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**Soviet Union and Afghanistan War**

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The world reaction to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 was intense and negative. This paper will give you the examples of how the Mujahedeen used the climate and terrain to their advantage in defeating the Soviets. The paper will show how each time the Soviet Union adapted their tactics the Mujahedeen found another way of using the terrain to defeat that tactic.

The force on force war gaming done by the Soviet Union preparing for the Cold War did not prepare them for the insurgency of the Afghanistan people would give them. The Afghanistan insurgents known as the "Mujahedeen" used the terrain of Afghanistan and guerilla tactics that the Soviet Union was unprepared to deal with. The Mujahedeen used several factors such as the mountainous, inhospitable land and their sheer determination not to be conquered by any infidel. The terrain and the weaponry provided by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and the United States helped in defeating the Soviets.

After a few failed attempts at cornering the Mujahedeen strong holds, the Soviets started using gunships and transport ships to envelop the retreating enemy. For a period of time the insurgents were devastated by this change in tactics. Once the anti-aircraft guns were introduced into the theater the Mujahedeen were able to adjust their tactics. The Mujahedeen placed the anti-aircraft guns on the mountain tops to secure their exfiltration routes. The inability to provide close air support and resupply to further outposts drove the Soviets back to land assaults and land resupply. The Mujahedeen had already dominated this course of action. This course of action began the downfall of the Soviet Union.

The Afghanistan population as a whole did not support the Soviet emplaced government. This allowed the Mujahedeen to operate within the populace and gain their support. Despite, the Soviets attempt to eliminate this support through artillery barrages and destruction of villages the

Mujahedeen were able to avoid a direct battle with the Soviets. The Afghani's innate ability to avoid a direct linear battle with the Soviets was instrumental in their defeat. The Mujahedeen were able to use the knowledge of the terrain to their advantage. A prime example was the first major battle in the Pashjir Valley. The Soviets moved in with 15,000 troops expecting to destroy a major Mujahedeen element. However, the Mujahedeen had foreseen the preparation of this major advance by the Soviets and simply moved up to the safety of the mountains outside the range of artillery, Soviet tanks, and BMPs could not travel. This continuing insurgent tactic proved successful for about two years of the war until the Soviets changed their military operations.

The Mujahedeen during the early part of the war had great success in cutting off resupply routes to the Soviet outposts. Many times the Mujahedeen used the same locations to ambush the Soviets. The Soviets refused to dismount their superior armor, which allowed the insurgents to concentrate their fires on the armor in the convoy. Once the armor was destroyed or incapacitated the insurgents could concentrate on the rest of the convoy usually appropriating some of the supplies for themselves. The Soviets knew they had to change their tactic if they were going to be successful. Once the Soviets finally changed their tactics by supplying a gunship to each convoy they achieved a greater success. However, influences of other nation states greatly hindered their success. The other nation states provided man portable anti-aircraft systems to help defend against these gunships.

Part of defeating an insurgency is cutting off the insurgent supply routes. These routes are used for arms, ammunition, medical supplies, and fighters. In the Afghanistan and Soviet War, these supply routes were along the mountains of the Pakistan and Afghanistan borders. The terrain and climate of these mountains did not provide the Soviets with the means to pursue or interdict the supplies of the Mujahedeen insurgent fighters. The Soviets were trained to fight

on flat linear terrain and were not prepared to dismount to pursue such fighters. If the Soviets had deployed enough troops to secure the border they were ill prepared to combat the elements in these mountains. The Mujahedeen fighters used old caravan routes used in the pass by goat herders, smugglers, and thieves. These fighters were able to traverse this terrain with pack mules and by simply walking. The fighters were hardened to the harsh climate and rugged terrain which made them very successful in getting their much needed supplies to their base camps. The Mujahedeen knew the Soviets were not willing to dismount their far superior combat vehicles and they were not suited to traverse the terrain anyway. The history of this problem is continuing in Afghanistan today. Even though, we dismount and traverse this terrain there are not enough troops in the area to secure such a large border.

Another tactic that proved very successful for the Mujahedeen fighters was to place their strongholds and training areas in locations that the Soviet helicopters could not reach. The Soviets only had air bases and refuel stations in certain areas and these locations were not spread throughout the country enough. The Mujahedeen learned the distances the aircraft could fly and maintain patrol areas. The Mujahedeen then placed their training camps and strongholds just outside the range of the bulky and cumbersome Soviet gunships. This tactic was not only successful in the years of the Soviet Union war but they are still using this tactic successfully today.

The first few years of the war the Soviets made a crucial mistake in leaving destroyed or incapacitated vehicles and weapon systems on the battlefield. They left these remnants due to the extreme cold weather and the terrain was not suitable to maneuver other vehicles to withdraw the wreckage. The Soviets feared they would incur further losses both vehicular and personnel by doing this. Even though, the Soviets knew the insurgents were running low of munitions and

modern weapon systems they still took shortcuts in preventing the pilfering of this damaged equipment.

This shortcut provided the Mujahedeen the ability to manufacture effective weapon systems and sell the scrap metal for hard cash. This hard cash provided the fighters with the ability to buy more arms and munitions. The insurgent patrols capitalized on this failure by the Soviet Union by comprising each patrol with at least one mechanic per patrol. This technique was widely used throughout the country.

The Soviets once again changed their tactics by providing clean up teams with flat bed trucks to secure all damaged vehicles and weapon systems. In an effort to combat the narrow terrain and climate they would use the MI-6 transport helicopter to secure pilferable wreckage. If these efforts were futile because of the elements or the safety of the terrain the Soviet gunships would come in and completely destroy the equipment. This is one lesson the United States Army learned and continues to implement throughout both theaters. Both the Vietnam War and the Soviet war have taught us this lesson. The Mujahedeen tactics of pilfering the Soviet equipment helped keep them in the fight for many years. The Mujahedeen survived this way until the flow of more modern arms and ammunition came from outside nations.

In the end, the Mujahedeen national will was stronger than that of the Soviet leadership, and the Soviet Army withdrew. (Mataxis, 2002) The Soviet Union and the Afghan communist did not realize the unwilling desire of the Mujahedeen to not give up in the face of technology and overpowering fire power. Although the Soviets had overwhelming fire power the Mujahedeen were able to use their will and knowledge of the terrain to help defeat the Russians. Along with the outside influences of other nation states this is a great success story for the Afghanistan people.

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