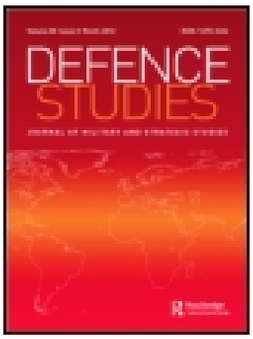

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ARTICLE

The Soviet–Afghan War, 1978–1989: An Overview[1]

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The experience of the past years clearly shows that the Afghan problem cannot be solved by military means only. Within the framework of the old thinking, old approaches we are doomed to [a] negative end result in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).

Colonel Kim Tsagolov (Soviet Army) to Marshal Dmitri Yazov (Defence Minister), 13 August 1987.

I died five years ago when I left Kabul. My soul has gone to heaven; this is just my body.

Afghan mujahidin fighter.[2]

Tsagolov's letter to Yazov provided a damning verdict on nearly eight years of effort by the USSR to preserve a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. Like many of his peers, Tsagolov had concluded that the USSR's embroilment in the Afghan civil war had been a disaster. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had cost thousands of troops and billions of roubles, and had produced a military stalemate. Moscow's attempt to bolster a Marxist-Leninist government in Afghanistan was thwarted by a disparate network of guerrillas, motivated by a combination of parochial factors, traditional hostility to foreign invaders and – as the quote from the anonymous mujahidin guerrilla shows – religious fervour.

The USSR's intervention in Afghanistan not only contributed to the 'Second Cold War' of the 1980s, but also to the rise of radical Islamism in the Muslim world.[3] Following the departure of Soviet troops in February 1989 Afghanistan's decline into internecine strife and state collapse was largely ignored by the international community until the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001, and the

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subsequent US-led invasion which overthrew the Taliban regime. Now that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces are currently fighting a resurgent Taliban insurgency in Southern Afghanistan – as shown by the savage fighting involving British troops in Helmand province since June 2006 – the USSR's own record of Afghan counter-insurgency (COIN) has become the subject of fresh scholarly and professional military scrutiny.[4] It is also predictable that critics of NATO's intervention in Afghanistan have drawn simplistic lessons from the Soviet defeat a generation earlier, and have also seized on Western covert assistance to the Afghan mujahidin to claim that the US and its allies 'created' Al-Qaeda.[5]

Although this article does not provide a detailed analysis of both Operation 'Enduring Freedom' and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), or an assessment of the course of both the COIN and stabilisation campaigns in Afghanistan, it is intended to provide a historical summary of the causes and the course of the Soviet–Afghan war, placing this conflict in the context of Afghanistan's implosion during the 1990s, the rise of radical Islamism, and the course of events which led President George W. Bush to declare his 'global war on terror' shortly after 9/11.

The Historical and Political Background

Afghanistan's physical geography and multi-ethnic composition has shaped both its limited economic development, and the sheer difficulties which indigenous rulers and foreign invaders have faced in attempting to impose their authority on Afghan society. About 12 per cent of Afghanistan's land is arable, and the remainder consists mainly of desert or mountainous terrain. Out of 21,000 kilometres (km) of roads, only 2,793km are metalled, all-weather routes, while the country's rail network is a mere 24.6km long. Afghanistan had a population of about 15.5 million in 1979, only 1,700,000 of which was urban (and 700,000 of which lived in the capital, Kabul). Some 41 per cent of Afghans belonged to the Pashtun ethnic group, concentrated predominantly in the southern half of the country. Another 22 per cent were Tajik, and 6 per cent were Uzbeks. Both the latter groups are ethnically linked to the peoples of the Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Some 5.6 per cent of Afghans were Hazara, who are mainly Shia, and the remaining 25.4 per cent were drawn from a variety of ethnic groups – Turkmen, Baluchi, Nuristani, and others. Afghanistan was nominally a monarchy from 1747 to 1973, but in reality the king's authority over the country's tribal and clan-based society was extremely limited.[6]

During the 19th century, Afghanistan became embroiled in the 'Great Game' between the British Raj and the Russian Empire, which was expanding into Central Asia. The British had attempted to conquer Afghanistan from 1839 to 1842, only to suffer a disastrous military defeat at the hands of Pashtun tribes. In 1907, after decades of intrigue and (in 1878–80) another British invasion of Afghanistan, both Britain and Russia tacitly accepted that the country would be a buffer between their two Asian empires. This state of affairs ended in 1947, with the British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent. Afghanistan inherited a border dispute with the newly independent state of Pakistan. The 'Durand Line' of 1893 split Afghan Pashtuns from their ethnic kin in Pakistan's North-West Frontier region, and Pashtun nationalists called for the unification of 'Pashtunistan'.

Afghan irredentism, and Pakistan's Cold War alignment with the USA, led the royal government to turn to the Soviets, while the USSR sought closer ties with Afghanistan as part of its policy of improving relations with non-aligned Third World states. Between 1955 and 1979 the USSR provided the Afghans with an estimated $1.25 billion worth of military aid, and $1.265 billion in economic assistance. Soviet technical advisers were sent to Afghanistan, and Afghan army and air force officers were trained at Soviet military academies.[7] Although a large portion of the assistance quoted was offered to the communist regime after April 1978, it is clear that the King, Zahir Shah, enjoyed a friendly relationship with Moscow. Indeed, Soviet interests would not have suffered had the Afghan monarchy survived.

However, in July 1973 Zahir was overthrown by his cousin, Mohammed Daoud, while on a visit to Italy. Daoud abolished the monarchy, declared himself President and established a left-leaning dictatorship. Not only did the new regime inherit its predecessor's pro-Soviet policy, but Daoud also cooperated with the Afghan Communist Party (the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, or PDPA) in order to bolster his regime. Daoud's courtship of the Afghan communists had dire long-term consequences. On 27 April 1978 Soviet-trained officers overthrew and killed the President in a bloody *coup d'état*, which brought the PDPA to power, and led to the declaration of 'the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan' (or DRA). The party had established close links with Moscow, and a number of its members were KGB agents or collaborators. Yet although the USSR was quick to recognise the new regime after the so-called April (or *Saur*) Revolution, there is no firm evidence to suggest that the Soviets were either informed of, or instigated, the coup.[8]

The PDPA governed with the assistance of Soviet advisers, who also trained the Afghan armed and security forces. However, the party's support

base was within the urban elite, and it had no substantial following within the rural populace. To compound this problem, the regime was split into two factions. The Parcham ('Banner') group, the one ideologically closest to the Soviets, argued for the incremental implementation of the party's programme, taking due account of Afghanistan's Islamic cultural tradition. The Khalq ('Masses'), on the other hand, were impatient to remould Afghanistan in the PDPA's own image. Ultimately, it was the Khalq which prevailed in the intra-party struggle for power, with Nur Mohammed Taraki becoming President, and Hafizollah Amin the Prime Minister. Parcham activists were purged, arrested, tortured and killed by the secret police, the AGSA. Its wiser adherents – notably its leader, Babrak Karmal – sought asylum in the USSR and elsewhere in the Eastern bloc.[9]

Having destroyed the Parcham, the Khalq leadership then sought to impose its reform programme on Afghan society. At face value, the Khalq's aims – transferring land-ownership to the peasantry, increased literacy, the promotion of women's rights – were laudatory, and for some commentators the Kabul regime's reforms constituted a progressive programme to alleviate Afghanistan's endemic poverty. However, this interpretation ignores certain factors.[10]

First, the agrarian reform programme was imposed by the government without reference to local factors – such as land use by nomads and the allocation of water for irrigation.

Second, there was a widespread belief that the 'reforms' (notably the state education programme) were a means of imposing an atheistic ideology on an Islamic society.

Third, the Khalq had shown by their liquidation of Parcham activists that they would tolerate no opposition to their policies within the PDPA, let alone outside the party's ranks. Soviet advisers in Kabul recognised that the Khalq's revolutionary zeal would backfire, but their suggestions to temper reforms were ignored by Taraki and Amin. Given the traditional anti-authoritarianism of Afghanistan's armed clans, the AGSA's brutal repression of anti-government dissidents and the atrocities committed by government forces against recalcitrant peasants had predictable consequences.[11] It was the PDPA's own ham-fistedness and savagery which provoked the country-wide rebellion which broke out in the spring of 1979.

The Road to Soviet Intervention: March–December 1979

On 15 March 1979 an Afghan army division stationed in the western city of Herat mutinied against the PDPA, massacring the Soviet advisers and their

families, and provoking an all-out uprising. Although the Herat revolt was eventually crushed by loyalist forces, with 5,000 killed as a consequence, the rising showed that the PDPA was losing control over the country. Having hitherto rejected Soviet advice to adopt a more pragmatic domestic policy, Taraki flew to Moscow on 20 March to beg his patrons for help. The transcripts of the Politburo meetings held at this time show how unwilling the Soviets were to overtly intervene in Afghanistan. During a telephone conversation with the Premier, Alexei Kosygin, two days earlier, Taraki blamed the Herat revolt on Iranian and Pakistani agitators and requested the deployment of Soviet forces, asserting that Tajik or Uzbek soldiers could be passed off as Afghan government troops. After consulting his Politburo colleagues, Kosygin rejected Taraki's request, stating with remarkable foresight that 'if our troops were introduced the situation in your country would not only not improve but worsen', and that Soviet forces would become embroiled in a bitter civil conflict.

The Kremlin did decide to send more arms and military advisers to the DRA; from March to October 1979 the number of Soviet advisers rose from 500 to 3,500. But despite Taraki's request , and similar entreaties made by Kabul during the spring and summer of 1979, the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev were not prepared to send combat troops into Afghanistan.[12]

The Kremlin's reluctance to contemplate intervention gradually diminished as the year progressed. Despite increased Soviet aid the DRA's armed forces were losing control of the countryside. Kabul's army was disintegrating, and demoralised conscripts were deserting in their thousands. There were also repeated mutinies similar to that which had occurred in Herat – the most notable being in Jalalabad in April, and in Kabul in August and October 1979. Soviet observers realised that the government forces were moribund. To compound the regime's problems, Taraki and Amin fell out with each other, and the President sought Moscow's assistance against his rival.[13] During a meeting with Brezhnev and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, in the Kremlin on 9 September, the Afghan President was encouraged to dismiss Amin. Taraki interpreted 'dismissal' as 'murder', and soon after his return home he ordered the Premier's assassination. However, Amin summoned troops loyal to him and arrested the President. Taraki was subsequently executed on 9 October.[14]

These dramatic developments within the PDPA regime occurred concurrently with less obvious, yet significant, changes within the Kremlin's power structure. Brezhnev had suffered a series of strokes since 1973, and by 1979 he was, in Robert Service's words, 'a helpless geriatric case'. As Brezhnev's health declined, the Politburo's Commission on Afghanistan acquired more influence. The Commission consisted of Gromyko, Yuri

Andropov (the Chairman of the KGB), Dmitri Ustinov (the Defence Minister) and Boris Ponomarëv (the head of the CPSU's international department). Of these four men it was Andropov, Brezhnev's heir-apparent, who had the most authority and who became the most avid supporter of military intervention. The Commission's support for the use of force to stabilise the PDPA regime was also backed by Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, Brezhnev's chief adviser on foreign policy. Gromyko spoke out against intervention in March 1979, but the pliable Foreign Minister, who tended to follow rather than lead opinion among his peers, was persuaded by hardliners in the Kremlin to take a tougher line.[15]

What was significant was that decision-making was focused on this small group within the Politburo. Kosygin was not consulted on Afghan matters, and Ustinov overruled senior General Staff officers who expressed unease over the introduction of Soviet forces to the DRA. While Gromyko stopped discussing Afghanistan with his deputy, Georgi Kornienko, in October 1979, the KGB Chairman ignored reports from his subordinates which called into question the efficacy of overt intervention in the Afghan civil war.[16] The Kremlin's hawks therefore deliberately isolated themselves from any dissenting opinions within the policy-making structure.

For Andropov, Ustinov and other proponents of intervention, the imminent collapse of the PDPA regime, and developments in the international sphere, justified a military response. In his talks with Taraki in March Kosygin had cited the negative implications intervention would have for Soviet foreign policy in general. By the autumn of 1979, however, the 'hawks' saw this argument as moot. Détente with the West had faltered, NATO was planning to introduce medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe, and the US Senate was reluctant to ratify the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II Treaty concluded by Brezhnev and President Jimmy Carter at Vienna (June 1979).[17] Considerations of prestige were at stake, but the Soviet leadership was also influenced by a 'zero-sum' view of Cold War rivalry, in which a loss for the USSR automatically represented a gain for the West. After the suppression of Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia (August 1968) Brezhnev had declared that the 'Socialist Commonwealth' had the right to use force to stop any of its members succumbing to 'counter-revolution'. During the latter half of the 1970s, Moscow also became more proactive in providing military support to left-wing governments and 'national-liberation' movements in the Third World. The USSR airlifted arms, advisers and Cuban troops to assist both the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola in 1975, and the Ethiopians against the Somalis in 1978. The introduction of Soviet troops to Afghanistan would mark the first occasion since 1945 that the USSR had

committed forces into combat outside its sphere of influence, but this development was shaped both by the Brezhnev doctrine and the USSR's more interventionist Third World policy.[18]

To complicate matters further, both Taraki and Amin had requested the deployment of Soviet forces. In July 1979 a battalion of airborne troops (VDV) was flown from the USSR to Bagram airbase, outside Kabul, while a KGB special forces (*spetsnaz*) Company was sent to defend the Soviet embassy. On 6 December a GRU *spetsnaz* battalion was sent to Kabul, ostensibly to help protect Amin's presidential palace.[19] After September, however, the commitment of Soviet troops had two purposes, the overt role of bolstering the PDPA, and the covert one of overthrowing Amin and replacing him with a more pliable client. From Moscow's perspective, Taraki's successor was not only a disastrous leader who had inspired widespread resistance and split the regime, but he was also untrustworthy. While Brezhnev resented the manner in which Taraki had been deposed and killed, on a less personal level there were concerns within the Kremlin that Amin would become a turncoat and seek an alliance with the Americans. The Afghan leader had been educated at Columbia University in New York during the 1960s, and KGB officers spread rumours that he had been recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The USSR concluded that Amin would end up expelling Soviet advisers and would invite in the Americans, who would then recover influence lost in the region following the Islamic Revolution in Iran (February 1979). The Afghan President's meetings with the American *chargé d'affaires* in Kabul during the autumn of 1979 fuelled misplaced Soviet suspicions; the historical record shows that Amin and the Carter administration regarded each other with reciprocal loathing, thereby forestalling any American–Afghan rapprochement.[20]

The Soviet decision to intervene was drafted on 12 December 1979, after a meeting of between Andropov, Gromyko and Ustinov. Brezhnev signed the memorandum authorising invasion, entitled *On the situation in 'A'*, and it was later counter-signed by all Politburo members (with the exception of Kosygin). Arrangements were made with the Afghan General Staff on 25 December to ensure the entry of 75,000 troops into the DRA. On the same day a VDV division (103rd Guards Airborne) was flown to Kabul, while the 108th and 201st Motor Rife Divisions (MRD) crossed the Amu Darya river into Afghanistan, occupying the northern provinces and advancing on Kabul. To the West, the 5th MRD was deployed to occupy Herat and Western Afghanistan. All of this was anticipated and welcomed by the Afghan leadership. However, on 27 December Soviet special forces assaulted the presidential palace outside Kabul. After a savage fire-fight, Amin was killed and the Parcham leader, Karmal, was flown from Moscow

and imposed as the new president.[21] Having installed a more reliable regime in Kabul, the Soviets expected that their intervention would last a matter of months. This proved to be a gross miscalculation.

The International Response

The extent of international outrage at the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was expressed by a United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution passed on 14 January 1980, which condemned the USSR's actions.[22] The intervention caused grave damage to both superpower détente and to Soviet prestige in the Third World. It is therefore necessary to examine the international reaction on four levels: East–West relations, the response from Islamic countries, covert operations aimed at undermining the Soviet occupation, and UN attempts at mediation.

The American reaction was particularly strident, and President Carter declared that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan represented 'a grave threat to world peace'. Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, regarded the USSR's actions as inherently aggressive, and concluded that Moscow's objective was regional hegemony. This adversarial interpretation of Soviet intentions became more prevalent in Washington following the inauguration of President Ronald Reagan in January 1981. Reagan administration officials concluded that the occupation of Afghanistan was the first step in a policy of expansion, and that Iran and the Arab oil-producing states would be the next victims of Soviet aggression. One of Carter's final foreign policy decisions was to announce that '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'. Carter attempted to back up his 'doctrine' by establishing a Rapid Deployment Force which could be deployed to the Middle East in an emergency. Throughout the 1980s Washington prepared contingency plans for military intervention to resist a Soviet incursion into the Persian Gulf, concluding secret deals for base rights and logistical support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states.[23]

In contrast, West European countries adopted a less alarmist view of Soviet intentions. While NATO members deplored the USSR's intervention in Afghanistan, America's European allies concluded that Moscow's aims were limited to stabilising the PDPA regime. The contrast in American and European attitudes was demonstrated by the transatlantic disputes over sanctions against the USSR. The US boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and cut grain sales to the Soviets, and the Americans expected their allies to

curtail trade and cultural contacts with the Eastern bloc. However, the West Europeans, in particular the French, were unwilling to sacrifice both continental détente and their commercial links with the USSR and Eastern Europe, and this attitude also affected NATO's response to the Solidarity crisis in Poland.[24]

The introduction of Soviet troops to Afghanistan also affected the communist world. The USSR's intervention caused more trouble between Moscow and the 'Eurocommunist' parties, such as the Italian PCI, and (coming soon after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the Sino-Vietnamese border war) caused further tension between the USSR and China.[25] The Warsaw Pact countries were naturally obliged to endorse Moscow's actions, although Hungary and Poland were concerned about the intervention's polarising effect on East–West relations, and by the collapse of détente.[26]

What was of greater consequence for the USSR was the damage done to its prestige in the Third World. After December 1979, the Soviets had great difficulty re-establishing their anti-imperialist credentials with the non-aligned states. The response of Islamic countries was particularly virulent, even traditional allies such as Iraq were hostile. Arab states provided financial and military assistance to the *mujahidin*, while thousands of volunteers from Muslim countries – including a young Saudi millionaire, named Osama bin Laden, who co-founded a 'Bureau of Services' (*Mekhtab al-Khidmat*) channelling foreign recruits to Afghanistan – flocked to Pakistan to fight in the anti-Soviet jihad.

Pakistan's position proved to be pivotal, as a vast number of Afghan refugees had taken sanctuary on its soil. Among the refugees were thousands of potential mujahidin recruits, and Peshawar became the political centre for the anti-PDPA resistance. For the Pakistani military dictator, General Zia ul-Haq, the USSR's intervention in Afghanistan represented both a threat and an opportunity. Zia feared that Moscow and Kabul would revive the DRA's claim to 'Pushtunistan', and that Pakistan would face Soviet pressure to the north, as well as a hostile India. The Pakistani military remembered the secession of Bangladesh in 1971, and believed that the survival of their country was at stake. Zia was, however, also thinking of the possible benefits his country would gain. By aiding the anti-communist resistance, he could install a pro-Pakistani regime in Kabul. Islamabad also demanded the lifting of the sanctions the Carter administration had imposed on Pakistan, as a consequence of its nuclear programme and the Zia regime's unsavoury human rights record, and held out for increased military aid as a price for cooperation with American plans to assist the mujahidin.[27]

The covert aid programme to the Afghan resistance groups incorporated the USA, Britain, France, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and China. The Carter administration had channelled funds to the mujahidin before December 1979, and the introduction of Soviet troops encouraged an increase in the flow of US aid. Under Carter and Reagan, the USA provided a total of $2.15 billion worth of assistance to mujahidin groups between 1979 and 1988, and this assistance was matched by the Saudi monarchy. Initially, arms were provided by Egypt and China, which had stocks of Soviet bloc weaponry, and were even purchased from Warsaw Pact countries, so as to preserve the fiction of 'plausible deniability' essential to any covert operation. However, by the late 1980s the mujahidin were receiving weapons which were Western in origin, such as the American Stinger anti-aircraft (AA) missile. The provision of Stinger occurred only after a prolonged debate in Washington between officials who simply wanted to keep the mujahidin fighting, and those – such as the CIA Director, William Casey – who wanted the Soviets to be militarily defeated by the Afghan resistance. Casey and like-minded officials subsequently prevailed, and the increase in aid to the mujahidin was outlined in the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD-166), 'Expanded US Aid to Afghan Guerrillas', which Reagan signed in April 1985. US officials and Congressional proponents of increased aid to the Afghan resistance also recalled the extensive assistance the USSR gave to North Vietnam during its war with the USA. The decision to sustain the mujahidin with increased funds and arms was therefore based not only on the strategic benefits of embroiling a Cold War adversary in a protracted, debilitating guerrilla conflict, but also on a vengeful desire to make the Soviets suffer their own Vietnam.[28]

Although it has become an article of faith since 9/11 that 'the West created Al-Qaeda and bin Laden' by supporting the anti-Soviet jihad, the reality is far more complex. Although up to 10,000 Arab and foreign Muslim volunteers are said to have travelled to Pakistan to fight in Afghanistan, there is no evidence of any connection between bin Laden and Western intelligence services. The former's involvement in the war against the Soviets appears to have been an autonomous one, assisted by funds provided through the Saudi government and religious charities.[29]

As far as aid to the Afghan mujahidin was concerned, donors had their own specific clients amongst the fragmented resistance movement. MI6 and its French counterpart (the DGSE) established a good working relationship with Ahmed Shah Massoud, the skilled guerrilla leader who controlled the Panjshir valley north-east of Kabul, and some of Massoud's commanders were brought to the UK to be trained by the SAS. While Iran provided aid to the Shia Hazaras, the Saudis looked to mujahidin leaders

who were ideologically closest to the Wahhabi doctrine of Islam, such as Abdurrab Rasuf Sayyaf. Throughout the war Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) had almost complete control over American largesse to the Afghan resistance. The CIA concluded an informal agreement with the Pakistani government ceding to ISI the dispersal of arms and money to the mujahidin, and CIA officers were even barred by Islamabad from crossing into Afghanistan. Zia's regime therefore ensured that its clients, notably Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami Party, received the most assistance. Hekhmatyar was the most radical of the Islamic mujahidin leaders, and was virulently anti-American. What was worse was that the ISI's policy towards the mujahidin had a divisive effect on the Afghan resistance, contributing to feuding and infighting between its various components.[30]

In late February 1982 the UN Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, appointed an Ecuadorean diplomat, Diego Cordovez, to be his personal representative on Afghanistan. Cordovez was involved in 'shuttle talks' between Washington, Moscow, Kabul and Islamabad, and from August 1984 proximity talks were held between the US, Soviet, Afghan and Pakistani governments at the UN Secretariat in Geneva. These talks failed to make any progress until 1988, although hopes for a negotiated Soviet withdrawal were raised during Andropov's tenure as CPSU General Secretary. Both the Reagan administration and General Zia's regime were retrospectively blamed for blocking a Soviet departure because they refused to cease arming the mujahidin. However, the sincerity of Andropov's commitment to a withdrawal is open to doubt. During a Politburo meeting in March 1983 the Soviet leader gave no indication that he considered the war in Afghanistan to be unwinnable – the record of the meeting indicates otherwise. A further problem with the UN-brokered talks is that they did not include the mujahidin and therefore did not bind the resistance groups to any peace agreement reached as a consequence of the quadripartite talks at Geneva; this was an omission which later had grave consequences.[31]

Fighting the War: 1980–1988

The initial Soviet invasion force in December 1979 consisted of 75,000 troops. By 1984, the USSR's 40th Army, or the 'Limited Contingent of Soviet forces in Afghanistan' as it was known (*Ogranichennovo Kontingenta Sovietskikh Voisk v Afganistane*, or OKSVA), had between 110,000 and 120,000 in its ranks. There were also around 10,000 personnel from the KGB and Interior Ministry (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Dyel*, or MVD) involved in operations in the conflict. The war effort also incorporated army and air force

units based in Central Asia, and KGB Border Guard units stationed along the Soviet–Afghan frontier. Nonetheless, the Soviet military contribution to the war was still smaller than that of the USA in Vietnam, where by 1968 there were over 500,000 US servicemen involved in the conflict in Indochina. The Soviet armed forces were required to retain their posture against NATO in Europe, and against China in the Far East, particularly when relations with both its main adversaries deteriorated. By 1970, the USA had committed 21 per cent of its military strength to South-East Asia. In contrast, the USSR never deployed more than a mere 2.1 per cent of its forces to Afghanistan.[32]

An additional problem was that the initial invasion force in December 1979 was composed of units bolstered by Central Asian reservists, who proved to be 'unreliable'. Moscow was therefore obliged to send Russian and other Slavic troops to the DRA in greater numbers. Furthermore, around 30–35 per cent of 40th Army's manpower was committed to the defence of Afghan cities and bases, rendering these forces unavailable for mobile operations against the mujahidin.[33]

Moscow initially hoped that the 40th Army's objectives would be restricted both in time and scale. The USSR's military intervention was envisaged as a short-term measure which would bolster the Kabul regime and its armed forces both materially and psychologically. Combat operations against the mujahidin were left to the Afghan government forces. The 40th Army's initial objectives were as follows:

- To hold Afghanistan's major cities, airbases, and key communications routes.
- To relieve the Afghan army of garrison duties and to push them into the countryside to fight the mujahidin.
- To provide logistical, air, artillery and intelligence support to the Afghan government forces.
- To limit Soviet casualties.
- To bolster the Afghan Army and other DRA forces, so that once the mujahidin had been beaten 40th Army could withdraw.

By mid-1980, however, it became clear that the Afghan government forces were incapable of defeating, or even confronting, the mujahidin. The Soviets had stabilised the situation in Kabul, and other cities, but the countryside was largely lost to rebels. By 1982, 40th Army became embroiled in operations against the anti-government resistance. The scale and scope of Soviet operations declined in 1983, at a time when Andropov was apparently searching for a UN-brokered settlement. In 1984 and 1985, during the brief interregnum of Konstantin Chernenko, the Soviet war effort in

Afghanistan intensified. After Mikhail Gorbachev became CPSU General Secretary (in March 1985), 40th Army's involvement in operations progressively decreased from early 1986 up until its withdrawal in February 1989. The reasons for this, and the factors which led to the end of the Soviet military intervention, are discussed below.[34]

The 40th Army's tactics reflected the Soviet armed forces' organisation for a high-intensity war with NATO or China, not a counter-insurgency conflict. During the first three years of the campaign, Soviet forces were involved in large-unit conventional sweep operations backed by armour and massive preparatory artillery bombardments. In the face of these onslaughts, the mujahidin would melt into the countryside, re-emerging once the impetus of any offensive had been spent, and when Soviet and Afghan government troops had ceded physical control of the battlefield. This pattern was demonstrated by the repeated efforts made to subdue the Panjshir valley. Between the spring of 1980 and the autumn of 1982, the Soviets and Afghan forces launched six offensives, the last involving 10,000 Soviet and 4,000 DRA troops, backed by armour, helicopter and fixed-wing air support. In each case, Massoud's guerrillas would disperse into the mountains surrounding the valley, re-emerging to ambush the attackers once they had ceded the initiative. After a short truce in 1983, the Soviet/DRA forces made repeated, but futile, efforts to subdue the Panjshir valley until 1987.[35]

From 1984 onwards, 40th Army began to refine its COIN tactics, focusing more on mobile operations aimed at confronting and destroying mujahidin groups. Ground forces were also regrouped for brigade and battalion-level operations, and the Soviets also targeted hitherto inaccessible guerrilla sanctuaries close to the Pakistani border with heliborne raiding groups. However, barely 15–20 per cent of Soviet manpower was sufficiently well-trained to act in a mobile COIN role, and these were concentrated in the *spetsnaz*, VDV, air assault and reconnaissance (*razvedka*) units. Most of 40th Army's forces were concentrated in motor-rifle formations, with troops mounted in armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs) and armoured personnel carriers (APCs), supported by tanks. These forces were road-bound, not suited to the task of combating lightly armed guerrillas in mountainous terrain, and were largely confined to convoy escort duties. The applicability of certain weapons systems was also questionable. Tanks were useless, but helicopter gunships (notably the Mi-24 'Hind') and ground attack aircraft (such as the Su-25 'Frogfoot') were more effective in combat against the mujahidin.[36]

The Soviet Army also suffered from the inflexibility of its command structure, from the platoon to the divisional level, and from the limited

skills of its conscripts. The war in Afghanistan was a light infantryman's war, and basic infantry skills – dismounted combat, fieldcraft, marksmanship, small unit tactics – were often lacking in Soviet units. The Soviet military had no conception of 'mission command', and permitted little initiative on the part of officers and non-commissioned officers. Indeed, the majority of the latter (up to the rank of sergeant) were senior conscripts, whose experience and military skills were barely better than the privates they led. This meant that in battles with the mujahidin 40th Army's response was often sluggish and inflexible, leading to needless casualties and wasted opportunities to close with and destroy the enemy.[37]

One of the most damaging aspects of the Soviet war effort was the dislocation of strategic aims from the anti-mujahidin campaign. Not all of this was entirely the fault of Soviet officials – one of 40th Army's commanders claimed that the USSR provided 100 million roubles in aid to Kabul in 1981 alone, but that the bulk of this assistance was embezzled by the PDPA regime.[38] Yet the basic problem for Soviet strategy was that although its objective was to preserve the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul, the manner in which the COIN campaign was prosecuted by 40th Army undermined the PDPA's credibility and legitimacy. This became apparent between 1984 and 1986, when the Soviets effectively settled on a strategy described by the anthropologist Louis Dupree as 'migratory genocide'. Villages were destroyed, thousands of civilians died in air and artillery bombardments, the rural agricultural infrastructure was wrecked, and many Afghans fled into exile. As Scott McMichael points out, '[rather] than drive the mujahidin from the countryside, the Soviets elected to drive off the population' which fed, sheltered and supplied the resistance.

A particularly repulsive feature of this effort was the sowing of the countryside with anti-personnel mines, in particular the air-dropped PFM-1 and PFM-1s ('Butterfly') mine which Afghan children easily mistook for toys.[39] In contrast with the US and British armed forces, which have struggled to balance the coercive elements of COIN with the political and psychological methods of isolating insurgents from their support base, the Soviets in Afghanistan focused almost exclusively on the terrorisation of the populace and its physical separation from the insurgency, irrespective of the human costs. This ruthless approach to COIN is unlikely to succeed unless the counterinsurgent can employ overwhelming force against its adversaries and the civil populace. With a force of 130,000 troops at the most, and the doubtful asset that was the DRA's armed and security forces, the Soviets lacked the means to crush resistance in Afghanistan by brute force.[40]

The DRA government forces consisted of the army, air force and a gendarmerie (*Sarandoy*) of around 20,000 men. The regime also possessed

its secret police force (renamed the KHAD), which had an estimated strength of 15,000–30,000 backed by around 100,000 informers. KHAD proved to be an effective, if brutal, arm of the PDPA regime, and had considerable success in using pseudo-gangs and black propaganda operations to penetrate the resistance and to exacerbate inter-mujahidin feuding.[41] The regular armed forces ostensibly stood at 90,000 strong (80,000 in the Army). In fact, the Army was sapped by desertions, and by early 1980 stood at 20,000 at most. Some Afghan units resisted the Soviets in December 1979, and were destroyed or disbanded as a result. Although the armed forces were built up to 35,000–40,000 in the mid-1980s, they were still generally unreliable.

Relations between the Soviets and their Afghan allies were generally characterised by mutual distrust and contempt. The Soviets made no pretence of treating the Kabul government as an equal partner, while the supposedly loyal DRA forces were riddled with mujahidin agents and informants. Attacks on Soviet or government bases often occurred with the connivance of Afghan military personnel. Khalq–Parcham feuding persisted within the officer corps and the state structure as a whole, and clashes between rival DRA units were common. Conscription was unpopular, and many soldiers deserted to the resistance, taking their weapons with them. In the latter stages of the war the Kabul regime relied increasingly on hired tribal militias, rather than regular troops. While militia groups such as General Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jauzjani put up more of a fight against the mujahidin, they were liable to change sides if the tide of battle turned, or once their pay ran out.[42]

The war in Afghanistan also revealed, and in some respects exacerbated, social problems within the Soviet military machine. The 40th Army's medical services were poor, and disease was rife. The extensive record of atrocities committed against Afghan civilians testified to the Soviet Army's disciplinary problems. Alcoholism and drug abuse were endemic, as was the systematic bullying of junior conscripts by senior soldiers, referred to in Russian as *dyedovshchina*. There were also serious racial tensions between Slavic and Muslim soldiers, similar in nature to the feuds which often occurred between black and white US servicemen during the latter years of the Vietnam war. Combined with corruption within the officer corps (sometimes manifested by weapons sales to the mujahidin), these weaknesses contributed to the collapse of the Soviet armed forces in the late 1980s.[43]

Estimates of mujahidin strength vary between 90,000 and 500,000 – a fluctuation explained by the seasonal nature of resistance in certain regions. Mujahidin tactics focused upon attacks on supply routes, and Soviet or

Afghan government convoys and outposts. The 40th Army's critical shortage of helicopters (which hampered its own anti-guerrilla operations) and the lack of suitable airfields for transport aircraft meant that Soviet garrisons were logistically dependent upon road-bound convoys. Mujahidin groups attacked these columns both in order to loot arms and equipment, and to deprive their enemy of much-needed supplies. Guerrillas also conducted sabotage attacks against airbases, power stations and government buildings, and assassinated PDPA officials. The mujahidin even made incursions into the Central Asian republics in order to create havoc on the Soviet Union's own doorstep. These raids were eventually called off by Washington in the spring of 1987 because of concerns over potential Soviet retaliation against Pakistan.[44] The mujahidin initially relied on the personal weapons which adult male tribesmen traditionally possessed. The resistance acquired Kalashnikov assault rifles, mortars, machine guns and other heavy weapons, either captured from Soviet and DRA troops, or handed over by deserting Afghan soldiers. The arms provided through Western, Saudi and Pakistani covert action were initially Eastern bloc in origin, so as to disguise the source of supply.

From late 1986, the Americans supplied Stinger AA missiles to the mujahidin in order to combat the Soviet air threat. The Stinger was credited by CIA veterans and Reagan administration officials as a war-winning weapon which enabled Afghan guerrillas to shoot down the aircraft and helicopter gunships that had hitherto preyed upon them. Soviet pilots certainly became less confident in pressing their attacks against the mujahidin. In contrast, Mark Urban attributes the decrease in Soviet air operations to the winding down of the war effort in Afghanistan which took place soon after Gorbachev took power.[45]

The varying resistance groups enjoyed considerable popular support, both within Afghanistan and the Pakistani refugee camps. The mujahidin incorporated traditional Pashtun royalists, ethnically based insurgents, freebooters and Islamic factions of varying extremes. Within Afghanistan, the most effective guerrilla groups were Massoud's predominantly Tajik force, the Herat province group led by Ismail Khan (the leader of the March 1979 rising), and Abdul Haq's insurgents, who launched guerrilla/terrorist attacks in Kabul. Yet the mujahidin groups varied in calibre, while assistance was allocated by Islamabad according to the political and Islamic allegiances of differing Afghan groups, not for their prowess against the Soviets. The lack of a unified political programme and disputes between the various factions, exacerbated by Pakistani meddling, proved to be the Afghan resistance's most serious weakness. Clashes between mujahidin groups were not infrequent; the Hazara groups, generally unmolested by the Soviets

throughout the war, spent most of their time fighting each other. Feuding between resistance factions, notably that which Hekmatyar waged against Massoud and his political patron, Burhanuddin Rabbani, undermined efforts to create a successor regime to the PDPA, and contributed to the bloody civil war which followed the mujahidin's victory in 1992.[46]

The Soviet Withdrawal

After Chernenko's death on 10 March 1985, Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) by his Politburo colleagues. Gorbachev initially gave the military a chance to bombard the mujahidin into submission, but it did not take long for him to lose patience with the war. At the 27th CPSU Congress in February 1986 he publicly referred to the conflict as a 'bleeding wound' (*krotovochashchaya rana*). Gorbachev's condemnation of the war in Afghanistan was a reflection of his policy of *glasnost* (openness). His predecessors had said very little about the USSR's role in the Afghan conflict, and the state media glossed over the 'internationalist duty' of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, portraying the mujahidin (if ever their existence was acknowledged) as mere 'bandits' in the pay of foreign powers. After 1986, the Soviet press became more frank in its portrayal of conditions in Afghanistan, and the more daring journalists questioned the legitimacy of both the war and the regime in Kabul. Gorbachev's relaxation of censorship and the liberalisation of the press was intended to assist his policy of internal reform, known as *perestroika*, but it also revealed unease within the populace over the Afghan conflict. Whether manifested by bereaved mothers who had lost sons in Afghanistan, draft-dodgers, or nationalists from the Baltic States wondering why they should die in one of Russia's wars, it was a sentiment which became more obvious as *glasnost* progressed.[47]

Gorbachev's readiness to abandon Afghanistan derived from two factors. First, excessive military expenditure had dislocated the Soviet economy, and the costs of the war were an additional burden. The CIA estimated that by December 1986 the USSR had spent 15 billion roubles on Afghanistan. In fact, both the war and financial aid to the DRA cost the Soviets a total of 60 billion roubles (around $40 million).[48] Second, the cause of *perestroika* would be helped if the USSR's relations with the Western powers improved, and the war in Afghanistan was an unnecessary barrier to better relations with both NATO countries and China.

The decision to pull out of the war was effectively made at a meeting held on 13 November 1986. The Chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, bluntly told his political masters that '[we] have lost

the battle. The majority of the Afghan people right now are with the counter-revolution.' The problem for Gorbachev – as it was for the Nixon administration over Vietnam – was to find a face-saving way out of the mess that his predecessors had bequeathed to him.[49]

About six months before the Politburo made its decision on withdrawal, Karmal was ousted as President of Afghanistan by the Soviets on 5 May 1986, and was replaced by Gorbachev with the head of KHAD, Dr Mohamed Najibullah. Under Soviet prompting, Karmal had declared a policy of 'national reconciliation' in November 1985, and Najibullah appointed 'non-party' figures to his government, made concessions to Islam, renamed the country the 'Republic of Afghanistan', and appealed to tribal groups to win them over to the government side. Despite Najibullah's boasts, the rhetoric of 'national reconciliation' made little headway with the mujahidin groups, although the regime was able to bolster its support amongst the non-Pashtun (notably the Uzbek) populace. The PDPA was still divided by infighting, and the former chief of KHAD inspired no confidence in his peers. Furthermore, as an individual who had been responsible for the arrest, torture and extra-judicial murder of a multitude of Afghans, Najibullah was not in much of a position to pursue a policy of 'reconciliation'.[50]

The settlement which led to the Soviet withdrawal derived from the 'proximity talks' held under UN auspices in Geneva since 1984, but these negotiations only assumed significance once it became clear that Gorbachev wanted to withdraw. However, the Soviets, the Pakistanis and the Americans both refused to cease supplying their respective Afghan clients, and there was until the last moment considerable scepticism on Washington's part as to whether the Soviets intended to leave Afghanistan. The Geneva Accords were finally signed by the USA, the USSR, Afghanistan and Pakistan on 14 April 1988. The withdrawal of the 'Limited Contingent' commenced on 15 May, and was completed on 15 February 1989.[51] In a staged ceremony to mark 40th Army's return its commander, General Boris Gromov, was the last soldier to cross the Amu Darya river onto Soviet soil. Gromov's act of symbolism did not disguise the reality that the Soviet armed forces had suffered their first Cold War defeat. Moreover, the Geneva accords did not only exclude the mujahidin, but they did not prevent future foreign meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs.[52]

The Aftermath

After 40th Army's withdrawal, Washington expected that Najibullah's fall was imminent. However, the war between Kabul and the mujahidin continued, with the Soviets, the Americans and Pakistanis providing

arms to their respective clients.[53] Despite predictions of immediate defeat, Afghan government forces were able to hold their own against the mujahidin, defeating the latter's efforts to seize the eastern city of Jalalabad (March–May 1989) and subsequently clearing the Paghman district (near Kabul) of rebel forces (April–May 1990). However, the collapse of the USSR in December 1991 deprived the Najibullah regime of its main means of support. Without arms supplies or adequate funding, government forces disintegrated, pro-regime militias switched sides, and the mujahidin captured Kabul on 16 April 1992. Najibullah was forced to seek refuge with the UN mission in the capital, remaining in this sanctuary until 27 September 1996, shortly after the Taliban seized Kabul, when he was tortured and lynched by Taliban militiamen.[54]

According to official figures, the USSR lost 13,933 killed in operations in Afghanistan (a hundred or so being 'advisers' killed before December 1979). 469,685 soldiers were wounded, and of these 10,751 were classed as 'invalids'. The 40th Army veterans, nicknamed *afgantsy*, returned to a country on the verge of disintegration. Many were radicalised by their experiences, and turned against the Soviet system. Some Central Asian *afgantsy* returned from the war as born-again Muslims – one veteran, Juma Namangani, founded the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which became affiliated with Al-Qaeda.[55]

As far as the wider Soviet bloc was concerned, Andrew Bennett argues that the defeat in Afghanistan discouraged the Kremlin from resorting to the use of force to suppress the East European revolutions in 1989. However, the Afghan experience did not prevent the Soviet leadership from crushing the Georgian and Azeri nationalist rebellions, nor did it forestall the suppression of the Lithuanian and Latvian independence movements in 1991.[56] After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian nationalists drew a direct link between the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the USSR's collapse, believing that Russia had to use force as a means of preserving its influence over the former Soviet Union and to prevent the disintegration of the Russian Federation. This sentiment, shared by the governments of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, was one factor influencing the Russian military interventions in Tajikistan, Moldova, and the Transcaucasus. It also was a contributory factor to the two wars Russia has fought to suppress secessionist rebels in Chechnya (1994–96, and 1999 onwards), although the Russian military's conduct of both wars shows that it has yet to incorporate the lessons of the failures its Soviet predecessor suffered in Afghanistan into its current doctrine.[57]

Could the Soviets have won? Mark Galeotti points out that in proportion to the US war effort in Vietnam Soviet involvement in Afghanistan was

far more limited, and he argues that a greater concentration of force could have defeated the mujahidin. This assessment should be treated with caution. It is true that the combat-effectiveness of the mujahidin groups was variable, and as far as the US-led covert aid programme was concerned, great claims were made about the allegedly war-winning role of the Stinger and other weapons supplied to the resistance. There were, however, specific weaknesses on the Soviet/Afghan government side which should be highlighted.

First, certain options were not open to Moscow. The Americans and South Vietnamese escalated the war in Indochina with military incursions into Cambodia and Laos, but Soviets opted not to assault mujahidin havens in Pakistan, as such an action would have precipitated a major East–West crisis.

Second, the Soviet war effort was as hampered by bureaucratic infighting over operational and policy decisions between the CPSU, military and KGB, both in Kabul and in Moscow.

Third, the Soviets failed to uphold the sovereignty of the PDPA. Indeed, incidents such as Gorbachev's removal of Karmal illustrated Soviet contempt for their Afghan clients, which did little to promote the PDPA's legitimacy.[58]

Finally, the communist cause in Afghanistan was undermined by the Soviets themselves. States wage war to achieve a political goal, but in this case the devastation inflicted on Afghanistan compounded the Khalq regime's loss of legitimacy in 1978–79. The destruction wrought by the Soviet army and air force served only to further discredit the Kabul regime in the eyes of ordinary Afghans, and to drive the latter into the arms of the mujahidin.

McMichael argues that a significant factor behind the Soviet defeat was the CPSU's own ideology, which precluded the adoption of an effective COIN strategy. The Soviet Army and security forces had fought guerrillas in the past – during the Russian Civil War (1918–21), against the Turkestan Basmachi rebels in Central Asia during the 1920s, and against Ukrainian and Baltic nationalists during and after World War II. However, according to Marxist-Leninist ideology 'wars of national liberation' were waged by progressive, socialist movements against reactionary governments. Socialist governments faced with internal revolt were dealing with a 'counter-revolution', fought on behalf of the former ruling classes. Soviet officials were ideologically restricted by what Colonel Tsagolov called 'old thinking', could not conceive of a popular uprising against a left-wing regime, and therefore failed to develop a political strategy to deprive the mujahidin of its support base.

The consequences of Soviet intervention for Afghanistan itself were both devastating and far-reaching. Around 1 million Afghans were killed, and according to the World Heath Organisation 1.5 million more were crippled. Another 5–6 million Afghans were driven into refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. The country's already underdeveloped infrastructure had been wrecked by the Soviet 'scorched earth' campaign. Yet Afghanistan's plight was compounded by four developments which followed the departure of Soviet forces: the West's neglect of Afghan affairs once the Cold War ended, the collapse of the country in the early 1990s and the subsequent rise of the Taliban, continued meddling in Afghan politics by Pakistan and other regional powers, and the involvement in Afghanistan of radical Islamist fighters bent upon jihad.

After Najibullah's overthrow in April 1992 the mujahidin factions fought each other in a civil war which compounded Afghanistan's misery. The conflict started with Hekmatyar's attempts to seize power from Rabbani's government, and degenerated into a war between the Pashtuns and other ethnic groups. The depredations of mujahidin commanders in Kandahar province helped inspire the rise of an Islamic militia led by Mullah Mohammed Omar, known subsequently as the *Taliban* (the plural of *talib*, meaning a student of Islam) in the spring of 1994. Capitalising on Pashtun support, widespread popular desire for an end to anarchy, and financial and logistical assistance from Pakistan, the Taliban conquered nearly all of Afghanistan, governing the country according on harsh, theocratic lines. Although neighbouring powers worried by the Taliban's ideology and Pakistani influence (notably Russia, Iran and India) provided military aid to the remnants of the mujahidin, known collectively as the 'Northern Alliance', by the autumn of 2001 the Taliban's enemies were on the verge of defeat.[59]

Had Mullah Omar not offered Afghanistan as a haven for radical Islamist extremism, it is highly likely that the USA and other Western powers would have continued to treat the country as a strategic backwater. However, the jihad against communism not only inspired veterans of the Afghan war to launch terrorist campaigns in Algeria, Egypt and elsewhere in the Muslim world during the 1990s, but it also encouraged bin Laden and his peers to declare a holy war against the world's remaining superpower and its allies. Ironically enough, 'Arab' fighters in Afghanistan were loathed by the majority of Afghans. During the 1980s mujahidin guerrillas generally viewed them as war tourists, and subsequently Afghan civilians grew to hate foreign jihadis for their intolerance and brutality. Taliban leaders, in contrast, granted bin Laden and Al-Qaeda sanctuary from 1996 onwards, using Arab, Pakistani and other foreign fighters as their shock

troops in their struggle against the Northern Alliance. As a consequence, the Taliban made themselves a target for regime change by the Bush administration after the mass casualty attacks its Al-Qaeda surrogates conducted against the USA in September 2001.[60]

The Soviet–Afghan war was therefore not only a catalyst for the USSR's collapse and the end of the Cold War, but was ultimately also a significant factor in inspiring both Al-Qaeda's jihad against 'Jews, crusaders and apostates', and the politically and militarily complex task of stabilisation and state-building which the Western powers are currently attempting in Afghanistan today.

NOTES

1 The analysis, opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, the Defence Academy, Ministry of Defence or any other UK government agency.
2 The first quote is taken from a translated version from the website of the National Security Archive ⟨www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/⟩. The second quote is from Jan Goodwin, *Caught in the Crossfire* (London: Macdonald 1987) p.175.
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10 For an exceptionally naive view of the Khalq's reforms, see William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War Two* (London: Zed Books 2003) pp.338–52.
11 Rubin, *Afghanistan* (note 6) pp.115–21; Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10 2001* (London: Penguin 2004) p.41. Maley, *Afghanistan Wars* (note 8) pp.29–30.
12 Transcripts of Politburo meetings, 17–19 March 1979; conversation between Kosygin and Taraki on 18 March 1979; and meeting between Kosygin and Taraki on 20 March 1979, in Odd Arne Westad, 'Situation in "A": New Evidence on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan', *CWIHP Bulletin* 8/9 (Winter 1996) pp.136–45, 145–50. See also meeting

between Brezhnev and Taraki on 20 March 1979, *CWIHP Bulletin* 4 (1994) pp.73–4. As the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU), Brezhnev was the leading figure within the Politburo, possessing far greater authority than the Premier, Kosygin.

13 Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute 1994) pp.1001–2, 1008; report by Deputy Defence Minister I.G. Pavlovskii, 5 Nov. 1979, 'Soviet Intervention' (note 12) p.158.

14 Odd Arne Westad, 'Prelude to Invasion: The Soviet Union and the Afghan Communists, 1978– 1979', *International History Review* 16/1 (1994) pp.61–2.

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16 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (note 13) pp.1012–13, 1035. Westad, 'Situation in "A"' (note 12) pp.130–1.

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19 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (note 130) pp.1002, 1008–9, 1013. Maley, *Afghanistan Wars* (note 8) p.34.

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21 This memorandum (P176/125) is in *CWIHP Bulletin* 4, p.76; Maley, *Afghanistan Wars* (note 8) p.33; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (note 13) pp.1016–18.

22 Galeotti, *Afghanistan* (note 6) p.221. For the UN General Assembly Emergency Session of Afghanistan (10–14 Jan. 1980), see ⟨www.un.org/ga/documents/liemsps.htm/⟩.

23 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation* (note 13) pp.1050–55; Crockatt, *Fifty Years War* (note 13) pp.287–8; Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (Free Press 2004) pp.38–9.

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27 Oles Smolansky and Bettie Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq* (Durham, NC: Duke UP 1991) p.217; Coll, *Ghost Wars* (note 11) pp.61–74;. Mark Adkin and Mohammed Yousaf, *Afghanistan, the Bear Trap: Defeat of a Superpower* (London: Leo Cooper 2001).

28 Galeotti, *Afghanistan* (note 6) p.18. John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee 1996) pp.359–66. See also George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press 2003).

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