is still difficult to understand the reasons for the action. A combination of factors--fear of religious unrest in the Soviet Muslim Republics, arising out of Khomeini's revolution in Iran; concern over possible US military intervention to rescue the embassy hostages in Teheran; and the desire to stabilize a deteriorating political situation in Afghanistan--have been considered as the most likely reasons. It was, perhaps, simply an opportunistic response to a perceived US weakness in the region. Whatever the inspiration, the Soviets suffered heavy political damage in their relations with the Third World as a result of the invasion, and subsequent events have shown it to have been a foreign policy blunder of enormous proportions. The Soviet Union has at last recognized the futility of its position in Afghanistan and has begun to withdraw its troops. Despite the current suspension of the withdrawal process, most analysts expect Moscow to abide by the terms of the Geneva Accord and end its intervention in Afghanistan in February, 1989.

³² Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith, New York: Bantam Books, 1983, p. 483.