



Afghanistan: Lessons of the Soviet War (U//FOUO)

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Our review of the accounts of Soviet, Pakistani, Afghan, and Arab players in the Soviet Union's decade-long war in Afghanistan identified three key lessons:

- ***Afghanistan's complexities undermined policy plans.*** The Soviets were prescient in identifying the major challenges they would face in Afghanistan and in some cases developed robust plans to address them. Nonetheless, Afghanistan's geographic and ethnic complexity, together with its lack of development, made implementation of these plans difficult even when significant resources were committed.
- ***Attempts to modernize Afghanistan hindered stabilization.*** Both the Soviets and the Afghan government assumed that stabilizing Afghanistan required the modernization of key political, social, and economic structures. Yet efforts to bring about this transformation often challenged deeply held societal norms, alienating the populace and further undermining the legitimacy of a central government already seen by the bulk of the Afghan people as foreign.
- ***Exploiting Afghans' economic self-interest was important.*** Although the conflict is often seen as ideological, participants on all sides noted that economic self-interest was a dominant motivator. Arab fighters were shocked to learn that the loyalties of Afghans at all levels of society and government were often for hire. Pakistan effectively exploited these motivations, but Soviet participants highlighted them as a missed opportunity in the fight against the resistance.
(U//FOUO)

"There is no single piece of land in Afghanistan that has not been occupied by a Soviet soldier....no single military problem that has arisen and not been solved, and yet there is still no result." Sergei Akhromeyev, Soviet General Staff Chief, 1986 (U//FOUO)

Scope of this Study (U)

Open Source Works analysts fluent in Russian, Dari/Farsi, Arabic, Urdu, Tajik, and Uzbek reviewed government documents, as well as accounts, histories, and memoirs written by a wide range of participants in the Soviet Afghan War – Soviet civilian officials, diplomats, and military personnel; pro-Soviet Afghan government officials; Afghan resistance members; Arab mujahadeen; and Pakistani supporters of the Afghan resistance. We studied contemporaneous accounts of the war as well as insights published in the decades afterward, concentrating on the political, economic, and social dynamics of both Soviet operations and resistance activities. Because there have been numerous assessments of the USSR's military tactics, we did not address them in this study. Complete findings of the study are available on the Open Source Works portal on Intelink-U. (U//FOUO)

Background (U//FOUO)

According to Politburo transcripts and insider accounts, Moscow recognized early many of the fundamental challenges it would face in Afghanistan and launched a variety of initiatives to address them. Many were similar to the challenges now facing the US – establishing a legitimate and effective central government; securing the border with Pakistan; developing a functioning economy; and building productive center-periphery relations – in a country composed of highly fragmented, traditional micro-societies lacking a common national identity or functioning infrastructure. (U//FOUO)

By the time Gorbachev became General Secretary in 1985 it was apparent that Moscow's exertions in Afghanistan were bearing little fruit. Following an extensive policy review, the Politburo concluded that the only viable alternative to fighting for twenty to thirty years was withdrawal. (U//FOUO)

Gorbachev's goal was relatively modest: to leave Afghanistan a "neutral" country with a government that could maintain control of Kabul. Yet it took the Soviet government nearly four years to prepare and complete the withdrawal. When the last Soviet soldier returned home through the Salang tunnel twenty years ago, it marked the end of a ten-year campaign that cost the Soviets thousands of lives and billions of dollars, and profoundly shaped the Afghanistan of today. (U//FOUO)

Lesson One: Even Sound Plans Proved Difficult to Implement in Afghanistan (U//FOUO)

Contrary to popular belief, the Soviets anticipated as early as 1979 the major problems they would face but could not deal effectively with them, despite in some cases devoting substantial financial and human resources.

- Moreover, although the Soviets were burdened by a controversial political system and coordinated opposition from multiple international parties, they were largely free from domestic political constraints in devoting significant financial and human resources to the conflict.
- Declassified documents from Politburo meetings in the months prior to invasion indicate that Soviet leadership struggled in particular with central government legitimacy; economic development; religious and ethnic diversity; and border control. (U//FOUO)

The Problem of Central Government Legitimacy (U//FOUO)

The Soviet leadership was well aware prior to the invasion that the Afghan government lacked legitimacy and that the Soviet presence would exacerbate this.

- In the spring of 1979, the Politburo concluded there was no support for the Afghan government: the most popular leaders had been killed or purged, and no

one trusted the leadership as a result of its "financial corruption," "violence towards arrested persons," "extreme measures and unjustified repression." In fact, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin observed: "Almost nobody does support the government." The Politburo noted that the government was opposed by a diverse set of forces, united only in "their common negative relation" to the regime.

- The Politburo concluded that the Soviet presence would "[bring] the attack of anti-governmental forces to a much higher level." Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko argued: "Our Army, if it enters Afghanistan, will be an aggressor. Against whom will it fight? Against the Afghan people first of all, and it will have to shoot at them." Central Committee Secretary Andrei Kirilenko reiterated: "...we will be required to wage war in significant part against the people." Kosygin agreed, adding: "[A] people does not forgive such things." (U//FOUO)

Moscow made inadequate attempts to address the legitimacy question:

- *Changing personnel.* The Soviets thought Babrak Karmal might be free from some of the major legitimacy issues of former Afghan Presidents Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, harshly criticized by the Soviets for their mistreatment of ordinary Afghans. However, Karmal never escaped his label as a Soviet puppet.
- *Use of economic assistance.* The Soviets hoped abundant economic assistance would strengthen support for the regime (see discussion of economic development below).
- *Exploiting core values:* Despite the Communists disdain for religion, the Soviets encouraged Karmal and his successor, Mohammad Najibullah to leverage Islam to bolster their credibility with the people. Karmal's government began all announcements with invocations from the Koran, established mosques, created a Ministry for Religious Affairs, and regularly appealed to all "Muslims of Afghanistan." Similarly, "Najib re-added 'Allah' to his name, renamed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) the "Watan" (Homeland) Party, proclaimed his respect for Islam and modified the constitution to say that Afghanistan is a Muslim state." These efforts did not alter Afghans' perception that the regime was 'godless' and Najibullah a KhAD (the State Security Agency) repressor.
- *Convening Loya Jirgas.* Beginning with a 1985 attempt to draft a new constitution, the Soviets convened multiple Loya Jirgas – "grand councils" of

tribal elders brought together to resolve particular issues – in an attempt to bolster legitimacy of the central government and broaden its base of support. These efforts were not viewed as sincere and did not properly represent many key constituencies.

- *Enlisting the opposition.* Gorbachev urged the Afghan government in 1985 to make overtures to some opposition forces to create a more stable regime, yet the Afghan government balked and the mujahedeen refused because they saw it as a sign of Soviet weakness and pending departure (See Box on National Reconciliation). (U//FOUO)

Incompetence and corruption within the Afghan government, coupled with a dearth of domestic human capital, required the Soviets to take on substantial management responsibilities. This reinforced the perception of the Afghan regime as foreign and weak, further undermining its legitimacy.

- The constant Soviet presence, rather than building up Afghan capabilities, created a “policy of reliance” as Afghan officials became habituated to waiting for Soviet instruction. Senior KGB officers complained that Afghan officials were not planning to fight the rebels because they assumed the Soviets would do it for them: “The leadership thinks that the USSR will solve all the economic and military problems. All they can think about is motorcars, positions and amusements!” (U//FOUO)

Many observers felt no Soviet effort could have granted legitimacy to a regime perceived as supported by foreign powers.

- National Islamic Front leader Sayed Ahmad Gailani told a Soviet journalist: “I’m not ashamed to thank the Americans for their military and monetary assistance. We were forced to accept it so that we could defend ourselves against a modern army. But everybody should remember that if anyone attempts to establish control over Afghanistan, we will fight him the same way we fought you.”
- A Soviet General lamented his “openness and gullibility” in dealing with the Afghans, saying Afghanistan “does not accept ‘outside helpers’, no matter how noble their intentions.”

Chronology of Key Events in the Soviet Afghan Conflict (U//FOUO)

1973

- General Mohammed Daud overthrows the ruling Afghan government, abolishes the monarchy and declares a republic.

1978

- *Saur Revolution*: General Daud is overthrown and killed in a coup led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Nur Mohammed Taraki becomes President.
- Treaty of friendship and cooperation signed between Kabul and Moscow, which provides legal basis for Soviet military deployment to Afghanistan.

1979

- Supporters of Afghan Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin murder Soviet-backed Taraki. Soviet Union sends in troops to remove Amin. He is executed and Babrak Karmal is installed as leader.

1980

- USSR steps up military presence as anti-regime resistance escalates.

1985

- Mujahideen come together in Pakistan to form alliance against Soviet forces.
- Gorbachev comes to power and initiates review of the Afghan war. The Soviet Politburo reaches decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

1986

- US begins supplying mujahideen with stinger missiles, enabling them to shoot down Soviet helicopter gunships.
- Mohammad Najibullah replaces Karmal as head of Soviet-backed regime.
- Policy of National Reconciliation is launched in Kabul.

1987

- Najibullah admits that 80 percent of countryside and 40 percent of towns are beyond government control.

1988

- Afghanistan, USSR, the US and Pakistan sign Geneva accords and Soviet Union begins troop withdrawal.

1989

- Last Soviet troops leave. Heavy fighting continues as mujahideen push to overthrow Najibullah.

1991

- US and USSR agree to end military aid to both sides.

1992

- Mujahideen forces loyal to Jaimat-e Islami take control of Kabul and declare Burhanuddin Rabbani as President. Rival militias vie for influence.

1996

- The Taliban remove Rabbani and seize power in Kabul.

(U//FOUO)

- A rebel commander in Kabul told a Western journalist in 1987: "The West says we are disunited because you are seeing things through your eyes. You are always looking for a single command all over Afghanistan. That is why you are always building up Massoud or someone else, speculating whether he will become a national leader. It is not the Afghan way." (U//FOUO)

Afghanistan's "National Reconciliation" Initiative (U//FOUO)

The "national reconciliation policy" sought to end the war by offering mujahedeen commanders a ceasefire, government posts and other concessions.

- Gorbachev told Afghan leaders in 1985 that the Soviet Union would begin to draw down troop levels and that, if they wished to keep power, they would have to work with forces outside the government, including the mujahedeen.
- On January 3, 1987 Najibullah issued a declaration entitled "On National Reconciliation in Afghanistan" that initiated a government ceasefire and called for rebel groups to suspend military activity.
- The government sought to negotiate agreements with rebel leaders of armed resistance by offering material assistance, rights to patrol territories and trade necessities to those who switched to the government's side.
- The national reconciliation policy sought to decentralize power and bring opposition forces into government. Its measures included:
 - Allowing multiparty elections and reserving seats in parliament for opposition parties;
 - Appointing non-communist party members and even former rebels governor in several regions;ⁱ
 - Creating local councils that had the authority to grant amnesty to suspected rebels and exempt individuals from military service.(U//FOUO)

The policy, however, failed: Afghan officials were not committed to it, the population did not trust the government, and the rebels, perceiving the government as weak because the Soviets were going to withdraw, saw no reason to compromise with the communist regime.

- The Afghan government did little to ensure the policy's success, apparently believing that the announcement of a peace process alone would end the violence.
- Afghan communist party officials themselves undermined the policy because they feared losing their own government positions and were unprepared to take the initiative in executing policy after years of relying on Soviet troops and advisers. As a Soviet diplomat noted Afghan officials had "gotten cold feet sitting behind Soviet troops' bayonets" and wanted the status-quo maintained.
- The Afghan resistance and Arab fighters perceived the Policy of National Reconciliation as a sign of weakness of the government in light of the looming withdrawal of Soviet troops¹ and a Soviet plot to prevent the establishment of a pure Islamic republic in Afghanistan. The opposition, encouraged by the US and Pakistan, refused to negotiate with the government and fought to establish total control of power in Afghanistan.
- The Afghan opposition leaders conducted a massive propaganda campaign against the Policy of National Reconciliation to discourage the Afghan population and refugees from reconciling with the government. Popular suspicion of the PDPA and absence of PDPA positions on the village level aided the mujahedeen in their propaganda against the Policy of National Reconciliation. (U//FOUO)

Economic Development (U//FOUO)

Although the Soviets were not successful in modernizing Afghanistan's economy, transcripts of Politburo meetings prior to the invasion indicate the Soviet leadership understood the depth of Afghanistan's economic woes and hoped economic development would win popular support and central government legitimacy.

- The Politburo in the spring of 1979 considered Afghanistan "an economically weak, backward feudal country with primitive economic forms and limited domestic resources" and felt it would be very difficult for a new government to "overcome centuries of backwardness." This, they concluded, "requires time as well as a thoroughly planned and well calculated approach." (U//FOUO)

The Soviets expended substantial financial and human capital trying to build up civilian infrastructure throughout the ten years of conflict.

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- Soviet economic and military support for Afghanistan in the 1980s has been estimated at \$35 billion.
- 21,000 Soviet civilian specialists of all trades served in Afghanistan to develop civilian infrastructure and stimulate the economy. The border patrol was tasked with bolstering economic ties and arranging for supplies for border people. The Ministry of Trade was ordered to purchase provincial agricultural products and handicrafts in exchange for manufactured foods; in 1981, the handicrafts industry employed 300,000 people and accounted for 9% of GNP.
- The Soviets invested heavily in infrastructure projects, including a ten-year, \$150 million effort to tie Afghanistan into the Soviet electrical grid. In 1984, for instance, 70% of Afghan industrial production came from Afghan-Soviet projects. (U//FOUO)

These efforts were often unsuccessful as a result of Afghanistan's low level of development, volatile security situation, an absence of human and financial capital to sustain projects without Soviet assistance, poor understanding of rural Afghan society, and uncontrolled local and Soviet corruption.

- The violence decimated the country's already basic economic infrastructure. For example, Soviet military operations destroyed much of the countryside's irrigation and drainage systems without realizing the consequences.
- Soviet advisors focused on big infrastructure projects the local populace had neither the human nor financial resources to maintain. Soviet advisors recommended the Afghan government focus on producing chemical fertilizers, building agricultural produce processing plants and consumer goods factories, and extracting natural resources such as gas, oil and copper.
- Much Soviet assistance was looted outright. The Chief Military Adviser to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal complained that local PDPA officials did not pass on material aid to the populace and were primarily concerned with saving themselves and their families. For example, the governor of Helmand province sold Soviet humanitarian aid to Pakistan. Both Soviet and Afghan personnel treated economic development as a source of personal enrichment, rather than as society-building.
- A colonel with the KGB later said: "the wisdom of the Afghans knows no boundaries, especially when it concerns spending foreign money and using foreign resources." (U//FOUO)

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Looking back, the Soviets concluded that any effort, no matter how large, was simply a drop in the bucket: there was little hope for success in Afghanistan's chronically poor, underdeveloped, rural, deeply divided, feudal society.

- Foreign fighters, in contrast, viewed Osama bin Laden's infrastructure investments in roads, hospitals, and tunnels for Afghanistan as important public relations tools. (U//FOUO)

Religious Sensitivities and Tribal Relations (U//FOUO)

Declassified Soviet documents and memoirs indicate that Moscow, in particular the military leadership, was cognizant of Afghanistan's ethnic and religious complexity.

- Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov in spring 1979 observed that Afghanistan's leadership did not sufficiently appreciate the importance of Islamic fundamentalists: "It is under the banner of Islam that the soldiers are turning against the government, and an absolute majority, perhaps only with rare exceptions, are believers." Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov echoed this concern, referring to "the Afghan tradition of resistance against foreigners on their land [provides] warning about the probability of our troops being pulled into military activity... 'We will pit all of Eastern Islam against us.'"
- Major General Aleksandr Lyakhovskiy, Deputy Director of the Soviet Defense Ministry's Operations Group in Afghanistan, wrote: "The military leaders thought that ... the poor knowledge of local customs and traditions, especially Islam, and national ethnic relations would force us into a quite difficult position." (U//FOUO)

In practice, however, the Soviets were unable to systematically address these concerns. Few on the Soviet side understood the depth and complexity of Afghanistan's tribal and ethnic relationships.

- Lyakhovskiy pointed out that the hasty deployment of Soviet advisers to Afghanistan meant that many were not familiar with the traditions of Afghan society. Others were entering a foreign culture and tradition for the first time, resulting in mistakes even in simple situations.
- Even late in the war, the military had not adapted. A memo from the chief of staff of the main Soviet Military Adviser in Afghanistan in 1987 complained that the ethnic and tribal makeup of military units of Afghan rebels and local population were not sufficiently taken into consideration by the Soviet military.

- A Soviet colonel later concluded: “We tried to use the mullahs in the interest of strengthening combat forces, but those attempts were timid and tentative. We knew little about Islam, we did not try to understand it, and in this respect our influence was very weak. Our open cynicism toward religion and the clergy was one of the reasons why we could hardly achieve anything in that predominantly Muslim country.” (U//FOUO)

In some cases, however, particular departments and ministries effectively tailored their activities to local differences.

- Soviet police advisors, not widely known for their sensitivity, worked to found mosques in their divisions, and advised local representatives: “Be sensitive to where you are. Ex: if the conscripts are Shiite, be sure to appoint a Shiite as ‘mullah.’”
- Other efforts to be culturally sensitive went awry. For instance, the Soviets packed their invasion force with troops from the Muslim Central Asian republics in an attempt to smooth relations with the locals. They quickly discovered that the Central Asian Reserve instead "stoked old animosities" between the Pashtuns, Tajiks and Uzbeks; the unit was withdrawn by March 1980.
- Russian Embassy officials in Kabul tried to explain to Moscow that its confrontation with Pashtun tribes was counterproductive. (See Text Box on National Reconciliation) (U//FOUO)

By contrast, the Arab mujahedeen tried to accommodate the diversity in religion and custom in regional subdivisions of Afghanistan, particularly the dominant Hanafi Muslim group. Arab Jihadists who complained about religious differences between Sunni Arabs and Sunni Afghans were advised to tolerate these differences, “because the other choice is Babrak Karmal, the Communist leader of Afghanistan, who differs completely from all Muslims.”

- Pakistan understood Afghanistan's tribal divisions and manipulated them for Islamabad's ends, according to mujahedeen commanders and academics. Tajik Commander Masood in particular was sensitive to Islamabad's attempts to promote the Pashtuns at the expense of other groups.
- Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, then the Director of the ISI's Afghan Bureau, claimed that Pakistan prevented the US from becoming involved too deeply in training and operations because “their methods were clumsy, unrealistic and ... above all, they did not understand the Afghans.” (U//FOUO)

The Soviet Embassy on Dealing with the Pashtuns (U//FOUO)

In a 5 March 1980 memorandum to the International Department of the CC CPSU, the Soviet Embassy in Afghanistan argues that reversing the confrontation with the Pashtun tribes is key to stabilizing the DRA and that the traditional social order of the Pashtun tribes must inform government policy towards them. (U//FOUO)

The memo recommends immediate implementation of the following policies:

- Cease military actions in the tribal zone and withdraw all troops with the exception of contingents in Hardez, Host and Jalalabad; immediately and strictly prohibit shootings and bombings of Pashtun villages. The tribal zone should be protected by a border militia of Pashtun volunteers. Promptly inform the tribal zone population about this measure.
- DRA and party leadership should immediately address the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan to:
 - declare deep respect of tribal traditions and promise to abide by them in recognition of the tribes' special status;
 - declare a ban on military operations in the Pashtun tribal area;
 - condemn former shootings and bombings of Pashtun villages;
 - promise to distribute monetary compensation to victims;
 - call on Pashtun refugees to return and promise they will not be persecuted for any activities conducted abroad;
 - promise to develop, in collaboration with Pashtun elders and mullahs, and urgently implement a "policy of trust, peace and cooperation" to establish peace in the tribal zone and protect individual life, property and increase prosperity.
- "The policy of trust, peace and cooperation" must:
 - expedite social, economic and cultural development of the tribal zone;
 - provide for budgeting of funds for tribal needs in Afghanistan's state budget;
 - reserve spaces for Pashtun boys and young men in high schools and universities of Jelalabad, Kabul and Kandahar and provide housing and other necessities for them,
 - create bureaus for recruiting Pashtun men for unskilled labor jobs, such as road construction and repair
- Delegate locally-respected and well-informed officials to each region in the tribal zone to coordinate local administration and observe the general situation.
- Pay out a monthly subsidy to the most authoritative mullahs. (U//FOUO)

Border Control (U//FOUO)

The Soviet leadership concluded they could not win the war without controlling the mountainous, 1640-mile long Afghan-Pakistan border, as it was the primary conduit for arms and rebel support. Border control was the subject of multiple Politburo meetings even before the invasion and deemed a top priority for the KGB. (U//FOUO)

Despite significant human and financial resources, however, the Soviets found it impossible to stem the flow of people and goods from Pakistan.

- The Soviets devoted significant resources to the Pakistan border problem. They assigned 50,000 Soviet forces to patrol the border; mapped locations of nearly a hundred caravan routes/mountain passes and mined them; developed a “barrier system” of traps and military subdivisions; employed elite KGB Spetsnaz units supported by USSR border troops; and established permanent garrisons.
- The Soviets also tried multiple types of local guards, some numbering 25,000 people: paid Pashtun border guards, Afghan territorial forces, and agreements with local tribes.
- The efforts to use local forces failed because of corruption, refusal to fight, and desertion. According to a Soviet colonel: “These forces did not live up to expectations. They did not spread and strengthen the influence of the government in their territories, did not secure the borders with Iran and Pakistan, did not protect civilians doing their daily work and refused to participate in combat operations.” (U//FOUO)

In the end, the Soviets concluded that the border simply could not be closed, “in view of the difficult terrain of the area and the existence of hundreds of passes in the mountains.” This assessment contributed to the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. (U//FOUO)

Lesson Two: Attempts to Modernize Afghanistan Increased Alienation (U//FOUO)

The Soviets believed that a successful, stable Afghanistan required the establishment of modern social, political and economic structures. The process of establishing those structures, however, challenged fundamental social and political norms, alienating the population and further undermining the central government’s legitimacy.

- The atheistic, urban PDPA offended deeply held social, religious and traditional mores.
- The government generated significant hostility by hiring local women into the KhAD and other government positions, enrolling girls in school, and asking women’s names when collecting census data in villages. Soviets generals were

surprised to learn that it was insulting to ask an Afghan male about his family or wife, or even to congratulate him on the birth of a daughter.

- Schools and universities began to teach politics and philosophy that countered Islamic tenets. Concerts, including dance performances by women, started in schools. (U//FOUO)

The regime tried to impose administrative organizations on the periphery without giving consideration to longstanding local power structures.

- Prior to the Soviet arrival, the Afghan regime had largely killed off the tribal aristocracy, destroying traditional power structures and limiting the negotiating authority of those left behind. .
- The government sent inexperienced young people (including women) with no knowledge of local cultural and religious values to administer the regions, where they inevitably offended the local populace.
- Abdul Haq, commander of the Kabul region, observed: "[T]he Soviets destroyed parts of the traditional fabric of Afghan society. The country has been invaded many times before. And always in the past, the religious leaders would call for jihad; the tribal leaders would provide the resources, and the people would fight." The Communists broke down traditional society and installed secular leaders who, backed only by Soviet troops, had little or no legitimacy. (U//FOUO)

Efforts to correct these errors later in the war were unsuccessful.

- A Soviet army colonel realized the populace was unconvinced: "Babrak Karmal and the army generals regularly attended prayers at the main Kabul mosque, especially on holidays. They had to pledge their respect to Islam repeatedly. However, most of the time, they stopped at merely proclaiming slogans. ... But most of these slogans and appeals sounded like the Soviet communist party dogma." (U//FOUO)

Violation of traditional societal norms undermined regime attempts to create national institutions, already a difficult task in a diverse country without a strong history of national identity or organizations. The Soviets did not understand that Afghans felt greater obligation to their micro-societies than to the nation or institutions.

- As one mujahedeen commander observed, "to tell a man who has lived in his village for decades, 'go out of your district and fight the enemy base in a remote area,' is not very appealing. To him, defending the village is more important than the district or province."

- This problem was compounded by the widespread perception that national institutions were in service of a fundamentally illegitimate regime. (U//FOUO)

Lesson Three: Exploiting Afghans' Economic Self-Interest Was Important (U//FOUO)

In profoundly impoverished Afghanistan, personal economic gain outweighed ideology as a motivator. This pragmatic self-interest shocked the Arab fighters and was shrewdly employed by Pakistan. Soviet observers noted later that they never fully grasped its potential for exploitation.

- Abdul Samad, a tribal leader of Spin Boldak told western journalists: "We needed the mujahedeen very much when we were fighting the Russians. We had to be members, because it was the only way to get arms. But we are not loyal to them. We are loyal only to our tribes and to our local people."
- A Soviet colonel observed the "wavering allegiances between the rebels and the government forces made them difficult to trust... they were attracted to the government by the opportunity to get weapons and money. It's amazing—get money and do nothing. They quickly figured it out and demanded weapons and money."
- The deputy commander of the Soviets 345th airborne regiment complained: "Sarandoi, the local police, and KhAD are not active; their information is for the most part false. They are mostly concerned with farming their fields and working on their private plots of land."
- One Pakistani author estimated that the vast majority of US weapons provided to Pakistan to give the mujahedeen never reached them. One rebel leader questioned, "Would it not be in American interest as well as ours to find out where these supplies of money and arms go? They send it; we do not receive it. In the middle there is some kind of hole into which most of the things vanish." (U//FOUO)

Much of the battlefield was for hire to the highest bidder, at least temporarily. As one Afghan working for Abdul Haq noted, "One can never buy an Afghan but one can always rent one."

- Arab fighters in Afghanistan were shocked to discover that the mujahedeen they believed to be ideological freedom fighters were in fact highly corrupt and mostly fought for money or personal gain.

- A group of Soviet colonels concluded that a local saying – “Everything is for sale in Afghanistan” – was largely true: all members of the armed resistance received payments for fighting against PDPA and the Soviet army and every operation was rewarded financially. They argued that the violence in Afghanistan was likely to continue as long as there were funds to pay for fighters.
- The government could buy protection for key infrastructure until they were outbid. The Kuki Khel tribe, for instance, received subsidies from the Aghan government for protecting the Sorubi-Kabul electric line. When the resistance offered more, the tribe blew up the line and fled to Pakistan.
- The head of the KGB in Afghanistan suggested bribing tribal leaders to support the government, but learned this approach “produced only temporary results.” His Afghan counterpart explained: “Once we paid 10,000 Afghanis to a tribal chief and thought that he would work for us. But, sometime later we found out that he was leaning to the other side. Why? Because the Pakistanis offered him 30,000 Afghanis, and he went with the highest bidder.” (U//FOUO)

The mujahedeen engaged in economic activity with all sides.

- The Governor and Army Commander of Kandahar Province explained to Western journalists that he both fought and collaborated with the mujahedeen, as required. The Soviet Chief Military Adviser to Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal complained that local party officials paid money to and cooperated with mujahedeen.
- The mujahedeen engaged in regular trade with Soviets throughout the military hierarchy.
- One officer recalled how Afghan entrepreneurs would incite attacks on Soviet garrisons simply to provoke return fire; they would then collect the brass spent shell cartridges the next day to sell for scrap metal. (U//FOUO)

Pakistan skillfully exploited these economic interests, controlling funding and keeping mujahedeen groups divided to ensure their control.

- Ahmed Shah Massoud drew parallels between Pakistan’s efforts to keep the mujahedeen groups divided during the Soviet period and its use of these same methods during the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. “Pakistan is helping the Taliban, but it does not want them to have a united army. On the contrary it still keeps the

Taliban commanders dispersed and equips each commander individually, so that at the end, they have the control of the situation themselves. (U//FOUO)

Afghanistan Now and Then (U//FOUO)

Similarities

- Afghan government officials today, as during the Soviet occupation, are widely perceived as foreign appointees. The failures of the Afghan government in both cases have often been seen as the failures of the foreign presence.
- Pakistan played a vital role in supporting Afghan resistance against the Soviets and to some degree continues to play that role with the Taliban.
- Civilian casualties greatly harden public opposition to foreign forces inside Afghanistan.
- The local populace remains unwilling or reticent to cooperate with foreign troops in Pashtun and, in some cases, Tajik and Uzbek areas of Afghanistan.
- Significant cultural and linguistic barriers and an insufficient understanding of traditional Afghan values are substantial hindrances to successful cooperation. (U//FOUO)

Differences

- The present insurgency is concentrated in the predominantly Pashtun east and south of Afghanistan. In contrast, the anti-Soviet uprising was scattered throughout the country and all ethnic groups – not simply Pashtuns—took part.
- Afghanistan today has a generation of trained fighters. Prior to the Soviet invasion, there was no precedent in modern Afghanistan for a full-fledged insurgency.
- The mujahedeen enjoyed greater legitimacy as a result of their broad international support, making it easier to recruit jihadists.
- The mujahedeen were funded by the United States, other Western countries, and Muslim states. In contrast, the present insurgency's principal funding sources are non-state actors and the drug trade. (U//FOUO)