The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979

Keywords – copy them into your books:

**Shah** – King or emperor. Iran was ruled by shahs until the 1979 revolution.

**Islamic fundamentalism** – an extreme movement of Muslims who wish to return to the fundamentals (basics/traditions) of Islam and live similarly to the Prophet Muhammad. Desire to end ‘corrupting’ non-Islamic influences, especially from the West.

**Mujahideen** – guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan against the Soviet army, secretly funded by the USA via Pakistan.
Why did the USSR invade Afghanistan?

Task – read through the information and copy the key points into your books:

Afghanistan was viewed by the Soviet Union as an important neighbour. In 1979, a revolution deposed the Shah. He was replaced by a Muslim fundamentalist government. Afghanistan now formed an important buffer between Iran and Soviet Union. Moscow was determined not to let Muslim fundamentalism spreads across its borders: the Soviet Union had many Muslim citizens. To protect Soviet interests it was important that there was a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan.

Figure 3.3 Afghanistan in 1979 and its borders with the Soviet Union, Pakistan and Iran.
Was the invasion of Afghanistan ONLY to stop the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism?

Task – read through the information and copy the key points into your book:

1. The Soviets were **fearful of a pro-Muslim government** and **being surrounded** which could be a **potential threat to Soviet Security and the Soviet buffer zone**.

2. Fears that **Amin**, the new leader of Afghanistan, was on **friendly terms with the USA**

3. **Access to oil in Saudi Arabia was threatened** by these pro-Muslim governments being unfriendly towards the Soviet Union.

4. **Expansion of the Soviet Satellite states** – therefore **increasing their power in the Middle East**.
The build up and invasion

April-September 1979:

24-25th December 1979:
The Soviets captured Kabul Airport. Their army crossed the border into the country on the same day

27th December 1979:
President Amin was killed during the KGB assault of the palace in Kabul.

28th December 1979:
President Carter informed that the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan by Brezhnev

1st January 1980:
The Soviets installed a pro-Soviet government led by former Afghan exile, Babrak Karmal.

The Soviets continued to fight a war in Afghanistan for a decade
Build-up to the invasion

In April 1978, a pro-Soviet government took control in Afghanistan and received economic assistance from Moscow. It was toppled in September 1979 when Hafizullah Amin staged a popular coup. At first, Moscow supported Amin, but his government became increasingly unpopular as other pro-Muslim factions tried to overthrow him. When Brezhnev heard rumours that Amin was talking to the USA about possible American support, he decided to act.

On 24 December 1979, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan. They claimed that they had been invited in by Amin to support his government against terrorists. However, Amin was assassinated on 27 December (almost certainly by Soviet commandos) and replaced by the pro-Soviet Babrak Kamal. The Soviets remained in Afghanistan for almost ten years, fighting opponents of Babrak Kamal.
What impact did the Invasion have on US-Soviet Relations? (Consequences):

Task – read the information on the next slide or on the PDF and write down in your books what the consequences of the invasion were.

One consequence of the invasion was...
Second consequence was...
A third consequence was...
A fourth consequence was...

Consequences can be:
- Positive or negative
- Increase or decrease tensions
- Made countries more or less friendly
- Short or long term
The impact of the invasion on USA–Soviet relations

 détente was already close to breaking up before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the invasion it was finished. Some historians argue that the Americans deliberately over-reacted to the Soviet invasion because they were looking for a way to ‘get out’ of détente. If so, they had found their way.

In the 1980 presidential election in the USA, the Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, ridiculed President Carter as weak and argued that the time had come for America to reclaim its position on the world stage and stand up to communism. He won a landslide victory.

Although US–Soviet relations were becoming more confrontational, the invasion of Afghanistan made confrontation more of a certainty. It helped bring about the election of a US president who believed communism was ‘evil’ and should be actively opposed.

The Olympic boycotts

In protest against the invasion of Afghanistan, the USA led a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games, which was held in Moscow. Over 60 nations supported the US boycott.

This was a highly significant move as the Olympic Games are a global event, which the Soviet Union was hoping to use to promote communism to the huge television audience who would watch the Olympics around the world. The boycott reflected the influence that the USA had in international affairs. All countries looked forward to the Olympics, and telling their athletes not to go was not an easy thing to do. Some countries, including Britain, did not prevent athletes from going, but did encourage them not to take part. Others allowed athletes to take part as individuals, rather than officially representing their country. But American athletes were told that if they tried to travel to Moscow, their passports would be taken away.

The boycott was so effective that with many of the best athletes staying away, some events at the Moscow games were made to look second-rate. The Soviet Union was extremely angry that its chance to showcase communism to the world had been undermined and relations with the USA deteriorated even further.

This was a significant moment in the ‘Second Cold War’. Relations were so poor that even four years later, when it was the USA’s turn to hold the Olympics in Los Angeles, in 1984, the Soviet Union led a boycott of the games which was joined by 15 communist countries.
Other consequences – copy the key points into your books:

- The war dragged on for 10 years. The Soviet Union spent $8 billion per year plunging the country into further debt.
- The failure of the Soviets to defeat the mujahedeene undermined confidence in the Soviet Union and communism.
- US companies were forbidden to sell technology such as oil drilling equipment and computers to the Soviet Union.
- When Kamal was made leader, many Afghan soldiers deserted the army and joined the Mujahedeene.
Why was the invasion of Afghanistan a disaster for the Soviet Union?

- Task - Write brief judgement in your neat books to answer the title question.

Unexpected involvement by America?

Mujahideen secretly funded and armed?

Break down in relations between USA and USSR?

SALT II not passed in USA?