

United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and Afghanistan War

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18 March 2005

MEMORANDUM FOR SGM Kyler, Group room R04, Fort Bliss, TX 79918-8002

SUBJECT: United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and Afghanistan War

1. Thesis Statement. Soviet miscalculations/under estimations of Afghan guerilla tactics were ultimately responsible for the Soviet failure and withdrawal from Afghanistan.
2. Discussion. War is an extension of world diplomacy and therefore requires careful consideration of such factors as: politics, logistics, ground tactics, and heavy weaponry. Failure to carefully consider all elements of modern warfare can seriously jeopardize the feasibility of a positive outcome. Hence, such was the case in the war between the then powerful USSR and the resilient Afghan people.
3. Conclusion. The war between the USSR and Afghanistan is an ideal analogy of an overwhelming powerful adversary miscalculating/under estimating the resiliency of a determined guerilla force. Careful, analytical reviews of all the elements of modern warfare conclude Soviet miscalculations/under estimations were responsible for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.
4. Counterpoint. Public support is a critical, albeit often neglected, aspect of modern warfare. Thus, such factors as: media coverage, value objectives, and ethnic differences cannot be overlooked and if neglected, can contribute to failure in war. Surely, the USSR and Afghanistan war is a case study for the importance of public support because even the then mighty Soviet empire could not turn a blind eye to the impact of public support.
5. Haines Award. We **do not** request that the Haines Award Selection Board consider this paper for the General Haines Award for Excellence in research. *Writing Research Papers*, 10th Edition by James D. Lester, is the guide used in the preparation of this research paper.

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Outline

Thesis: Soviet miscalculations/under estimations of Afghan guerilla tactics were ultimately responsible for the Soviet failure and withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I. Background

Conflict Conception and Invasion

II. Politics

Leadership and Influences

World Perception

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Planning

Supply and Transportation

Combat Service Support

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Tactical Procedures / Artillery

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VI. Public Support

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Ethnic Differences

The political perspective between the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan had many different views while talking about politics. Let's try to first understand a little bit about the country of Afghanistan and why it was so important to the Soviet Union during this time.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan is a land-locked country in south-western Asia. Its neighbors are Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, Iran to the west, the People's Republic of China to the northeast and Pakistan to the east and south (Grover 52).

There were few Kings of Afghanistan with the last being, Mohammad Zahir Shah, he reigned from 1933 to 1973. In July 1973, while King Zahir Shah was in Italy, the monarchy was overthrown by a coup in which the main figure was the former Prime Minister, General Daud. While this coup took place the main intent was to renounce the constitution and declare Afghanistan a republic.

Because of the many different religious beliefs in Afghanistan there have been continuous civil wars between the government and rebel Muslim forces, resulting in killings and coups. This brings us to December 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The Soviet withdrawal, however, did not end the political uncertainty dogging the politics of Afghanistan. In 1994 a newly formed militant Islamic movement "Taliban" started taking possession of Afghanistan. The Soviet intervention came to an end with the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in early 1989. On 26 September 1996 Taliban forces set up an interim Government under Mohammed Rabbani and Afghanistan was declared a complete Islamic state under Sharia law (Grover 173).

Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979-1980 raised some questions about that intervention. Does the history of Russia/the Soviet Union support the notion that tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union intended to employ Afghanistan as a step in the expansion of Russian/Soviet power? When we look back in retrospect, the history of Russia suggests a pattern of Russian expansion into Central Asia. The British and Afghan leaders feared that Russia might expand into Afghanistan. Russian leaders were afraid that Britain would move in on Russian commercial interests in Central Asia. When World War II was over, both the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to extend their influence in Afghanistan; the U.S.S.R. being the more successful. Beginning in April 1978, Soviet influence and the Soviet presence in Afghanistan increased greatly as a result of a coup that brought Taraki's Marxist party to power.

Why did the Soviet Union intervene in Afghanistan at a time when the probable costs of such a move were so high? While Soviet motives are difficult to assess because of the secrecy surrounding Soviet decision making, four factors were crucial in the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan: (1) a need to secure the Soviet southern border, especially because of the unstable political situation in Iran and the growing Sino-Western rapprochement; (2) the possibility of hard-line elements within Soviet decision-making circles in the wake of the numerous political/diplomatic setbacks suffered by the Soviet Union; (3) a Soviet belief that Hafizullah Amin, leader of the Afghan Communist party and government from September 1979 to December 1979, would either be overthrown by anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan or would remain in power but pursue policies incompatible with Soviet interests in Afghanistan (Grover 231).

This raised a question that would an all-out offensive be very costly to the Soviet

Union militarily and politically, as would a long, drawn-out conflict? Unconditional withdrawal would leave Afghanistan open to what Soviet leaders describe as "foreign agents" supported by the United States, China, and its allies. It is likely that as the struggle drags on, the Soviet leadership came to see conditional withdrawal as the least intolerable choice. Although a withdrawal would be undesirable from the point of view of Soviet honor, it would be acceptable as long as forces hostile to the U.S.S.R. were removed from Afghanistan. But a caveat must be inserted here: the Soviets would withdraw their forces only if the viability of the Marxist regime in Afghanistan is fully assured. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Karmal regime and the Soviet government have advanced a political solution to this crisis.

From an international perspective, the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan is self-defeating. Consequences that must be perceived as disturbing to Moscow include a revitalization of NATO, an increased stimulus to U.S. military spending, and the virtual tabling of SALT II agreement. Moreover, the United States and China were brought closer together as a prospect dreaded by the Soviet Union. Anti-Soviet currents in the Islamic world have grown stronger; an international Islamic conference, held in January 1980, voted almost unanimously to cut off all economic aid to Afghanistan until Soviet troops were withdrawn. Common Market countries have agreed to limit farm exports to the Soviet Union. NATO states agreed to allow 572 American medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles to be deployed on their soil (Grover 300).

Many countries responded favorably to the U.S. plan to boycott the Moscow summer Olympics. The Soviet action in Afghanistan did not get Jimmy Carter past the November elections, but it provided his successor, Ronald Reagan, with fresh ammunition for his

requests for greater expenditures for defense spending. Now, the United States were more willing to play an active military role in defense of its perceived interests. Finally, a second UN General Assembly resolution, passed on November 21, 1980, demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan. One hundred eleven members favored the resolution, twenty-two opposed it, and twelve abstained from voting on it (Grover 82).

Doctrinal changes included: (1) an enhanced role for the Communist party in formulating military doctrine and in directing other aspects of Soviet military affairs; (2) an alteration in the types of war postulated: a greater stress on and sophistication in treating civil wars, an expansion of national liberation struggles, an upgrading in importance of civil wars and national liberation struggles as "just" conflicts (in comparison with wars in defense of socialism) and a redefinition of defensive socialist wars and of "unjust" wars to include imperialist efforts to restore capitalism in newly established socialist states; (3) a recognition of the possibility of a local war initiated by the Soviet Union (as well as by an enemy nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological attack) and acknowledgement that a war can remain local in scope even if waged by rival military alliances; (4) an escalation doctrine directed to a great extent toward discouraging a Western drive for military superiority; (5) an increased emphasis on the Warsaw Pact armies in military defense planning; (6) a renewed emphasis that the Soviet Armed Forces must rally all "anti-imperialist" forces in the world in the struggle against the West; (7) a de-emphasis on a war-waging capability; and (8) a preemption strategy directed toward a possible attack from the East (China/ Japan) and toward preventing the West from gaining military superiority over the Soviet Union and its allies (Grover 372).

There were several options open to the West regarding the Soviet presence in

Afghanistan as well as in adjacent areas. Some of these options overlap and, thus, should not be considered mutually exclusive. These included: (1) continued build-up of American/Western military forces in Southwest Asia and elsewhere, as well as the continued supply of Western allies (China/ Japan/ Pakistan/ South Korea/and NATO states) with military and economic technologies; (2) continued imposition of economic and other sanctions against the Soviet Union; (3) search for a political solution in Afghanistan aimed at the creation of an independent state under international supervision; (4) agreement to certain concessions to the U.S.S.R. such as the acceptance of Afghanistan, like Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and other states in Eastern Europe, as part of the Soviet sphere of influence, or the granting to the Soviet Union of the same economic, political, and diplomatic benefits that have been extended to the People's Republic of China, and (5) slowing down of the American military build-up and a reduction of arms in general(Grover 420).

Option three may not have been feasible because there was ample evidence that Soviet leaders would not accept an independent Afghanistan operating under international supervision. Clearly, the Soviets wanted to establish a Soviet protectorate in Afghanistan and would not accept any other solution that might jeopardize this status. To Moscow, Afghanistan had become "nonaligned," which means that Soviet leaders already considered it part of their sphere of influence and not part of the West's. This would prove highly costly in political terms, both domestic and international, for the Reagan administration.

Great caution needed to be exercised in offering policy suggestions for Western decision makers, not only because of the volatility of Southwest Asia, an area in the

world that probably presents greater challenges to peace than any other, but because all too little is known about what goes on in the minds of Soviet decision makers. Indeed, much of the conduct of foreign affairs in both Washington and Moscow remained hidden behind the barriers of secrecy.

Soviet foreign policy makers were basically insecure and also sensitive about being treated as an inferior power, Russian and Soviet history and Marxist-Leninist ideology reinforced these feelings. The discord that has erupted between China and the Soviet Union over strategy, tactics, ideology, and common borders has become perhaps the most significant political feature of the second half of this century. The key factor in determining global events is the "correlation of forces" between the two opposing blocs. The Soviet Union has traditionally been reluctant to allow any vacuum filled with a socialist state to change back to a more democratic or capitalist form of government. Because of these beliefs it was said that Soviet leaders tend to view the world in bipolar terms that is, imperialism led by the United States, and communism led by the Soviet Union(Grover 139).

Given their conflict mind-set, which stresses conflict in international relations, Soviet leaders view the United States and the non-Communist West in general as aggressive and opposed to all Soviet policy moves that are described as peaceful. The Soviets believe that the "correlation of forces" was shifted to favor the socialist bloc since World War II. The Soviet Union excludes what it calls "support for struggles of national liberation" from its profession.

Even though the Political realm had an impact on the war, the logistics of the combat service support had a difficult time getting the job done which became the down fall of the Soviet Army. Mountainous areas of operations dictate that commanders foresee needs before demands are placed upon Combat Service Support (CSS) Personnel. The main logistical differences between mountain operations in other terrain are a result of the problems of transporting and securing material along difficult and extended lines of support. Logistics support must emphasize a continuous flow of supplies to specific locations, rather than the build-up of stocks at supply points along the main supply routes.

Supply point operations alone are insufficient; the proposed support structure must plan for redundancy in the ability to distribute supplies directly to units operating from predetermined supply routes. Both sides recognized the vital importance of Lines of Communication (LOC), and this shift of LOC control was a constant feature throughout the entire duration of the Soviet-Afghan War. Failure to do a detailed reconnaissance for the type and maximum number of vehicles that the road network can support, classifications of bridges, suitable sites for drop zones, landing zones, air stripes, available water sources, local resources, facilities, and other service and support activities due to mountainous terrain was a major downfall on the Soviet Army.

Combat in the mountains is seasonal, in November, the snow falls, closing all roads and passes forcing people to the low ground for survival. March and April the snow begins to melt and combatants begin to stir. May and June are excellent months for fighting and combat. July and August are too hot and the fighting decreases. September and October are again excellent months for fighting or combat.

Afghanistan country side is very mountainous with one road connecting its cities in a giant ring; with trackless deserts to the south make this a very remote land, with only 24 kilometers of railroad.

The Mujadhideen (Holy Warriors) used a combination of pick-up trucks and indigenous pack animals and personnel to move their equipment in the mountains, and camels in the desert. Their support base was built in, since they were local people of neighboring communities. Food, water, shelter, and medical aid were readily available and the neighbors provided intelligence on the Soviet movements. Their weapons were what they had on hand-primarily WWI-era British Lee-Enfield.303 bolt action and older British Martini-Henry single shot breech-loading rifles from the 1880s with a maximum effective range of 300 meters. As the supply moved from one point to another they would contract the tribal leaders (teamsters) to move them for 10% toll of the goods which was paid in advance. (Grau) But the commanders of the teamsters were responsible for the loss of transport mules, trucks and camels to Soviet action.

The Soviet 40th Army brought its full complements of tanks, air defense artillery, chemical protection units and all the other paraphernalia for conventional war against a modern mechanized force. The mountain's caused the Soviet Army to replace the tank and air defense with more infantry and engineers. More helicopters and SU-25 close air support were brought into the fight.

The Soviet Union seized all airfields and roads and drove the people out of the country. The Mujahideens strategic struggle was to strangle the Soviet lines of communication (LOC)-the critical roads over which the Soviets traveled. The

mountainous terrain serves to create natural checkpoints, funneling forces through only a handful of vulnerable passes and this is where the Mujahideens cut the Soviets off from their supplies.

Each soldier will require 4500 calories or more per day in strenuous mountain activities. In abrupt ascents to high altitudes rations are hard to digest so different rations must be available to the soldier, adding extra weight to the soldiers load by about 15lbs. Each soldier will require about 4 quarts of water per day in low ground and about 6 per day in the higher elevations. (Grau) Purification of mountainous water must be available if clean water isn't available. Keeping the water and food from freezing in the winter will be another task for the quartermaster. General supplies such as clothing and equipment, tentage, cold weather gear, batteries, gloves, sleeping gear, and things for personal hygiene will be in great demand. The vehicles would require more fuel in the mountainous terrain which would have to travel on the LOC.

The Soviets used Bull dozers to widen the orchards, villages, and other cover and concealment some 300 meters back from both sides of the road to create stand-off and aid in counter attacks. Wire needed for barriers, constructing obstacles and fighting positions was in demand for these positions. They needed items for creating helicopter LZs, things for repairing roads and for mountain operations for the infantry. Ammo for the infantry, mortars, helicopter gun ships, tanks, and anti-personnel mines would be difficult to transport on the LOC because of mines that the Mujahideens placed on the road. Parts for the tanks and helicopters were very scarce and emphasis on preventive maintenance became first priority in the Soviet Army.

Medical supplies had to have the highest priority for movement. The Soviet forces biggest concern wasn't getting wounded in battle it was the threat of disease. Over 76% of the Soviet service personnel were hospitalized for disease during their normal two-year tour of duty. Typhoid fever, plague, malaria, cholera, diphtheria, pneumonia, hepatitis, and other water-borne diseases plagued the force. Most of this resulted in the lack of clean drinking water (particularly after the initial bombing of infrastructures), poor sanitation both in the field and in base camps, infestations of disease carrying organisms like lice and rats, stress, and a poor and inconsistent diet. Only 11.44% were injured during battle of gun shot. (Grau)

Mujahideens used trucks and mules for the mountainous areas and camels for the desert land. In 1984 the United States sent American mules to help support the Mujahideens crisis but the American mule was bigger and couldn't carry the heavy loads as the smaller mule, plus it ate more and began to die as a result of disease. The Mujahideens were forced to build a series of supply depots, supply points and forward supply points inside Afghanistan to ease their logistic dilemma. Their primary means of communications became messengers; visual signal and meetings are the preferred.

The Soviets found it took 85% of their force to provide basic security-guarding cities, industry, airfields, garrisons, and outposts along the supply routes from the Soviet Union. This became a logistical nightmare for the Soviet Army which led to their defeat. (Grau)

In conclusion the Soviet Union had to withdraw from Afghanistan due to poor logistic capabilities and the ability to fight a guerilla war with the Mujahideens.

The initial invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union on Christmas Eve, gave the Soviets a false impression that this was going to be a short and relatively easy war. Catching western governments and the Afghan military off guard, allowed the Soviet ground force to quickly overtake cities, airfields, and key government sites. The logistical support of a large invasion force that covered a vast geographical area proved to be an obstacle the Soviets could not overcome. The tactics used by the Soviet Union required a constant transport of supplies into and around the country; however, they were never able to sustain a constant flow of required materials.

The initial plan and tactics used by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan were not much different from of any large modern army would have used. Their technique of massive firepower followed by overrunning the enemy and finished with a mop up, proved to be ineffective. The use of massive firepower from fixed wing aircraft, artillery, tanks, and helicopters preceded all of their attacks. This heavy barrage continued until the commanders believed that there was little or no enemy forces remaining alive or uninjured. The Soviets would then send in their wheeled vehicles and tanks to “overrun” the few remaining enemy forces left alive. They would finish with their ground troops in the “mopping up” stage, since the barrage of rockets and artillery combined with bombing would have destroyed their puny ill-equipped enemy forces. (Nawroz 96) This proved to be an ineffective technique in the case against the Afghan Freedom Fighters. They would simply withdraw during the barrage, with minimal casualties, then return later to fight the Soviets.

The Soviets used their doctrine and strategy that were well suited for a European or Chinese theater of war. The Soviet Union structured, equipped, and trained their units for

nuclear and high intensity war on the European plains. Their tactics were designed for battlefields that were dominated by lethal high-precision weapon systems. (Collins 1985) This was not the enemy, terrain, or climate that they were fighting against in Afghanistan. The terrain was rugged and mountainous, which limited the use of their vehicles. The climate was extremely hot, which hindered them due to inappropriate individual gear. The enemy did not stand and fight as the Soviets trained for, rather they would hit, run, and hide. This was a new technique to the Soviet army and they were unfamiliar with how to fight in this manner.

The Soviet motorized units were not trained to dismount and fight far from their motorized vehicles. This was a close combat fight, which was not part of their doctrine. The troops and officers were reluctant to leave the relative safety of their "mobile bunkers" (Nawroz 96). The freedom fighters did not stay and fight in fortified defensive positions. Soviets' doctrine taught them to destroy the positions, drive through, and "mop-up" the enemy. With reluctance of the troops to dismount and fight, the Afghan fighters could get relatively close and destroy the vehicles; they would quickly depart to fight again later. By the time the Soviets new doctrine was developed, the Soviet Union troops were reluctant to fight a close combat battle with a rugged, willing enemy that would not quit (Nawroz 96).

The equipment that the Soviet soldier used was a direct result of their tactics. The motorized rifle soldier was never to be more than 200 meters from his carrier. The load-bearing equipment (LBE), uniform and weapon reflected this tactic. The LBE was carrying vast amounts of ammunition; this was due to the required high volume of fire technique used by the Soviets. This made the equipment very heavy and cumbersome.

The uniform and boots were hot and uncomfortable, not designed for walking or maneuvering long distances (Nawroz 96). The weapons that accompanied the dismounts were very heavy. The machine gun weighed 75 pounds. The automatic grenade launcher weighed in at 66 pounds; coupled with 32 pound loaded ammunition drums. These heavy infantry weapons, simply would not allow the Soviets to pursue and catch the light weight Afghan fighters.

The use of artillery by the Soviet Union was mostly ineffective throughout the entire war in Afghanistan. The Afghan fighters did not dig-in and wait on artillery to arrive in foxholes, as the Soviets trained to fight. The massing of artillery fires and the battle drills of the Soviets were ineffective against a constantly moving guerilla force.

Communications between air to ground and maneuver units were often poor, due to guerillas constantly knocking out unguarded communication sites. This led to poor or limited coordination with artillery units, which resulted in ineffective fires.

Some of the most successful battles that were fought utilized helicopters. The initial firepower, mobility, and invulnerability of the helicopter put the guerillas on the defensive. The Soviet army also successfully used helicopters to conduct air assault operations with their spetnazs. The ability to move these hardened fighters quickly, proved to have much success in many battles. These forces were accustomed to fighting outside of armed vehicles (Nawroz 96). Unfortunately for the Soviets, there were never enough helicopters and air assault forces in country to perform all the required missions. They often squandered these assets on unnecessary missions. During all convoys the high ground along the route could have been secured by air assault forces, this would have allowed their convoys to safely pass through the area, but this was not always the case

(Collins 1985). Lack of helicopters, air assault forces, and the unwillingness of the Soviet, to deviate from large scale operations, did not allow them to capitalize on this asset. Eventually through good intelligence work and a supply of stingers, the helicopter became less of an asset to the Soviets. The Afghan fighters set up effective ariel ambushes and began conducting missions at night.

The Soviets loss of the Afghanistan war can be attributed to many issues. One aspect of their loss is the tactics and techniques utilized by the Soviet Union. The technique of massive firepower and mop-up are ineffective against a guerilla-based army. Conventional war designed around large theater is ineffective. The Soviet Army did not commit the correct amount or type of soldiers and equipment, nor did they change their fighting doctrine quick enough in order to be victorious.

Armored Fighting vehicle afforded the Russian troops little protection from ambushes due to the limited angles of the 120 smooth bore guns, which were not able to fire due to the difficult angles, with out the afforded protection of armor the convoys were not able to deliver their supplies which caused disruption to their supply lines, which in return cause limited supplies to reach many of the out post, in return since the tanks could not afford the convoys protection they would have to increase their protection of the supply lines, thus reducing the number of battle ready troops. The use of tanks were used cautiously moving only when commanders were sure that no functioning weapons remained in the zone of advance, barley did 10% of armor officers served in the Afghanistan war, soldiers were reluctant to leave there armor vehicles, officers portrayed a very different picture, by firing machine guns in the air and to the sides one would think they vanquished their enemies for ever. Disabled tanks were carefully camouflaged; tanks

were of very little value in this war, replacements in the soviet army were hard to fill so the generals decided that driver's, gunners, tank commanders were to be replaced first.

Tanks could not be used on the offensive and were only limited to defensive operations. Tanks were limited to over watching one combat vehicle, or a group of combat vehicles they would occupy dominant terrain features to cover other vehicles as they advance forward, tanks were present in the war but were of very little use due to the terrain and the logistic support that accompanied moving them for long periods of time, which caused the tanks to run out of fuel, tanks were very susceptible to ambushes, again tanks were present but were not to useful in mountain warfare, consequently the newest Russian tanks were not used the most modern tank used was the T64, tanks have a very limited use for the counter guerrilla force but in the right terrain tanks would perform remarkable. There are some striking parallels between the Soviet role in Afghanistan and the United States' role in Vietnam. Like the United States, the Soviets had to restructure and retrain their force while in the combat zone. Eventually, military schools and training areas began to incorporate Afghanistan combat experience and to train personnel for Afghanistan duty. Mountain warfare training centers sprang up in many districts. However, unlike in the United States Army, the Afghanistan war was not an all-encompassing experience for the officer corps. Barely ten percent of the Soviet motorized rifle, armor, aviation and artillery officers served in Afghanistan. However, a majority of airborne, air assault and Spetsnaz officers served in-country.

The Soviets were slow in adopting new tactics to the realities of the rugged terrain and rugged enemy. When the Soviets finally realized the importance of dismounting conventional motorized rifle troops for close combat and mopping-up, it was too late.

The troops and even their officers were reluctant to leave the relative safety of their armored carriers and preferred to use artillery and air strikes instead of close combat. They had lost the willingness to combat a rugged enemy that would not quit. The pressure of an unpopular, lengthy, expensive war had transformed many tough, stubborn and ruthless Soviet soldiers into liabilities whose sole hope was to survive and go home.

General Nawroz once watched the return of a Soviet motorized column from a day's combat. Its mission was to open a highway for traffic and destroy the enemy blocking it. The Soviets acted like conquerors as they passed by General Nawroz's hiding place. Officers stood inside the turrets of the tanks, firing machineguns in the air and to the sides. One would have thought they had vanquished their enemies for ever. Disabled tanks and trucks were towed, carefully camouflaged, inside the column. When General Nawroz reached the site of the highway battle, he saw swarms of very young, cheerful freedom fighters running to the highway from all directions, armed only with rifles, a few AK47s and a couple of rocket launchers. They were collecting the meager spoils of the combat that had just taken place. The vain-glorious return of the Soviet column was in fact a rout.

Not all Soviet soldiers avoided their duty. Many Soviet soldiers fought valiantly throughout the entire war. In particular, soldiers in Spetsnaz, airborne, air assault, and mountain rifle units, as well as those in separate motorized rifle brigades continually sought to close with the freedom fighters in close combat. But, these forces were accustomed to fighting outside of their armored vehicles and had not developed the "mobile bunker" mentality.

Soviet tactics and equipment were designed solely to operate within the context of a theater war against a modern enemy who would obligingly occupy continuous defensive positions. The Soviet Army planned to contend with this defensive belt by physically obliterating hectares of defensive positions through the weight of massed artillery fires and then driving through the subsequent gap to strike deep and pursue the shattered foe. Future war was seen as a lethal, high tempo event where forces and firepower were carefully choreographed. Consequently, Soviet tactics were simple. They were designed to be implemented rapidly by conscripts and reservists and not to get in the way of the unfolding operation. Spacing between vehicles and the ability to dismount a personnel carrier from a squad line and provide suppressive small-arms fire were prized components of motorized rifle tactics. Tactical initiative was not encouraged as it tended to upset operational timing.

The mujahideen did not accommodate the Soviet Army by fighting conventional war. They refused to dig in and wait for Soviet artillery. The Soviets found that massed artillery and simple battle drills had little effect on the elusive guerrillas. Tactics had to be reworked on site. Air-ground coordination, artillery adjustment and coordination among maneuver units was often poor and required constant "quick-fixes" throughout the war. The most tactical innovation was seen among the airborne, air assault and Spetsnaz forces and the two separate motorized rifle brigades. These forces did the best in counterinsurgency battle. Far less innovation was apparent among the motorized rifle regiments. Tanks were of limited value in this war, but helicopters were a tremendous asset. Engineers were always in demand.

Even in the initial stages of the conflict when the guerrillas had little experience, the Soviets failed to win most of their engagements. Without the helicopter gunship, the Soviets may have withdrawn years earlier. Its firepower and mobility and initial invulnerability put the guerrillas on the defensive. The Soviets used helicopters extensively and ruthlessly against the unprotected guerrillas. But like all innovations in war, this advantage also did not last long. The guerrillas adapted. They fought at night when the helicopter was least effective. Guerrilla intelligence discovered the time and location of planned Soviet attacks and set up air defense ambushes and dug protective bunkers. The guerrillas received newer and more powerful weapons which they used against the helicopters. Finally, the guerrillas received the Stinger shoulder-launched air defense missile—a very effective weapon against low flying aircraft. The masterful employment of Stinger by the Afghan freedom fighters heavily tilted the balance in favor of the mujahideen. Even the extensive Soviet use of their airpower that was stationed across the northern border could not change the situation. The sophisticated, high-flying planes and helicopters from the Turkistan Military District flew a large number of missions against Afghan freedom fighters, but the guerrillas were winning.

Westerns often decry the youth and inexperience of Soviet soldiers and NCOs, but the guerrillas found that the training standard of the Soviet soldier, especially the ethnic Russian, was comparatively high. Some of the POWs that General Nawroz came in contact with showed good technical knowledge and practical skill. But these qualities were not properly used in Afghanistan due to adverse psychological and environmental conditions.

The Afghanistan War forced the 40th Army to change tactics, equipment, and training and force structure. However, despite these changes, the Soviet Army never had enough forces in Afghanistan to win. Initially, the Soviets had underestimated the strength of their enemy. Logistically, they were hard-pressed to maintain a larger force and, even if they could have tripled the size of their force, they probably would still have been unable to win. Often, they could not assemble an entire regiment for combat and had to cobble together forces from various units to create a make-shift regiment. Base-camp, airfield, city and lines of communication (LOC) security tied up most of the motorized rifle forces, but still, the mujahideen constantly interdicted the road and pipelines supplying the Soviet and Afghan forces. The Soviets were never able to completely control their LOCs, although their forces were performing an important international mission. Consequently, they were never able to consistently transport sufficient supplies into the country to support a larger force. The guerrilla mastery of the roads strangled the Soviet efforts. Soviet equipment losses included 118 jets, 333 helicopters, 147 tanks, 1314 armored personnel carriers, 433 artillery pieces or mortars, 1138 communications or CP vehicles, 510 engineering vehicles and 11,369 trucks (Grau 106).

Many of these losses were on the highways, and a key loss was the large amount of cargo-carrying trucks. The Soviets were still able to field large formations for operations in the Pandshir valley and other locales, and were still able to launch local offensives with overwhelming local superiority, but it required extraordinary efforts to do so.

On paper, the 40th Army looked to be in good shape, but it was unable to maintain adequate personnel strength in its line units. Regiments were often at single battalion strength, battalions at single company strength and companies at single platoon strength.

First priority on personnel replacement always went to filling the driver, gunner and vehicle commander slots for the unit combat vehicles. This left a few, reluctant personnel available to dismount and fight the resistance. As noted, disease cut into units' present-for-duty-strength as poor field sanitation practices and poor diet contributed to the spread of disease. From 1/4 to 1/3 of a unit's strength was often sick with hepatitis, typhus, malaria, amoebic dysentery, and meningitis. From October through November 1981, the entire 5th Motorized Rifle Division was combating ineffective since over 3,000 of the divisions' personnel were sick with hepatitis (Roy 126). Units were filled twice a year from the spring and fall draft call-ups. Conscripts sent to the Turkistan Military District had six month to a year's training before going to Afghanistan for the rest of their service. Further, military districts and Groups of Forces were levied for troops twice annually. These levies were quite large. Yet, the unit field strengths remained appallingly low. The Soviets learned, like the Americans in Vietnam, that units need to be filled well in excess of 100% (in some regions of the world) if one hopes to field and maintain a reasonable fighting force. The 40th Army was chronically short of resources to carry out its mission and was an embarrassing reminder to its political masters of their political hubris and miscalculations which pushed this army into the inhospitable mountains of Afghanistan, where it could not be properly supplied and maintained.

The Soviet Ground Forces developed the bronegruppa concept to use the firepower of the personnel carriers in an independent reserve once the motorized rifle soldiers had dismounted. It was a bold step, for commanders of mechanized forces dislike separating their dismounted infantry from their carriers. However, terrain often dictated that the BMPs, BMDs and BTRs could not follow or support their squads. The bronegruppa

concept gave the commander a potent, maneuverable reserve which could attack independently on the flanks, block expected enemy routes of withdrawal, serve as a mobile fire platform to reinforce elements in contact, serve as a battle taxi to pick-up forces (which had infiltrated or air-landed earlier and had finished their mission), perform patrols, serve in an economy-of-force role in both the offense and defense, and provide convoy escort and security functions.

There is no doubt a seemingly valid argument can be articulated that soviet miscalculations involving political dynamics, ground tactics, logistics, and tank employment led to the soviet withdrawal in Afghanistan. However, in the study of armed conflict, such an argument is tragically incomplete because it is essential that one also consider the hugely important dynamic of public support. The mere mention of The Vietnam War brings a vivid American analogy to mind bearing witness to the essential element of public support. Surely, the initially gradual and later eventual lack of public support by the American people for the United States effort in Vietnam contributed to the ultimate withdrawal of United States forces. Likewise, although seemingly possible to discount at first look, the lack of Soviet public support for their country's efforts in Afghanistan in fact led to the withdrawal of Soviet forces from that country's "Vietnam" experience. Specifically, one must consider such factors as: the inherent nature of the closed communist government and thus it's inability to garner soviet public support, the vast availability of media (conventional and unconventional) coverage surrounding the Soviet war against Afghanistan, the lack of clear soviet military and political objectives, and lastly the innate religious, ethic, and historic differences of the Afghan and the soviet people. Let's start this review of the lack of Soviet public support by reviewing the

inherent nature of the previously closed communist government and thus its inability to garner soviet public support.

It is common knowledge that the previous form of government in Russia was the authoritarian communist United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). The USSR inherently did not consider the value of public support for its Afghan war initiative because it felt domestic public support in the USSR would never fade because the Soviet regime thought it enjoyed comprehensive control of the press. In addition, the Soviet regime could and would ruthlessly stifle any manifestations of dissent and would never be compelled to negotiate with resistance elements. Similarly, many national observers maintained the USSR, its political course governed by a clear and ruthless sense of purpose, would remain steadfastly indifferent to international opinion (Baumann 1). Clearly, the inherent nature of the previously closed communist government did not feel the need to garner soviet public support. Thus, the USSR was doomed to suffer affects similar to the American involvement in Vietnam. However, over the course of the ten year war in Afghanistan, the USSR government would become increasingly aware of the need for public support. In fact, the vast availability of media (conventional and unconventional) coverage surrounding the Soviet war against Afghanistan would soon begin to perpetuate the lack of domestic public support in the USSR.

During the time of the war in Afghanistan, the USSR vastly miscalculated the growth of conventional media coverage and its potential impacts. It is estimated television households in the world have grown more than six-fold to almost 1.2 billion (against a total population growth during the period of approximately 65 percent). During the 1990s alone, satellite and cable households grew from 85 million to well over 300

million, substantially increasing the demand for programming and ultimately international news coverage. Complementing this growth in both the production and consumption of broadcast media has been the Internet (Conetta 1). Ultimately, the Internet made it possible for the average USSR citizen to gain access to foreign press as an alternative source of reporting on world events contrasting the communist USSR controlled media. Likewise, the USSR government miscalculated the potential impact of the unconventional media. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet men rotated in and out of service in Afghanistan and brought home all the signs of a losing, unpopular struggle: low morale, criticism of the government's Afghan policy, as well as drug and alcohol abuse. The Afghan war also hit home in other ways. Billions of rubles were spent on Afghanistan instead of the now crumbling Soviet economy. Also, in the troubled Central Asian republics, Soviet Muslims had come into contact with the Afghan jihad when, at various points during the war, rebel bands crossed the sensitive Soviet border to foment unrest among the Islamic population (Galster 5). Clearly, the USSR failed to consider and adequately deal with the vast availability of media (conventional and unconventional) coverage surrounding the Soviet war against Afghanistan. Yet, the USSR also failed to learn yet another lesson from the failed American effort in Vietnam, because the USSR government lacked clear soviet military and political objectives.

As previously mentioned, the American analogy of the Vietnam War closely assimilates the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Any country seeking military action most have clear, defined, and attainable military and political objectives. Otherwise, it risks a long, drawn out military action with no conceivable end in sight and potential defeat (Persico 576). Fact is, the Soviets began the war in Afghanistan without a

coherent strategy and, even later, failed to link their assorted efforts in such a way as to establish a basic unity of effort. An example is the way in which highly destructive, firepower-intensive military operations undermined political campaigns aimed at winning the active support (or at least neutrality) of the Afghanistan population. Had Soviet strategy been better conceived, there might have been at least some prospect for success (Baumann 9). In addition, the time period of the Cold War required the majority of USSR military assets assignment to the European theater of operations. Thus, the Soviet regime simply did not feel the need to obligate the forces necessary to ensure victory in a conflict they did consider their main military objective. Equally important was the failure of the USSR to consider the innate differences of the Afghan and the soviet people which also contributed to the lack of public support.

Inherently, the USSR and Afghanistan peoples shared few similarities which ultimately led many in the Soviet regime to question support of the war effort. In reality, the innate religious, ethic, and historic differences of the Afghan and the soviet people are vast. In the religious context, the communist regime was atheist in nature. However, in contrast the Afghan people were fundamentalist Islamic. Thus, the invading Soviet armies were viewed as "Godless." The Islamic religion served to unite the Afghan resistance whereas the Soviet Armies were united by authoritarian enforced discipline. Also, there were no ethic similarities between the Afghan people and the Soviets. The Soviet population is largely Slavic while the Afghan population is largely Pashtun and Tajik (CIA np). Thus, the Soviet population felt no ethnic need to support military involvement in Afghanistan. Lastly, the Afghan people had fought against numerous attempts at invasions dating from as far back as Alexander the Great (Hammond 130). In

contrast, the Soviet people were the product of a regime change from a monarchy to a stable communist government. Only in the most recent years prior to the war with the Soviet regime had the Afghan government adopted socialist tenets. Clearly, there was no religious, ethnic, or historic basis for the Soviet people to support military action in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, while factors such as politics, ground tactics, logistics, and tank employment surely contributed to the soviet withdrawal in Afghanistan, it was in fact the lack of popular support which undermined the USSR military effort. First, the inherent nature of the closed communist government and thus its inability to garner soviet public support no doubt contributed to the ultimate Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Secondly, the vast availability of media (conventional and unconventional) coverage surrounding the Soviet war against Afghanistan garnered a rare Soviet people's negative reaction to the Afghan war. Thirdly, the lack of clear soviet military and political objectives will ultimately undermine any military effort. Lastly, the innate religious, ethic, and historic differences of the Afghan and the soviet people did nothing to garner Soviet support. Truly, the lack of popular support undermined the USSR military effort.

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