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**OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC
LESSONS OF THE WAR
IN AFGHANISTAN, 1979-90**

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Stephen J. Blank

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FOREWORD

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 was, in many respects, a milestone in Soviet history. On the one hand it represented the high-water mark of Soviet intervention in Third World states and thus served as the archetypical example and justification for the intensification of the cold war in the early 1980s. On the other hand, the ultimate defeat and poor performance by this military in Afghanistan was one of the key forces that triggered the drive for a comprehensive reform of the entire Soviet national security system and its decision-making structures. Thus this war had profound domestic and foreign repercussions.

This analysis focuses on the purely operational and strategic lessons of the war. It insists that lessons of these kinds were present and that they offer significant insights both for such wars in general and for the course of Soviet military developments in the 1980s and 1990s. These lessons also offer important clues concerning the reforms required in order to preserve democratic civilian control over the military. It should also alert analysts everywhere as to the nature of local wars in the Third World in the 1990s, a phenomenon that shows little sign of abating. Though in many ways like all wars, this war was unique; it was not merely a series of random tactical exercises that were ultimately futile. Rather, like all wars, it shows us something of the shape of our present and future, if we are only insightful enough to understand it correctly.



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In more specifically Soviet terms, this war will undoubtedly become a greater object of study and reflection after the August 1991 revolution and failed coup. As this study makes clear, that coup was the outcome of prior rehearsals and operations whose roots lay in the invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent effort to Sovietize that nation. That coup also displayed the plotters' willingness to gamble on civil war to enforce their agenda, and equally, their continuing failure to learn from the Afghan debacle more than simply technical lessons of force organization and preparedness for such "low-intensity" operations. Indeed, a recent American analysis of the coup and its aftermath singles out the "Afghanistan syndrome" as playing a decisive role in shaping military men's refusal to go along with the coup. The Soviet Army and society experienced a deep sense of betrayal and trauma due to Afghanistan. It came to realize the incompetence and corruption of its senior military and political leadership. As a result, a generation of officers and soldiers distrusted their commanders' wisdom and integrity, not to mention the legitimacy of orders like those given in Afghanistan. Thus an unspoken but visible collective determination never to let the armed forces be used for misguided political adventures at home or abroad, or be used as a scapegoat for failed policies, took hold.¹

This determination saved the day in August 1991. However, should the revolution that then ensued fail to provide the impetus for the reconstruction of the Soviet nation that then became possible, force may well come to be seen as the only way of enforcing minimal order and stability against the dangers of total breakdown and anarchy. In that event, not a farfetched one any longer, the lessons of low-intensity conflict, whether in ethnic wars or conflicts, or in a general civil war become all too pertinent. In that case the historical will become the actual and the "nightmare" of the past Soviet history will continue to shape the present and the future chronicle of those peoples. The defeat in Afghanistan was thus a prologue to a drama that was then played out at home and whose first act is now complete. However, few trends in history or in revolutions end after only one act.

PREFACE

ENDNOTE

1. Ilana Kass, "How the Soviet Military Blew the Coup," presentation to the Center for Naval Analysis, Alexandria, VA, September 11, 1991.

SUMMARY

The Afghanistan war remains the most criticized military and political decision of the Brezhnev era and the best example of policies criticized by Soviet reformers in the last several years. In Afghanistan, Soviet Third World policies ran into a dead end. Those policies were expressed by the promotion of revolution by external armed force, ideological formulations of "states of socialist orientation," "vanguard parties," and the notion that Soviet military power was what allowed for a forward and basically anti-American policy.

The war also invalidated many aspects of Soviet military strategy and operational art. It demonstrated that despite pressures to use the Soviet military in the Third World, the Soviet Army lacked (and still does) a coherent strategy for fighting at any level anything other than the set piece European theater strategic offensive. The officer corps proved to be deficient in achieving tactical, not to mention operational, or strategic, combined arms coordination in Afghanistan's terrain. Officers were equally unable to make independent decisions, adapt tactically to the theater, realize Soviet norms for speed and mobility, and gain adequate intelligence of the area. In many ways the Soviet Army resembled the brutal Tsarist army of poorly trained conscripts at the mercy of corrupt and chauvinist officers with little military competence or knowledge of how to command and face unexpected situations.

The poor tactics and strategy involved in transplanting a European army and battle plan to invade Afghanistan, and the corruption of the army reflected by its poor performance in the theater were probably the greatest (but hardly exclusive) causes of spiraling public anger at the army in the late 1980s. This anger, by now, has grown well beyond those factors. Thus Afghanistan and what it revealed about military performance has been a major catalyst of military reform since 1987. At the political level the Afghan case, a closed decisionmaking process where expert opinion was disregarded, prompted public and official pressures to reorganize the entire process of national security decision making and policies.

Aspects of the European model for Soviet operations in Afghanistan may be seen in the initial invasion of 1979. The force configuration, the initial targets, the use of airborne forces as the initial spearhead of a ground assault all resembled the forms of a theater European invasion as well as the Prague operation of 1968. The overall operation was a combined arms vertical envelopment with the airborne forces operating as an OMG (Operational Maneuver Group) to seize key C³I points and air bases.

In the invasion, Moscow used Muslim forces who were readily available at nearby bases and who might win over the native population. The latter was a grievous miscalculation since these Muslim troops often were themselves won over. Moreover, the population, as competent analysis would have predicted, intensified its rejection of the puppet government. The invasion soon led to a national liberation war against a Soviet Army and political leadership that had no idea of civic action operations since neither group had any concept for low intensity conflict or counterinsurgency. Thus, the strictly European nature of Soviet military operations foretold a disaster when transposed to the Afghan theater.

The widespread reports of poor Soviet morale that came out of Afghanistan concerning Soviet forces are traceable both to the internal corruption of the Soviet Army and to the poor performance by NCOs and commanding officers. We maintain that morale is a function of poor performance, corruption, and terrible logistics (there is no other word that describes them)—all of which were present in Afghanistan.

Soviet planners miscalculated, for the duration of the war, the needs of the theater, and the ability of the theater to sustain its forces for a long war. They did not sufficiently consider the natural and climactic obstacles that Afghanistan presents to the occupier. Thus, their logistics trains were long, cumbersome, slow moving affairs that were highly vulnerable to mines and ambushes. Soviet commanders adapted by delegating many forces to convoy and patrol duties and by creating new formations of logistics troops as well as by increased reliance on aerial logistics. But even here the theater could only sustain 85-100,000 troops and the

breakdowns in logistics and the poor quality of supplies and health care, coupled with the brutality, corruption, and incompetence of commanders, eroded morale.

The vulnerability of Soviet logistics to ambushes and other attacks led Moscow to allocate many troops to the relatively static task of defending convoys and to a greater reliance upon air logistics deployed in or to heavily fortified air and other bases. This heavy fortification imparted a defensive aspect to Soviet forces—in anticipation of current European developments and highlighted the Soviet command's awareness of the need to keep the guerrillas out of cities and key bases—a vital element in counterinsurgency operations and one they successfully performed. In repelling attacks on cities or forestalling them, the Soviets underscored the essentially political nature of their objective of consolidating an unpopular government by force. Thanks to their success in urban and base defense they have proved able to maintain the PDPA regime in power to the present. But they had to consign many of their forces to the static defense of urban and base assets, not active offense, to do so.

The Afghan invasion in itself represented a major failure of the Soviet strategic intelligence process. Biased and politicized reporting misinformed leaders of operative conditions there and made intelligence much less than the force multiplier it needs to be in a low intensity conflict. Soviet human intelligence then and during the war appeared to be poorly adapted to the requirements of collecting and analyzing tactical and order of battle intelligence, structuring viable pro-PDPA organizational networks, and counterintelligence. Soviet specialists on Afghanistan were disregarded, the KGB was divided over invading, but Andropov, its head, skewed the process in favor of invasion, thus substantively influencing the decision to do so. His actions resembled the faked stories of counterrevolution and Western invasion in Czechoslovakia that contributed to the invasion there in 1968. Many of the intelligence cadres in Afghanistan tended to identify with the faction to which they were accredited. This distorted their reporting, a fact that was compounded by their lack of expertise regarding Afghanistan.

Tactical intelligence in the field was also poor owing to the stereotypical and European based preparation for action that characterized Soviet operations. Often the Soviets forfeited strategic or operational surprise and thus could not convert tactical gains into anything more than that. Censorship prevented leaders, commanders, small unit leaders, and ordinary soldiers from learning the truth. Finally there is evidence of a continuing KGB and GRU campaign to disinform that made it difficult for them to admit defeat. As in 1968 this campaign suggests an abiding tendency by the intelligence organizations to deceive the leadership if not itself, a factor that has continued into the 1990s (in the Baltics, for example) and suggests the leadership's continuing inability to fully grasp the realities of its own domestic and foreign relationships.

After 1980 Soviet force structure gradually changed to include a much heavier air, helicopter, and airborne, and heliborne component at the expense of tanks, armored columns and the like. Though Moscow never succeeded in fully meeting the requirements of decentralized C², high mobility, and the optimal combination of mobility with firepower, Soviet capabilities did improve markedly. Moreover, the utility of the helicopter as "a universal air weapon," combining fire, mobility and insertion capabilities, validated previous claims for helicopters' utility in combat, as did the use of the airborne forces' deployment in Afghanistan. As a result, Soviet tactical manuals of the 1980s brought together the platforms' demonstrated utility with the "revolution in military affairs" to fashion a tactical, operational, and strategic doctrine and force structure that has important implications for future war.

These innovative deployments and their codification represent the first Soviet efforts to fight a Soviet version of what we call "air/land battle," albeit at a small scale. This effort went awry in Afghanistan because Soviet forces could not combine arms optimally or match mobility to firepower. Nevertheless the Soviet forces there and the senior officers who learned from them and disseminated these lessons gained experience and insights that will benefit the Soviet armed forces in future conflicts. Key aspects of this process are the importance and

primacy of airpower as a mobile fire platform and troop conveyor and the use of special forces (as understood by Moscow, not as we define the term)—forces flexibly configured to achieve special missions and be inserted well behind the FLOT.

The Afghan experience demonstrated a Soviet inability to fight so-called local wars or low intensity conflicts with the available forces and structures. Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear that fighting small wars will be a major task of the army in the 1990s as the USSR unravels or threatens to. Thus Soviet authorities have begun to create new force packages to meet these threats even if doctrinal innovations and pronouncements lag behind that process. These new forces are made up of enlarged MVD, KGB Border Troops, regular armed forces Spetsnaz, the Spetsnaz of the KGB and MVD, and airborne troops seconded to the KGB's command for counterinsurgency operations.

These forces comprise a Soviet effort to create a Rapid Deployment Force for maintaining internal security as well as for antidrug, terrorist, and other putative criminal activity. Undoubtedly, plans are underway for augmenting such forces beyond their present limits and for professionalizing them by means of high salaries and better conditions. These forces were first used in the attempted Baltic coups of January 1991, which could only have been commanded by Gorbachev.

These coups replicated the Afghan invasion and Polish coup of 1981 by Jaruzelski by means of the stealthy and not so stealthy insertion of troops into the zone to be occupied and the use of deception and *Maskirovka* techniques after a long period of cat and mouse with the Baltics. The Baltic experience also followed in the pattern of the preceding activities in that, first, an entirely new command and control system for merging the KGB, MVD, and regular armed forces into flexible units for any operation was created during 1990. The aim was to quell unrest and force submission to Moscow and also to institute a conservative domestic and foreign policy agenda. While it failed, the forces involved are still available and indicate that Gorbachev, conservatives, or even Russian nationalists could tempt fate and civil war in the USSR. To the

extent that armed forces are used there, as in Afghanistan, for such purposes, that will indicate just how little or how much Moscow has learned from Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Soviet War in Afghanistan was the greatest test faced by the Soviet Army since 1945. But it was a test that the army failed. Accordingly, this war and its outcome for the USSR has had profound implications both for the armed forces and for the USSR's overall security policy. Due to this protracted failure, Afghanistan has become the single most criticized national security decision of the Brezhnev era, and Soviet leaders and reformers have sought to draw lessons from it to prevent a recurrence of that failure.

Studies of the Red Army's performance in Afghanistan have concentrated mainly on its adaptation to the tactical requirements of that war and theater. More politically minded analyses have also sought to analyze its impact upon civilian support for the army, national security decision making, and Soviet policies in the Third World. Included in the latter are studies of what military-political leaders believe about direct superpower involvement in regional conflicts.¹ This study seeks to do more than that. Although attention is paid to the strategic lessons of the Soviet intervention, this study's main contribution is to analyze the operational and strategic level military lessons learned by Moscow that are currently being applied to doctrine, strategy, operational art, and force structure.

To understand Afghanistan's impact on Soviet thinking and policy it must also be remembered that it is virtually impossible to ascribe changes in these areas exclusively to lessons of Afghanistan. Soviet participation there coincided with an equally profound reevaluation of doctrine, force structure, and strategy for warfare either in Europe or with the United States that was prompted in very large part by three forces having little or nothing to do with Afghanistan. These forces were technological revolution in weapons and hence in Soviet

operational art; the crisis of the Soviet system; and changing Western military strategies, first in response to the Soviet threat of a decade ago, and later to new thinking and changed Soviet policies in Europe.

This conjunction of pressures for reform makes it difficult to isolate a purely Afghan cause of observable changes in Soviet posture. Nonetheless, we can cite some lessons learned that pertain to Afghanistan *at least as much* as to any other cause. All of these lessons, when they appear in Soviet literature at the operational and strategic level, generally bear the title, "lessons of contemporary local wars," and specifically local wars in the Middle East (the Near East in Russian refers to Israel vs. the Arabs). These lessons pertain mainly to force structure and operational art. They are:

- The importance of improved small unit capability for independent action;
- The importance of command of the air and neutralization of enemy air defense;
- The use of helicopters, airborne, and heliborne forces including special forces (not just Spetsnaz) for aerial and ground operations;
- Better training and logistics for unconventional wars;
- The importance of morale and unit cohesion;
- The need for better intelligence assessments;
- The need to learn how to fight defensively;
- Strategies for winning small wars: denial of cities to the enemy.

While Afghanistan is hardly the only reason why the Soviet Army has instituted changes in these areas, its failure there can be seen in each one of them. That suggests the place of this war as one important factor in leading to observable changes in Soviet military policy. Overall, it appears that there is not yet an unclassified Soviet publication that analyzes or summarizes the entire set of lessons learned. The literature is partial, elliptical, and often reticent—a natural reaction to

defeat and to the codes of Soviet military discourse. Nonetheless, discussions of the impact of local wars or of the topics given here indicate that the war is being studied very seriously. And it behooves us to come to grips with it as well lest we too fail to learn what we should from Afghanistan.

Macropolitical Lessons of the War.

There are many political lessons to be learned from Afghanistan. They include major policy debates over the Third World and civil-military relations. In the latter case, it can be seen that the war in Afghanistan, more than anything else, stripped the Soviet Army of its aura of invincibility and its reputation as the vigilant and nonpartisan defender of the homeland. As a result of failure in Afghanistan, attacks on the army's privileged position with regard to material resources, men, and policy making have emerged with growing ferocity.

Corruption in the recruitment process and exemption of the elite's children from military service has led to deep dissatisfaction with the arrogant elitism of the officer corps and its privileges. In addition, the growing reports of an army whose internal life is built on hazing (*Dedovshchina*), ethnic violence between soldiers, bad pay, and physical abuse of soldiers by officers has contributed to a profound loss of respect for the military. That loss of respect for the military and its values is compounded by widespread reports of Soviet military atrocities in Afghanistan and its domestic police activities in the non-Russian republics. Thus, in 1989, 85 officers are reported to have been killed by civilians and over another 4-year period 15,000 conscripts are said to have died while in service.²

The attacks on the military's privileges and its brutality emanate from below, but attacks on its influence over the budget and the economy in general, as well as over policy making in security policy, come from above. Since 1985 the Gorbachev regime has not only substantially reduced military outlays, it also has deliberately set up rival centers to provide input on security policy thereby challenging the military's traditional monopoly over data and analyses. Critiques of the

military's secretiveness and undue influence over that process habitually refer to Afghanistan, even more than to the decision to put SS-20 missiles in Europe, as the outstanding example of disproportionate military influence over policy.

Finally, the discrediting of the military leadership has stimulated an internal military reform movement that calls for a reduced and professionalized army on the basis of voluntary service that does not engage in domestic police activities. It is possible that one lesson learned by these military reformers is that a professional army, not one of conscripts and reservists, is needed to wage wars like that of Afghanistan should they emerge in the future. Moreover, it is all too likely that similar "small wars" may break out in the Soviet republics, especially in Transcaucasia or Central Asia. Should that occur, professionalization, if affordable, would contribute greatly to staffing an army that could wage "small wars" without experiencing the problems connected with the growing "Islamization" of the conscript forces.

At the same time the transition to defensive doctrine indicates a substantial revision of views on the utility and desirability of intervention in Third World conflicts. The debate among Soviet military men and civilians owes much of its intensity to the impact of Afghanistan.³ Essentially civilian and military reformers argue that the attempt to postulate a socialist interest in the Third World overextended Soviet resources and tied Moscow to governments masquerading as socialist. These states were, however, unable to win mass support or develop their countries. Thus, they involved the Soviet Union in regional conflicts or civil wars in those states that played into the hands of the United States and further raised Soviet costs beyond a tolerable level. Furthermore these wars, of which Afghanistan was the premier example, reflected an excessively ideological approach to resolving Soviet interests. Admittedly, the USSR will not simply pack up and leave its clients. But reformers have contended that the USSR has no military interests whatsoever beyond its borders. And the Soviet government has indeed begun implementing decisions to withdraw all troops from beyond its borders.⁴

The Ideological Roots of Conflict.

The following arguments expressed the excessively ideological and militarized approach to Third World conflicts that predominated among Soviet elites to justify an expansive policy in the 1970s:

- The correlation of forces was changing in favor of socialism and against imperialism.
- This correlation, generally viewed in military terms at the expense of other variables, supposedly was essential for radical Third World regimes' survival. That is, Moscow's military reach inhibited the U.S. proclivity toward intervention.
- National liberation movements and the USSR were natural allies with a duty to support each other. This translated into Soviet military and political support, and in return, the political support of these regimes in international fora and in providing regional bases for the Soviets.
- Through this "progressive" Soviet support, the USSR found the political-ideological formulas to ensure that these states would move toward radicalism and ultimately socialism. When these formulas—the state of socialist orientation and the vanguard party—took root in a society, they guaranteed for Moscow that certain durable requirements for Socialism were emplaced and upheld from within and without. The designation of states like Afghanistan or Ethiopia as states of socialist orientation ruled by vanguard parties entitled them to substantial Soviet aid which generally took the form of military assistance on a large scale. Indeed, in the Third World, Soviet power was thought to be the decisive instrument in those states' liberation.⁵

Since socialism was on the march there was no need for the Soviets to learn the military lessons that the United States learned or should have learned in Vietnam. The ideological response of former Soviet political leaders to Vietnam,

particularly in the International Department of the Central Committee (ID) which coordinated the export of revolution, overlooked many realities of war in the Third World. So too did the ID's adherence to concepts such as "the state of socialist orientation" and "vanguard parties" that characterized Moscow's Third World clients, which created a deep sense of ideological and military-political obligation on Moscow's part to them. These notions and the commitments they entailed ultimately helped lead Moscow astray in Afghanistan. These points merit attention because their saliency and pervasiveness indicate that by 1979, far from being a strategic force multiplier inhibiting the United States and bringing about a shift in the correlation of forces, ideology had blinded Soviet officials to the realities of Third World conflicts, or low intensity conflicts, if one chooses that appellation for them.⁶

When Moscow discussed the Vietnam war, for example, its media entirely omitted mention of the impact of Vietnamese culture, geography, or class structure upon the war's outcome. Much of Soviet professional military literature was devoted to mainly tactical or operational concepts, not strategy. Instead, Moscow universalized Vietnam's outcome for other states. Vietnam was unique in many ways, including its ethnically homogeneous society. Soviet interpretations suggested that communist forces would always win in the Third World because of socialism's inherent superiority, regardless of local obstacles.⁷

The concept of the vanguard party postulated an existing ruling party that tended to replicate Communist Party structures, a broad front of workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, and intelligentsia within an organizationally and ideologically united party. These parties, often military in nature, were still made out to be a "revolutionary-democratic" alliance that tended towards the Russian model. They aimed at a deeper unity with the CPSU by replicating its internal mechanisms in order to qualify for that designation and ensuing assistance.⁸

Third World regimes that rejected capitalism and were on the way to socialism were designated as "states of socialist orientation." At home they carried out radical transformations

towards that goal, and in foreign policy they supported Soviet positions on major world issues.⁹ Ulianovskii, an authoritative Soviet spokesman at the time, singled out these states' anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist policies as determining the extent to which they merited inclusion as states of socialist orientation. According to him, the changes these parties and states made led Marxists to conclude that where the two forces existed together (state and party), there were real prospects of the transformation of the national democratic stage into socialism.¹⁰ Ulianovskii specifically included Afghanistan as such a state in mid-1979 though he warned about the dangers of a state moving too rapidly in defiance of existing conditions—precisely the case in Afghanistan.¹¹ Soviet commentators flirted with the idea of labelling either the party in Afghanistan as a vanguard party or state of socialist orientation. But what clinched the Soviet political obligation to intervene if necessary was the treaty of friendship between the two states in 1978. Though the treaty did not obligate Moscow to defend Afghanistan if it disintegrated due to its own leaders' errors, it did extend the Brezhnev Doctrine to Afghanistan by virtue of these ideological descriptions of the new reality there. Accordingly, these ideological nostrums led Moscow to commit itself against threats to roll back socialism in Afghanistan. Although we tend to view the Brezhnev Doctrine as one that legitimized Soviet intervention, we should remember that it also committed Soviet prestige to defense of socialist states.

Today Soviet analysts ascribe to the Brezhnev era an excessive ideologization and optimism concerning these states' prospects for socialism and the need to defend them. Soviet literature on these issues identifies those failings that placed too much confidence in ideological schemes backed up by military force as the great mistake of the period.¹² Accordingly, the Gorbachev team has opted for an entirely different approach whose effects are already visible in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, and Angola.

Operational and Strategic Lessons.

If we turn to more operational and strategic level considerations that shaped the invasion of Afghanistan we

also find a misplaced ideological confidence and misreading of the situation. During this time the Soviet leadership defined its policies in the Third World in general and in Afghanistan in particular as being anti-American in nature. Overall policy in the Third World was viewed as one that competed with the United States, not one that collaborated with it for the sake of peace. Soviet leaders made it very clear that they believed they could pursue a vigorous policy without affecting detente since they saw the United States doing the same thing in the Third World. At the strategic level, therefore, there was a serious disconnect between issues of regional security and detente with the United States. Moscow assumed that it could, through surrogates or covert operations, insert friendly regimes or troops into these countries and not undermine its parallel detente with the United States.

The doctrinal analog of this perception was the change in Soviet thinking about local war. Whereas in the 1960s Soviet writers, almost to a man, maintained that one side's direct intervention in such wars would trigger a most serious crisis, by 1978 the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* stated that while local wars' increasing scope and intensification threatened *possible* world war, the growing might of the socialist camp created real possibilities for preventing such a transformation.¹³ This changed statement of policy and doctrine is clearly traceable to the growth of Moscow's conventional arsenal in the 1970s, its rethinking of the independent conventional option as a result of its attainment of nuclear parity and consequent realization of the obstacles to a credible conventional option in Europe posed by the nuclear weapons in that theater. The outcome of this rethinking, as it applied to conventional conflict is also tied to the growing sentiment for deploying Soviet assets abroad. We can trace a step-by-step increment in the size and quality of Soviet forces and assets deployed abroad from 1967-79, as well as the modalities of those transfers in accordance with increased support for what many called "the internationalist mission" of the Soviet armed forces.

That policy clearly enjoyed doctrinal sanction by high-ranking figures like Minister of Defense Marshal Grechko and Admiral Gorshkov who publicly endorsed it and, in the

latter case, justified force requests by reference to those missions for the Navy.¹⁴ Thus, whereas in the 1960s Soviet conventional forces were forced into a period of austerity to meet the nuclear threat and therefore rejected intervention in Third World conflicts, in the 1970s an influential constituency within the Soviet military, buoyed by rising conventional procurements, declining American capability, and enhanced Soviet strategies and instruments for Third World operations (e.g., coups d'etat or use of surrogates like Cubans), successfully validated its case for selective Soviet intervention in these conflicts. This military constituency evidently aligned itself to those in the party apparat—Suslov, Ponomarev and the International Department—and successfully lobbied for a forward policy in Afghanistan.

The foregoing analysis suggests that there exists a direct relation between the availability of an independent conventional operation and the prospect for direct Soviet or Soviet Bloc intervention abroad. Those who link improved air and sealift capabilities, along with airborne troops, ground forces, special forces, and mobile artillery to the prosecution of such options appear to be correct.¹⁵ However, the actual prosecution of war in Afghanistan taught Moscow the hard way that it had neither the quality of troops, tactics, officers, and operational art, nor the high-tech systems needed to conduct conventional operations in the Third World under the conditions of the 1980s, let alone in the much more militarized European and Far Eastern TVDs.

The war in Afghanistan invalidated the two fundamental assumptions of the lobby for Third World options. The first is that these local wars could be quickly won with no damage to the security of the superpower relationship and hence of the USSR itself. Second, the armies of socialism would always, in Grechko's term, "march only in one direction." Victory, especially a rapid one based on principles of Soviet operational art was supposed to be inevitable. Instead, Moscow fought a war for which it was doctrinally unprepared with forces and equipment that were also unsuited to the theater.

At the same time this war accelerated the global formation of an anti-Soviet bloc led by the United States and the

formation of a U.S. counterdoctrine against Soviet forces in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, known as the Reagan Doctrine or neoglobalism to the Soviets. That counterdoctrine placed the Soviet Union under threat because it was part of what Soviet leaders came to see as a seamless web of a worldwide U.S. strategy against the USSR that included Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INFs), Airland Battle, and FOFA in Europe, as well as SDI, Maritime Strategy, and the creation of an anti-Soviet Asia bloc.

In summary, the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan severely undercut the military claim to influence over all aspects of national security policy. Afghanistan has contributed to the rethinking of all aspects of conventional warfare, not just local war or tactics. Afghanistan has also demonstrated that it was wrong to advance socialism in the Third World by ever-larger injections of Soviet military power to would-be socialist states that appeared under the umbrella of ideological concepts like socialist orientation and vanguard party. Afghanistan has substantially eroded the prestige and status of the military and of military service, setting in motion the articulation of an ever more widespread view of the army as a particularly brutal and chauvinistic fraternity of incompetents, criminal elements, and corrupt commanders. Lastly, the failure of this unilateral and militarized approach to regional conflicts in the Third World has failed to increase security. Instead, this and other wars drained economic and political resources away from Moscow. Therefore, more than any other single event, Afghanistan has prompted the ongoing reorientation of Soviet policy relating to resolving regional conflicts in the Third World.

Afghanistan and Military Reform.

The impact of Afghanistan can be found in issues of force structure and restructuring of the Soviet Army. Clearly the effort to make the army a more mobile and less bloated force, with commanders of units and sub-units who can act independently, owes something to this war.

Polish General Lewandowski writes:

At the same time, it should be noted—experience and numerous post-war examples testify to this—that the number of troops does not always determine victory. The outcome of battles, and even of wars, is more and more being shifted from the quantitative sphere to the qualitative sphere. Today, in the main, he who has the qualitative advantage in firepower, leadership, training, and operational organization can count on victory.¹⁶

The Soviet reformers also observe that it was precisely the Afghan war which highlighted Soviet military shortcomings.

The state of the USSR Armed Forces, however, does not correspond to the command of the times, and the measures which are being adopted are of a cosmetic nature and prevent the army (from) being brought to a new quality level, which was reflected in concentrated fashion in the course of the "Afghan campaign." Military reform encompassing all spheres of defense building are essential to achieve this goal.¹⁷

There is no doubt that the military-political leadership understands at least some of the shortfalls in human quality of both the officer corps and enlisted men revealed by Afghanistan and subsequent public criticism. Already in 1988 Defense Minister Yazov stressed that democratization of the Armed Forces was not only inevitable, it was the precondition for ensuring that the "*human factor*" really began to act effectively. Without that, the benefits of quality equipment, increased training, better military science, and improved force structure were unachievable.¹⁸ However, between formal recognition of the need for reform and its actual implementation exists a great controversy led by both military reformers and the Institutchiki.

Military reformers have stated that 45 percent of the conscripts in the 4 million man army of 1989 had "various mental aberrations." Fifteen percent had criminal records and one-third had virtually no command of Russian—a figure twelve times as large as in 1969.¹⁹ The quality of the officer corps is also criticized. According to 1989's operational inspections, 40 percent of the officers were rated only as satisfactory. Since unit commanders receive replacement recruits twice a year and teach them the same thing over and over again,

officers neither have the time nor the skill to upgrade themselves.²⁰

These figures are not onesidedly chosen for the benefit of the reform argument. Other admissions include stagnant tactics during the Brezhnev period resulting from a refusal to admit mistakes, formalized bureaucratic training, emphasis on show or unreal scenarios for exercises, downgrading of conventional tactics due to the impact of nuclear weapons, and the stereotype of the marching offensive that assumed unrealistically high rates of advance and ignored natural obstacles (which abound in Afghanistan) and enemy action.²¹ More recently, *Voennyi Vestnik* (The Military Herald), the Soviet journal devoted mainly to tactics, published a poll of officers that exposed just how poorly Soviet officers think of their training, and of their men, officers', and warrant officers' qualifications.²² A recent Air Force article is revealing in its description of actual sorties being flown according to a long standardized scheme where the "adversary" does not interfere.

And if there is opposition, the *OPFORCE* as a rule is flying the same kind of aircraft, and all actions are known in advance down to the slightest details.²³

The main reason for failure to train authentically lies in the desire of all concerned to get high marks. There remains a continuing tendency to neglect tactics in training and introduction of new weapons. Too much close supervision has deprived people of opportunities to exercise independent judgment and learn how to master the control and command of combined arms units and air-land operations at any level.²⁴ Since the Western literature on the war in Afghanistan tallies with these observations we may assume that whether the problems are recognized they have yet to be overcome.

In fact, the war in Afghanistan may have undermined several of the initiatives being pursued by Chief of Staff Ogarkov and Minister of Defense Ustinov to rectify these shortcomings. Recently published works suggest that they shared a concern to shake up the training and education of the officer corps to make it more responsive to technological

demands, more creative, and independent-minded in finding solutions on the battlefield. Marshal Ogarkov reputedly voiced the opinion in 1971 that half the officer corps were incompetents who should be fired.²⁵ Moreover, he and the General Staff (but not Ustinov) opposed the proposed invasion, and suggested instead an enclave strategy of holding defensive positions in the fortified cities of Afghanistan.²⁶ The invasion shelved all these plans and involved Soviet troops in operations for which Ogarkov reportedly saw little utility, while raising American and Western threat perceptions considerably. The notable bitterness with which he increasingly opposed Brezhnev's defense policies after 1980 may owe something to his original skepticism about Afghanistan and the growing realization of its true costs.²⁷

There is limited evidence concerning internal military politics regarding this war at the high command level. On the basis of the promotion of many senior officers who served there, the government and army viewed service there and the war in a positive light.²⁸ At the same time one also has the distinct feeling that there is an orchestrated campaign of silence about the military's performance there. Articles about the lessons of recent wars mention the Near East-Israel vs. Arabs--and the Middle East--the Gulf War and Afghanistan. But the latter is not mentioned by name. The military's reticence about this war can also be found in the annual Air Force Day article by Marshal Efimov, CINC of the VVS (Soviet Air Forces) this past February. Efimov recounts all the glorious exploits of the air forces in all the wars up through 1945, including the ignominious Finnish War and the operations against China in 1929, and Japan, 1938-39 and 1945. But not one word is said about Afghanistan or the lessons learned in aerial combat over such terrain.²⁹ Such silence can hardly be accidental and it appears throughout the literature.

Afghanistan and the Policy Process.

It is clear that the war exposed serious deficiencies and differences among the main institutional players in national security policy making and in the entire cornucopia of Soviet Third World policies and strategies. Competing security policy

orientations regarding use of forces in the Third World came to a head in 1979 and the consequences of that clash are now felt throughout these institutions. In foreign policy, for example, the military was dethroned from policy-making power and policies were reoriented from use of force in the Third World.

Until the costs of Afghanistan and related adventures fully manifested themselves to policy makers, Soviet policy continued to take the form of a coherent strategy based on an articulated approach, military and political, to expansion of its power position in the Third World. The failure of that policy and strategy in Afghanistan has been a major catalyst for the new thinking, especially its downgrading of the military dimension of national power security and its emphasis on cooperation, even with the United States to solve regional conflicts (the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait became the model test of such cooperation). Soviet and Afghan commentary today forcefully attack the linked series of ideologies and political-military positions that led to the war and dolefully point out the consequences for both societies.

For the Soviets, it earmarked them in nonproductive dependencies abroad and associated them with instability and economic failure.³⁰ For the Afghans, Najibullah's recent assessment for both countries is similarly negative. Not only does he criticize the policies of past regimes, he observes that the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan was neither in Soviet nor Afghanistan's interest. It provided pretexts for Western intervention in the civil war, strengthened the national and religious antigovernmental tendencies among the population, and resulted in Afghanistan's and the USSR's international isolation. Finally, the enormous Soviet presence induced a laziness among the governmental class that only undermined its legitimacy further as it sucked the Soviets deeper into the morass.³¹

Thus, the entire policy complex of arms transfers, surrogate forces, KGB (and GRU) covert operations, socialist orientation and vanguard parties conspired to draw Moscow deeper into the core problems of its new clients and to cover these with the protective mantle of the Brezhnev Doctrine which formally

obliged Moscow to defend such clients from "imperialism."³² Cases of Soviet foreign intervention before 1980 not only showed an operational decisiveness, they were as much, if not more, impelled by the prospective costs of not acting as by the expected gains of these operations.³³

A strong case can be made as well for the idea that the USSR had a combined military, political, and ideological strategy for the Third World. Soviet ambitions grew with the growth of its military, covert, and political assets.³⁴ Analyses of discussions of Muslim Communist Parties indicates a targeting of the army, intelligentsia, and state sectors of Afghanistan and other countries, for recruitment. These analyses reveal a tendency to discount Islamic factors among Muslim countries and not to regard Islamic identity as a fundamental primordial force that animates the Islamic world. Rather, the Soviets saw Islam as an instrumental force, employed for tactical or strategic political purposes. Therefore Soviet policies could manipulate it. Accordingly, in these analyses they disparaged the potential for the use of Muslim identity as a rallying point against the USSR. Moscow, somewhat naively, thought it could mechanically transpose earlier nationality policies in Soviet Central Asia to the Muslim world without encountering serious obstacles. Here as elsewhere, it was misled by what Malcolm Yapp has called, "ideological claptrap." At the same time, the Afghan-Soviet treaty of 1978 was the clearest example of Moscow's military-political geopolitical ambitions in both Muslim and East Asia. This treaty committed Afghanistan to the longstanding Soviet goal of an Asian collective security system and ultimately committed Moscow to intervene to rescue a beleaguered "Socialist Afghanistan."³⁵

The Afghan intervention initially provided an occasion for a particularly brutal expression of Moscow's "arrogance of power." Insofar as it came after a series of apparently unbroken U.S. failures in the Third World and Soviet successes, it provided an opportunity for Soviet spokesmen at home and abroad to "throw their weight around." This arrogance of power is to be found in many Soviet officials' statements that frankly conceded that Moscow had embarked

on a policy of "gambling" whether or nor Washington liked it. In terms more congenial to Soviet discourse this was an admission of an "adventurist" policy.³⁶ Other Soviet comments stated that Washington had been deluded if it thought that Moscow would sacrifice support for the liberation movement to gain the benefits of detente.³⁷ Moscow had the power and the right to defend any of its clients anywhere who wanted protection.³⁸ Yet at the same time analysts from Brezhnev down clearly misread the nature of the war—even stating that it was intended as no more than a limited police action.

And even now Soviet military figures cannot fully come to terms with the military or strategic viability of partisan and guerrilla forces despite their own experience of them in World War II, or with Afghanistan. For instance, in 1987, General-Lt. of Aviation Serebriannikov wrote that Lenin observed, "Your appeals to create partisan detachments to combat the regular imperialist army are amusing to every soldier." Serebriannikov continues. "As we see, he had the same approach as Engels. Only a regular army can oppose another regular army."³⁹ Thus military writers still rationalize the Soviet intervention by saying that the revolt against the revolution threatened to put an anti-Soviet force at the border and that Afghanistan could somehow threaten the USSR's vital strategic interests while itself undergoing civil war.

According to General Bazhenov, editor of *Military Thought*,

Afghanistan witnessed a limited contingent of Soviet forces, and their operations demonstrated that the method of preparing for war and the conduct of operations in mountains were correct. We left Afghanistan not because of defeat but because of political resolution of the Afghan question. I don't know of anywhere that our forces were driven out. Our airborne especially performed well. The situation is moving toward stability.⁴⁰

Moscow had thus blinded itself to both political and military reality. Politically, it mistook tribal and military juntas espousing a radical line for viable or potentially viable Soviet-type models. It pursued a policy in the Third World that escalated military tensions there and at the same time pretended that it was not responsible for the degradation of

regional security that then came about. It committed itself to regimes which commanded no real domestic base. Moscow thereby obligated itself to a process of ever more involvement in their affairs. The Soviet Union never understood why the United States looked angrily at its policies in the Third World and believed that it could pursue a frankly adventurist policy unjustifiably gambling with impunity. Moscow believed that it must have the right to operate according to its own standards and criteria and the power to demand participation globally on that double standard. Weisband and Franck's observations with regard to the Czechoslovak intervention in 1968 demonstrate that this arrogance of power dated back to that time and that it encompassed both domestic and foreign policy under Brezhnev.

*Implied in Soviet conduct is the assertion that not only could they invade a satellite, but that they could deceive, lie, confuse, and surprise the world; so long as their conduct was confined to their private ghetto of vassal states, they could be as erratic, unsystematic, unpredictable and immoral as they pleased. Implied also is the notion, . . . that what Russia did in its ghetto would make little more difference to the rest of the world, and the conduct of the United States in particular, than what the Soviet leaders were doing to dissidents within the Soviet Union itself. That the Russians presumed on their relationship with the United States Government in this manner, speaks not only of them but of their view of the United States, . . .*⁴¹

Finally, a major lesson then for the policy process is found in the current demand for a decision-making process that takes full account of divergent and expert opinions, rejects monopolistic and dogmatic institutional perspectives, and is more open to public debate. The demands of reformers for the institutionalization of the Soviet Congress of Deputies' watchdog role and the Gorbachevian reforms that have stripped the Party's International Department and the military of their monopolies over Third World and military affairs harken back to Afghanistan as the paradigm of what not to do. In this sense, Afghanistan provided a major impetus for restructuring national security decision making and opening up debate on those issues.⁴²

Military Lessons.

The recent first Soviet military assessment of the war confirms the stultifying effect of conceptual blindness regarding Afghanistan on the conduct of the war itself. Soviet troops proved ineffectual, it is now claimed, because the Stalinist theoreticians had supposedly buried the past experience of Moscow against the Basmachi (a falsehood). More to the point is that Soviet military teaching apparently ignored the experience of partisan and counterpartisan warfare (the Soviet term) during 1945-80 and stressed only training according to the classical and traditional forms of military operations in World War II. Allegedly, the partisan resistance during World War II was also ignored or neglected in Soviet military instruction. "Furthermore it was never envisaged that our Army would be used in such situations."⁴³ While much of this is true, much of it is a rationalization.

An enormous amount of Soviet military literature is devoted to so-called local wars, like Vietnam and those in the Middle East. While apparently most of it examined the more purely conventional warfare aspects of these conflicts, much of this literature could have applied to Afghanistan if the USSR had correctly understood and prepared for the theater and the war itself. Certainly training was inadequate and tactics were rigid. But at the bottom of all those shortfalls lies the fact that the prior experience of the Soviet military in the Third World in 1975-79 predisposed fundamental misapprehension of the mission requirements involved in this "stability operation."⁴⁴ The Soviet military and civilian command made Clausewitz's fundamental error of misreading the nature of the war itself. Because they wrongly defined the military-political problem—a police operation or in our terms a stability operation—they then concluded that regular forces could do the job. The fact that the generals said they would be out by the Olympics in the Summer of 1980, and then said that they would be out by the next party congress in February 1981, compounded the problems and confirms their delusion.⁴⁵

The fundamental mistake was a profound miscalculation of the theater and the type of warfare suitable in it—a monumental

error of strategic assessment and also an equally profound intelligence failure.

Placing the blame must look at more than the Soviet military leadership since four channels existed for the control and monitoring of Third World clients. These were the Soviet ambassador, the International Department, the KGB, and the General Staff of the Army, presumably including the GRU.⁴⁶ The army and its intelligence system had a functioning flow of information on events in Afghanistan. A second point is that, given the attention we know the Soviet military pays to the preparation of the theater and the evidence of the 1941 command study of Iran, it stands to reason that Afghanistan had been the subject of much prior contingency planning. Military planning in Afghanistan dates back to the invasions of the 1920s if not to the 1955 inauguration of modern Soviet aid. By 1979 a regular system of interaction with the Afghan military had developed along with an equally developed intelligence penetration of the area and plans for its exploitation. Evidence also points to strong GRU support for the invasion. There is much evidence of GRU operations in the Third World that took the forms of covert planning of coups, gun running and the like. This evidence suggests that the GRU and probably the MPA, whose journal *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, published extensively on intervention in the Third World, provided the military input to convince Minister of Defense Ustinov of the desirability of and likelihood of a successful intervention.⁴⁷

The General Staff under Marshal Ogarkov may well have opposed the plan of intervention. Soviet military analysts argue that the General Staff recommended a garrison strategy of peacekeeping in the major cities and bases that would keep Soviet forces out of combat and allow a new regime to reach an accord with the rebels. The plan ultimately adopted was apparently ordered from above by the civilian commanders—Ustinov and Brezhnev.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the General Staff plan overlooked the fact that any large-scale Soviet intervention, even an operationally limited one, would invariably undermine the only local force that could stop the insurgency. In other words, the Soviet military failed to grasp the fact that any resort to military means substantially

worsened the problems that the military would then have to face. It appears also that the military was misled by prior conventional operational successes as in the Ogaden War of 1972-78.⁴⁹ In addition, there was a strong military-political impetus, not unlike ours in Vietnam, to demonstrate commitment to our clients.⁵⁰

Rethinking Policy.

The resulting catastrophe impelled a rethinking of Soviet approaches to regional security and conflict in the Third World during Brezhnev's final years. That process has visibly accelerated under Gorbachev. The six elements formalized in the original Brezhnev view of regional conflicts have all been repudiated by Afghanistan. These elements were:

- Stability in the Third World is artificial and undesirable. Instability is inevitable, historically ordained as that area moves from capitalist domination to some form of "socialist orientation."
- Therefore, anticolonial and anti-imperialist revolutions are inevitable and desirable when they occur. And the USSR is the natural ally of these revolutionary anti-imperialist forces and is obliged to help where feasible. Moreover, its military support inhibits the full commitment of imperialist military power against these revolutions.
- Imperialist actions alone are the sole cause for the interruption of this "natural development" in the Third World and for the ensuing rise of international tensions.⁵¹
- Since the superpowers share certain common interests in averting nuclear war that exist independently of these conflicts, the pursuit of detente is not affected by the internationalization of the class struggle occurring in the Third World.
- These regional conflicts do not necessarily (though could) escalate into superpower confrontations since

Soviet forces have risen to parity with those of imperialists.

- A limited number of conflicts (mainly the Arab-Israeli one) do threaten world peace and could escalate into open confrontation. This obliges the USSR to search for political settlements if available.

Recent works on Soviet approaches to regional conflicts show that all these points have been refuted. Third World conflict is no longer seen ideologically as a strict zero-sum game. These wars are not assumed as strictly wars of national liberation or counter-revolutionary efforts to arrest "history." They are recognized generally as inflaming superpower tensions and antagonizing the regional actors in each area to the point of joining the anti-Soviet side. These conflicts are seen to drain the USSR of international and domestic resources and strengthen those that oppose Perestroika's institutional, democratizing reforms, as well as its effort to curb the military-industrial complex's limitless appetite for state revenues and resources. At the same time the dispatch of troops abroad and secret slides into war aggravate class and ethnic tensions at home and undermine the legitimacy of both Soviet foreign and domestic policy.⁵² In short, the previous political-ideological justification for an expanding Soviet military role in Third World conflicts has been repudiated, making the likelihood of such intervention under unilateral Soviet auspices highly unlikely.⁵³

Therefore, it is no accident that Gorbachev's reforms have largely aimed at the outcomes and problems revealed by the Afghan invasion. By invading Afghanistan the Brezhnev regime reached the climax of its ideologically-based policy described by some of its spokesmen then as adventurism and now criticized in similar terms by Soviet commentators and officials. Not only was this a bankrupt policy, it highlighted the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union's international standing, military doctrine, strategy, operational art, and tactics.⁵⁴ And its economic and human costs to the USSR and Afghanistan are still incalculable. Bankruptcy is not too harsh a term to ascribe to a policy whose costs cannot be reckoned 11 years after the event.

CHAPTER 1

ENDNOTES

1. Mark N. Katz, *Gorbachev's Military Policy in The Third World*, The Washington Papers, No. 140, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989; Mark N. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982; Celeste A. Wallander, "Third World Conflict in Soviet Military Thought," *World Politics*, Vol. XLII, No. 1, October 1989, pp. 31-63; Stephen Blank, "Gorbachev's Agenda and the Next Administration," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, October 1989, pp. 381-397; Stephen Blank, "After Afghanistan: Assessing Soviet Capabilities for Foreign Intervention," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. IX, No. 2, 1990, pp. 117-136.

2. Stephen Foye, "Murders of Soviet Army Officers," *RFE/RL Report on the Soviet Union*, June 29, 1990, p. 11.

3. The continuing press campaign by the military and its supporters to portray the Afgantsy as merely fulfilling their internationalist debt and patriotic obligation, as well as the following articles give the military and old thinkers' defense. The articles cited in the following note give the opposing view. "Afghanistan-Podvodnia Itogi," *Ogonek*, No. 12, March 1989, p.6; "Veterany i Perestroika," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, March 4, 1989; "Kak Prinimalos Resheniia," *Ibid.*, November 18, 1989; "Tak My Voshli v Afghanistan," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, September 20, 1989.

4. "Andrei Kozyrev, Andrei Shumikhin, "East and West in the Third World," *International Affairs*, March 1989, pp. 64-74; *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) USSR*, June 20, 1988, pp. 58-59; June 27, 1988, pp. 1-3, 5; June 30, 1988, pp. 4-9. Andrei Kozyrev, "Confidence and the Balance of Interests," *International Affairs*, November 1988, pp. 3-12; Alexei Izyumov, Andrei Kortunov, "The USSR in the Changing World," *International Affairs*, August 1988, pp. 46-56; *FBIS, USSR*, "Third World' Policy, Perestroika Reexamined," Annex, May, 22, 1990, pp. 1-6, are some of many examples. Andrei Kolosov, "Reexamining Policy in the Third World," *Mezhdunarodnaia Zhizn*, April 1990, pp. 37-45.

5. *Ibid.*, all.

6. Katz, 1982; Avigdor Haselkorn, "The 'External Functions' of Soviet Armed Forces," *Naval War College Review*, January-February 1980, pp.

35-45; Francis Fukuyama, "Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the Power Projection Mission," Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1987, pp. 13-50.

7. Stephen Blank, "Soviet Low-Intensity Conflicts: An Agenda for Research," *Conflict*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 1989, pp. 1-19.

8. William Zimmerman, Robert Axelrod, "The 'Lessons' of Vietnam and Soviet Foreign Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. XXXIV, No.1, October 1981, p. 16.

9. David E. Albright, "Vanguard Parties in the Third World," in Walter Z. Laqueur, ed., *The Pattern of Soviet Conduct in The Third World*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983, pp. 208-225; Francis Fukuyama, "The Military Dimension of Soviet Policy in The Third World," Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1984, pp. 20-22.

10. Roman Ul'ianovskii, "Countries With a Socialist Orientation," *Kommunist*, No. 11, July 1989, JPRS Translation, p. 131.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 137.

13. Raymond Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to Reagan*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1985, pp. 526-537, 666-689, 915-965.

14. As quoted by Philip Nel, "The Current Soviet View of Regional Conflict: How Much of a Change?" *Africa Insight*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 1988, p. 75.

15. Fukuyama, 1987.

16. Rajan Menon, *Soviet Power and the Third World*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 14-16, 60-128; James M. McConnell, Bradford Dismukes, "Soviet Diplomacy of Force in the Third World," *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1979, pp. 14-27.

17. *Joint Publications Research Service, Eastern Europe*, July 6, 1990, "Structural Changes in Light of New Defense Doctrine Viewed," p. 14.

18. "Draft Concept Of Military Reform Proposed," *FBIS*, USSR, June 21, 1990, p. 66.

19. "Yazov Article Views Defense Building," JPRS, *Soviet Union: Military Affairs*, August 12, 1988, p. 4.

20. "Lopatin Comments on Military Reform, Conversion," *FBIS*, USSR, June 19, 1990, pp. 69-70.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Major General Ret. I.N. Vorob'ev, "Pochemu Taktika Okazalas' v Zastoe?" *Voennaia Mysl*, No.1, January 1990, pp. 37-44.

23. Michael Orr, "Tactical Developments in the Soviet Ground Forces," Unpublished Paper, Soviet Studies Research Center, RMA, Sandhurst, June 1990, as quoted in *Voennyi Vestnik*, June 1990; Stephen Blank, "Imagining Afghanistan: Lessons of a 'Small War'," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, Vol. III, No. 3, Summer, 1990, pp. 468-490.

24. "Tactics As Element of Air Combat Training," JPRS, *Arms Control*, June 27, 1990, p.1, taken from *Aviatsiia i Kosmonavtika*, No. 1, 1990, pp. 1-3.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Dale R. Herspring, *The Soviet High Command 1967-1989: Personalities and Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 119-214; and Dr. Herspring's remarks at a Center for Naval Analysis seminar Alexandria, VA, July 18, 1990.

27. "Afghanistan Podvodia Itogi," p. 6.

28. Herspring, at CNA seminar; Fukuyama, 1987; Bruce Parrott, "Political Change and Civil-Military Relations," in Thane Gustafson, Timothy J. Colton, eds., *Soldiers and the Soviet State: Civil-Military Relations From Brezhnev to Gorbachev*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 44-92. That officer training as Ogarkov demanded was not being carried out is clear from more recent statements by prominent military men like Deputy Chief of Staff, General Lobov. Lobov stated that,

The problem of improving the methodological expertise of commanders may thus be said to be the most acute problem that we face at the present time. The source of the problem is to be found in military educational institutions, where future officers undertake only minimal study of even the most elementary methodological procedures.

Since these schools form the future Soviet officer, reform must start there.

29. Herspring, p. 270; Blank, "Imagining Afghanistan." p. 488; Bruce Porter, "The Military Abroad: Internal Consequences of External Expansion," Gustafson and Colton, pp. 304-316.

30. "AF CIC Rationalizes Offensive Characteristics of Air Force," JPRS, *Arms Control*, July 16, 1990, pp. 1-2, cited from *Aviatsiia i Kosmonavtika*, No. 1990, pp. 1-3.

31. Andrei Kolosov, "Reappraisal of USSR Third World Policy," *International Affairs*, May 1990, p. 36; Vladimir Nosenko, "Learning From Past Errors," *New Times*, No. 7, 1990, pp. 26-28. Kolosov observes that:

The "Vietnamese syndrome" that the U.S. went through only whetted appetites. As a result, we waged an outright war in Afghanistan, we were deeply enmeshed in several acute conflicts (and we encouraged socialist developing countries to take part in them), and we promoted the creation of regimes in different parts of the world that tried, under banner of anti-imperialism, to implement in their own conditions the administer-by-command model and therefore counted on us in everything. The specifics of these regimes, the militarist bent typical of our domestic and foreign policy, and the backwardness of the Soviet civilian economy that was strongly manifest even then made for the fact that military cooperation and arms deliveries were the heart of our relations with developing states "friendly" to us. Their militarization only pushed them even farther into participation in conflicts and into authoritarian rule and worsened the situation in the economy that was rapidly falling apart as it was, as a result of the application of our scheme. The "allies" demanded more and more resources, became more deeply involved in conflicts, and increasingly strengthened in everyone's eyes the association between Soviet policy and instability, authoritarianism, and economic failures. Other developing states, above all the most prosperous ones, economically, cooperation with which could have yielded us real benefit, came to have a stronger distrust of the Soviet Union and a reluctance to have anything to do with it, and even openly protested against its adventures in the Third World.

32. "Najibullah Delivers Party Central Committee Report," *FBIS*, Near East and South Asia, July 3, 1990, pp. 44-45.

33. Stephen Blank, "Soviet Forces in Afghanistan: Unlearning the Lessons of Vietnam," *Responding to Low-Intensity Conflict Challenges*, U.S. Air Force, Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL, 1990, pp. 53-126.

34. Joshua M. Epstein, "Soviet Vulnerabilities in Iran and the RDF Deterrent," *International Security*, Vol. VI, No. 2, Fall, 1981, p. 164.

35. Fukuyama, 1987; McConnell and Dismukes.

36. "Political Shifts in the Middle East: Rcots, Factors, Trends," *World Marxist Review*, No. 2, 1980, pp. 58-64; Michael A. Lennon, "Russia's Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in Asia," Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 1980, p. 9; Howard M. Hensel, "Asian Collective Security

and the Iran-Iraqi Border Dispute: The Soviet View," *Journal of South Asian and Middle East Studies*, I, No. 1, 1977, pp. 44-64.

37. A. Iskenderov, "Unity of The World Revolutionary Process— Factor of Stronger Peace," *International Affairs*, December 1978, pp. 66-74; "Soviet Diplomat in Washington Interviewed on Kabul Crisis," *FBIS*, USSR, January 15, 1980.

38. "Down the Arc of Instability," *New Times*, February 1980. "It must be said that we have never given grounds for such illusions, and it is not our fault that they existed here and there."

39. *The New York Times*, April 22, 1980. Ambassador to Paris Chervonenko angrily observed that Moscow would prevent "any more Chiles," referring to the Allende regime's collapse in General Pinochet's 1973 coup.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Lieutenant General V. Serebriannikov, "Armiia-Kakoi ei Byt'?" *Krasnaia Zvezda*, February 12, 1989, p. 2.

42. Thomas M. Franck, Edward Weisband, *World Politics: Verbal Strategy Among the Superpowers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 26.

43. Jeanette Voas, "Preventing Further Afghanistan: Reform in Soviet Policymaking on Military Intervention Abroad," Center for Naval Analysis Occasional Paper, No. 2, Alexandria, VA, August, 1990; "Lopatin Outlines Military Reform Concepts," *FBIS*, USSR, September 17, 1990, Supplement, pp. 31-40.

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45. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

46. Wolfgang Berner, at the XX Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 20, 1988.

47. *Soviet Proxy Activities in Africa*, Conference Materials, Washington, DC, February 19, 1988, p. 13.

48. Blank, "Soviet Forces in Afghanistan"; "KGB's Kalugin Interviewed on Career," *FBIS*, USSR, June 29, 1990, p.58.

49. "Afghanistan: Podvodia Itogi," p. 6.

50. Mark Urban, "Soviet Intervention and the Ogaden Counter-Offensive of 1978," *Royal United Services Institute*, No. 2, 1983, pp. 42-46; "Foreign Report," *The Economist*, August 16, 1978, p. 2.

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52. S. Neil MacFarlane and Phillip Nel, "The Changing Soviet Approach to Regional Conflicts," *Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. V, No. 2, June 1989, pp. 151-152.

53. *Ibid.*

54. "Shevarnadze Discusses Foreign Policy Process," *FBIS*, USSR, August 3, 1989, pp. 45-46; Jiri Valenta, "No More Afghanistans?" *New Times*, No. 30, 1990, pp. 28-29.

CHAPTER 2

THE INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN: AN OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

In several aspects the December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan resembled the Czechoslovak invasion of 1968 and pointed to future operational concepts. The invasion in several ways also pointed toward what we might see should the USSR be involved in extensive military operations in the 1990s. Such operations clearly include the increasingly likely possibility that Moscow might intervene to quell a rebellion or secession in one of its republics. The similarity among the different kinds of operations listed here, Prague, and Kabul, is not accidental. This operational congruence conforms to the Soviet inclination, as of 1979, to ignore the entire concept of low-intensity or unconventional warfare which Soviet military men have regarded until now as a foreign "counterrevolutionary" concept.

The Afghan invasion combined the use of high quality airborne and Spetsnaz forces along with ground forces of the lowest quality in the Soviet service. Those forces were category 3 troops, often Muslims, configured in motorized rifle divisions. The initial insertion of Soviet troops took place in the Soviets' air bases and at Kabul airport, which was seized by an airborne landing assault force. This choice of target highlighted the primacy of air superiority in Soviet thinking concerning the initial period of war. It appears that the Soviet leaders harbored doubts about Afghanistan's air force because to guarantee air superiority the invading Soviet troops contained air defense forces—hardly a concern if they were only "rescuing" friendly forces. The use of airborne and air defense forces represented a flexibility in tailoring forces to particular missions that was not simply SOP but a reply to specific potential threats. There are also grounds to suspect the prior introduction by Soviet forces of CW assets into Afghanistan or

their concurrent insertion during the invasion. This is because the Soviet forces included chemical defense units, a deployment that may also have been planned for a European invasion as well at the time.

The seizure of airbases and airports from which Soviet troops then fanned out to occupy key C³I areas, fortresses commanding roads, and key cities fully comports with the target ranking assigned to Soviet forces. Air operations were, at this time, the initial phase operation and consisted of massive targeting of air and missile bases, C³I centers, and key infrastructural targets.¹ The initial phase heavily relied on airborne insertions and Special Forces. In the initial air/anti-air operation, as of 1979 the emphasis was on the offensive dimension, and the forces involved in it, air, airborne, and Spetsnaz forces, are exactly the forces that would be used now, as then, for the operation (see Chapter 6 for example). Spetsnaz forces would detect, locate, and, in tandem with the bigger units, seize those targets or destroy them.² Current Soviet military literature has assimilated the lessons of this operation and previous preparations for theater war in Europe or Asia. Thus, today, published analyses of both local war-combat in small theaters like the Third World—and theater warfare in Europe or NE Asia expressly call for such forces to be combined in the initial operation to strike at precisely those targets.³

Afghanistan thus illustrated aspects of Soviet operational art as of 1979 for "stability operations." It also was a model for future operations aiming to seize control of or neutralize enemy C³I as quickly as possible and attain strategic if not tactical and operational surprise as the Baltic Coup of 1991 demonstrated.⁴ In achieving strategic, operational, and tactical objectives, Soviet commanders are also required to employ deception which goes by the name of *Maskirovka*.⁵ The successful use of *Maskirovka* in Afghanistan appears to have been orchestrated with attention to audiences in Islamabad, Beijing, and Washington among others, as well as Kabul. Thus, despite the facts that intelligence sources caught the buildup of Soviet forces in April 1979, that airlift operations were rehearsed during the summer (to Yemen and back for no

apparent reason), that on at least five occasions before November 4, 1979 (i.e., the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Teheran) East bloc diplomats or others warned U.S. diplomats there that Moscow might well invade, and despite the fact that Soviet troops began performing combat missions in country in April 1979; Moscow attained total surprise. A week before the invasion, the *Economist's Foreign Report* charged that Moscow was preparing to invade Iran and accounts by staff members of the Carter Administration NSC admitted that the White House was totally surprised by the invasion.⁶

Soviet study of local wars since 1945, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Arab-Israeli, stresses that seizing C³I targets or destroying or blinding them, generally by air or airborne strikes, in the initial phase of operations provides an aggressor with vital strategic advantages.⁷ General Lobov and Andrei Kokoshin, in their 1989 article on strategy, claimed that during the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the disruption of Soviet C³I was the crucial factor that almost overturned the correlation of forces to the Germans' advantage.⁸ Such an appreciation of the importance of early targeting of C³I has led Soviet military analysts to think of war in wholly new forms. For example, General Lebedev and Aleksei Podberezkin observe that,

Certainly the aims of aggression do not necessarily consist in the capture and holding of territory. As the experience of wars and local military conflicts indicates, the attacking side can also set other tasks: the maximum undermining of the defensive and economic potential of the nation subjected to aggression, as well as destabilizing of the domestic political situation. These goals are achieved not so much by the land forces as by assault aviation and combat helicopters. Even in the wars where the task was set of holding territory, the attack aviation caused significantly greater damage than the tanks and artillery (for example in the war between Iran and Iraq). All these wars commenced, as a rule with a surprise air strike.⁹

In other words, the emphasis on speedy seizure of C³I targets, as in Afghanistan, has helped reorient Soviet thinking concerning the value of air over land power in warfare. It would certainly be wrong to ascribe the change only to this conflict,

but the invasion and subsequent operation certainly contribute examples of this trend in action.

A second lesson relevant to prompt targeting of C³I and future operations is the use of space communications and intelligence for Soviet commanders. During the invasion commanders received satellite reconnaissance as they did during Soviet withdrawals in 1988-89. They did not receive such intelligence during combat operations in 1980-88. That fact has led Western analysts to believe that this intelligence is of a strategic nature and is provided only for strategic level operations. Therefore this intelligence is not provided to lower level commanders who, from Afghan evidence, seem to be on a very limited need-to-know basis. Nonetheless, surprise and *Maskirovka* operations and the invasion went smoothly. When one also considers that the troops were controlled by satellite communications, one finds a unique Soviet approach to the growing use of space assets for low or mid-intensity operations.¹⁰ This fact also suggests that in operations against more developed and better armed enemies, space assets will play an increasing role. Therefore, it pays to think of Afghanistan as a TV-theater of war (Teatr' Voiny) and the invasion there as a strategic level operation that is part of Soviet military doctrine and strategy and not an isolated case.

Operational Lessons.

While the invasion prefigures a tilt towards air and airborne forces over ground forces in the future, it also must be seen in the light of Soviet strategy and operational art circa 1979. It was, in outline, remarkably similar to what we could have expected in the event of a European war. The aerial seizure of Kabul and key air bases, linked with the advance of armored and mechanized troops in Motorized Rifle Divisions, constituted a model encirclement operation. Here the airborne forces enforced a vertical envelopment of the entire theater and performed the missions of an operational maneuver group (OMG). The OMG, which can be constituted out of any force posture, is a combined arms force tailored to strategic missions that is inserted into the enemy's rear either by land, sea or air to perform operational and/or strategic missions. These are,

seizure and neutralization of air bases, missile bases (in Europe), neutralization or seizure of C³I targets and key junctures, isolation of the rear from the front, and, in general, disruption of the enemy's capability to conduct operations.¹¹ This is exactly what happened inside Afghanistan and Kabul. And the use of forward detachments, tactical level OMG forces and Spetsnaz, to detect, locate, and seize key targets inside Kabul is also part of the overall strategic operation.¹²

At a time when Soviet thinking has begun to refocus on limited war scenarios, i.e., limited objectives as well as rapid conflict termination, this operation also is of interest. Operationally, the invasion took the form of an encirclement of the Afghan government and its forces. The Soviet encirclement operation as a model descended from the operation at Khalkin Gol in Mongolia in August 1939 against Japan. That was the first time the Soviets successfully conducted an encirclement operation. We may also speculate that had Moscow judged Afghanistan correctly it would have displayed (as in Mongolia in 1939) an ability to use encirclement operations to bring about a rapid and controlled termination of the conflict—by seizing C³I and destabilizing the Amin regime—in a limited operation.¹³

Another way in which the Soviet invasion resembled past Soviet operations and suggested future ones is by its building on the experience of previous Soviet and Soviet bloc deployments in the Third World. This goes beyond the development of sufficient capability to airlift a division or more into Kabul, important as that is. The Soviet deployments to the Third World in the decade before 1979 manifested novelty in the composition of the invading forces. Soviet force packaging, i.e., the integration of air and air defense assets in divisions, steadily built upon previous deployments, starting with the dispatch of a division to Egypt in 1970. Subsequent deployments of Soviet or Cuban forces indicate an attempt to make divisions and subsequently regiments and battalions more flexible and impart greater capability to them to perform many diverse missions. Here, as noted above, we see the materialization of the concept of tailoring forces to the requirements (real and potential) of the mission. The forces in

Egypt and later in Ethiopia operated independently under local control, an innovation in Soviet procedure at the time. This force "package" also provided the means for subsequent gradual insertion of large combined arms forces into the theater, (ground, naval, and air and air defense forces).¹⁴ By using such "force packages" that were mission tailored, the Soviets showed a gradual disposition to restructure their forces in the direction of greater integration of combined arms at the divisional level and below. Later on, as a result of combat in Afghanistan, this restructuring went further, going to the battalion level in the Combined Arms Rifle Battalion (CARB) of the mid-1980s. And there is evidence from Afghan operations there of even further downward combination and integration of force assets. Thus the invasion force of 1979 continued a trend towards downward integration of combined arms to the division level, and even beyond, that has become more visible with time.

Another aspect of the invasion that derives from Soviet investigations of local war is the combination of elite airborne forces (the VDV and Spetsnaz) along with Category III troops of the lowest order of readiness and quality on the ground. This combination, using large numbers of Muslims in the ground forces clearly aimed to convey an image of Muslim pro-Soviet solidarity abroad perhaps also served as an instrument of *Maskirovka* to outside observers in Afghanistan. But it also represented Soviet use of troops more easily and rapidly deployable to the theater and validated some Soviet observations that local wars are characterized by the gradual insertion of ever new troops into combat, a situation that means that the best troops may not be the first to enter into operations.¹⁵ Thus the airborne troops provide the "quality edge" in Yossef Bodansky's terminology while the lower quality troops provide the mass but still attain surprise and operational success. Inasmuch as the invasion of Kabul was also a coup de main, or in our terms a stability operation, time was essential for Moscow. Its planners clearly believed they faced potential air threats and therefore they acted not just to win but to overwhelm the enemy lest prolongation occur with all its harmful consequences.¹⁶

The resort to a coup de main imposes the requirement of placing large bodies of troops simultaneously directly upon each target by appropriate techniques of aerial, ground, or naval insertion, influence, and ingress.

There is less need for sophisticated coordination on the ground, airlifted vehicles, or extensive tactical movement beyond that needed to reach the target. The coup overwhelms the enemy by its magnitude, the seizure of headquarters at the outset, or the disarming of troops.¹⁷

All of the foregoing points to the fact that these elements of the invasion grew out of an evolving effort to consummate the principles of the deep strike or deep operation that have dominated Soviet thinking for years. Elements of the invasion can be traced back at least to 1939 and Khalkin Gol, i.e., even before the great strategic operations of World War II in Europe and Asia.¹⁸ The invasion built upon these experiences, subsequent theory and refinements of operational art and force structure, strategy, and on the lessons learned in combat scenarios in the Third World.¹⁹ Soviet forces deployed either in Europe, Manchuria, Korea or elsewhere in the Third World would very likely use aerial movement, surprise air and land strikes, space assets to target enemy C³I, and attempt to overwhelm the enemy and win quickly by using *Maskirovka* to attain maximum surprise. The point of Afghanistan in this connection is that Moscow did not then (and may still not) accept any division of warfare and operational art into conventional and unconventional warfare. War was war, plain and simple.²⁰

Strategic Lessons.

At the same time that the invasion was a brilliant tactical and operational success in replacing the regime, Moscow failed to achieve its strategic objectives. Soviet troops failed to guarantee a stabilization of Afghanistan. It appears that the missions assigned to Soviet forces beyond capture and retention of main cities and arteries were the following:

- Replacing the Amin government with Karmal's that would be more compliant with Soviet wishes and less

visibly dedicated to assaulting Afghan social mores and religion.

- Occupation of cities and C³ nodes, roads, and airbases.
- Stabilization of the situation by providing a screen behind which the Afghan armed forces would now reconstitute themselves under a more popular regime and rebuild to the point where they could take on the Mujaheddin.
- Intimidate the Mujaheddin and/or their foreign patrons, particularly Pakistan.²¹

In line with this, Wolfgang Berner claims that Soviet generals told Brezhnev they would be out by the Summer Olympics of 1980 and when that failed they moved their deadline to the XXVI Party Congress of February 1981. When that failed to materialize in late 1980 they demanded 300,000 more troops, a process that probably helped bring about a purge of military commanders at that time.²²

However, it appears clear that by mid-1980 Soviet leaders began to realize the enormity of their miscalculation. Gromyko reportedly told Indian Foreign Minister Nareshima Rao, in April 1980, that the Soviet leaders had miscalculated when they invaded Afghanistan.²³ Whether or not that is true, in mid-1980 military reorganization began as a result of the realization of that miscalculation.

Major Soviet miscalculations include:

- The Soviets vastly overestimated Babrak Karmal's capacity to unite and lead a fractious PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) and implement a credible program that would command public support or win legitimacy.
- The other side of that failure is the underestimation and insufficient account taken of the tribalism that ripped apart the PDPA and continues to do so. This tribalism and factionalism made a mockery of party unity and hobbled efforts to create a government

along Soviet lines.²⁴ It also provided the Mujaheddin with substantial intelligence assets against the Soviet forces.

- A fundamental error was made in thinking that invasion could assure stability that would permit reconstitution of the Afghan military. Predictably, the invasion utterly compromised the regime and its army, and deprived them of real legitimacy for years to come. This forced the Soviets to bear the brunt of anti-guerrilla fighting for which they were unprepared.
- The fundamental misapprehension was that European style forces and tactics could be applied to a TV where guerrilla war predominated and where the political center of gravity became not Karmal's government but the Soviet forces. By invading, the Soviets fell prey not only to a somewhat more telescoped process of graduated intervention comparable to Vietnam, but also to all the liabilities of coalition warfare with a deficient partner. Since Soviet forces were tailored for another mission and had not sufficiently understood the topographical, climatic, and military dimensions of the theater, a mission/force mismatch soon developed.
- Moscow overlooked both the nationalist and international reaction to the invasion. Soviet leaders apparently failed to foresee that the Mujahedin would receive more recruits and support from within by virtue of the nationalist reaction to the invasion, or that Pakistan would become the recipient of greater foreign assistance, mainly American, but also Egyptian, Saudi, and Chinese.
- Moscow grievously miscalculated the impact of using Muslim troops. Instead of socializing the Afghans, they manifested signs of solidarity with them against their own forces, or proved militarily incompetent by virtue of their poor training and morale. They were replaced as soon as possible. But unrest in Soviet Central Asia continues to reverberate to this day with

local Soviet police forces consistently complaining about infiltration and agitation from the Afghan side of the border. As the Soviet delegates to the CNA Seapower Forum in September 1990 all concurred, the war in Afghanistan continues at home inside the USSR.

- All of these errors are bound up in the fundamental misreading of the theater and of the nature of the war to be fought. The USSR blundered into an unconventional war with perhaps the most conventionalized and standardized tactical-operational mindset of any major army in the world. Its inflexible *modus operandi* proved to be visibly incapable of adjusting to Afghan conditions. And as Belov noted earlier (Chapter 1), Soviet forces were quite unready, physically and psychologically, *not to mention morally*, for the rigors of Afghanistan. The many adaptations that then ensued represented an effort to make up for those errors.²⁵ But the current ferment in both the military and Soviet society as a whole undoubtedly owe much to the military failures that Afghanistan exposed, first and foremost at the level of strategic leadership and intelligence which inflicted deep wounds on both countries.

At the same time, the initial operation, carried forward the Soviet concept of a deep strike and refined it further, suggesting future dimensions and applications. Given Soviet capacity to respond, and better intelligence and leadership in the future, there is not *a priori* reason why recognizable follow-ons to that operation should not be expected if Soviet forces are used in combat either to quell domestic unrest or for foreign wars. The legacy of Russian military experience, whether in Europe or Asia, is by no means exhausted.

CHAPTER 2

ENDNOTES

1. Phillip A. Petersen and Major John R. Clark, "Soviet Air and Antiair Operations," *Air University Review*, March-April 1985, pp. 36-53.

2. On Spetsnaz see Major William H. Burgess III, ed., *Inside Spetsnaz: Soviet Special Operations, A Critical Analysis*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990, General Robert C. Kingston, Ret., Foreword; Chapter 10, John H. Merritt, "Prague to Kabul"; Chapter 11, David Isby, "Afghanistan"; Chapter 12, William H. Burgess III, "Spetsnaz and the Deep Operation."

3. Among the many published examples of this are, Rear Admiral V. Gulin and Captain 2nd Rank, I. Kondyrev, "Oboronitel'noe Napravlenie Sovetskoi Voennoi Doktriny," *Morskoi Sbornik*, No. 2, 1988, pp. 12-13; Colonel R.M. Portugal'skii, "Narushenie Upravleni e Voiskami Protivnika," *Voенно-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, No. 1, 1988, pp. 74-79.

4. Stephen Blank, "New Missions and Forces for Soviet Space Forces," *Defense Analysis*, Vol. VII, No. 2, Summer 1991, examines the growing Soviet interest in targeting precisely those assets in a future war, not conventional forces, as a way of winning rapidly at the conventional level.

5. Stephen Blank, "Soviet Low-Intensity Conflicts: An Agenda for Research," *Conflict*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 1989, pp. 1-19.

6. As reported at the CNA seminar, Alexandria, VA, July 18, 1990.

7. Portugal'skii, V.K. Babich, *Aviation in Local Wars*, JPRS, Translation, Soviet Military Affairs, October 2, 1989, p.50.

8. "Its (C³) disruption was almost the main factor that sharply changed the balance of real combat capabilities in the aggressor's favor. It seems that this factor has not yet been sufficiently taken into account to this day." "Kokoshin, Lobov Discuss Military Thought of General Svechin," JPRS, Translation, Soviet Military Affairs, April 13, 1989, pp. 22-23.

9. "Military Parity and Asymmetries," *Ibid.*, May 17, 1990, p. 37.

10. James C. Bussert, "Signal Troops Central to Soviet Afghanistan Invasion," *Defense Electronics*, June 1983, pp. 102-108.

11. Charles J. Dick, "Soviet Operational Concepts," Parts 1-2, Soviet Studies Research Centre, Surrey, England: RMA Sandhurst, Camberley, 1985; Christopher N. Donnelly, "The Soviet Operational Manoeuvre Group: A New Challenge for NATO," *International Defense Review*, August 1982; Charles J. Dick, "Soviet Operational Manoeuvre Groups—A Closer Look," *International Defense Review*, June 1983, Peter H. Vigor, *Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983; Phillip A. Petersen, John C. Hines, "The Conventional Offensive in Soviet Theater Strategy," *Orbis*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, Fall, 1983, pp. 695-739.

12. Burgess, Chapters 10-12.

13. Christopher D. Bellamy, Joseph S. Lahnstein, "The New Soviet Defensive Policy: Khalkin Gol 1939 As Case Study," *Parameters*, Vol. XX, No. 3, September 1990, pp. 19-32.

14. LTC David Eshel, "The Soviet Expeditionary Force 1970: A Lesson in Organizational Flexibility," *Born in Battle*, No. 9, 1980, pp. 42-48.

15. Joseph Bodansky, "The Bear At Sea," House Republican Research Committee, Washington, DC, 1990, Pt. II, p. 19, quoting General V. Larionov. The use of Category III troops mainly of Muslim origin may also have had a political purpose that backfired upon Soviet leaders once those troops learned the true nature of the war and also proved to be incapable of dealing with the Mujaheddin.

16. Stephen Blank, "Soviet Forces in Afghanistan: Unlearning the Lessons of Vietnam," *Responding to Low-Intensity Conflict Challenges*, U.S. Air Force, Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL, 1990, pp. 78-79.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Bellamy and Lahnstein, pp. 19-32.

19. Stephen Blank, "Soviet Forces in Afghanistan: Unlearning the Lessons of Vietnam," pp. 79-82.

20. Ryszard Kuklinski, "The Suppression of Solidarity," in Thomas Kostrzewa, ed., *Between East and West: Writ ings from Kultura*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1990, pp. 72-98; C.N. Donnelly, "Poland Part 2: The Military Significance of the Polish Crisis," *Defence Yearbook 1983*, London: Brassey's, 1983, pp. 10-13; Private communication from Richard D. Anderson of UCLA. Certainly in 1980-81 the Soviets tried to bring about an equivalent rapid denouement in Poland either by the threat of invasion in late 1980 or by its operational plan for a coup that was domestically organized. Here too secret plans for augmenting the Polish forces and

creating their own independent C³I fit in with the operational guidelines discussed above.

21. Douglas M. Hart, "Low-Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan: The Soviet View," *Survival*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, March-April 1982, p. 62.

22. Anderson, Karen Sawhny, "The New Afghan Military Balance," *Contemporary Review*, November 1988, p. 233; Remarks of Wolfgang Berner at a Panel of the XX Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, November 20, 1988.

23. Raju C.G. Thomas, "The Afghanistan Crisis and South Asian Security," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 4, December 1981, p. 424.

24. "Afghanistan Preliminary Results," *Ogonek*, No. 30, July 1988, reprinted in Issac J. Tarasulo, ed., *Gorbachev and Glasnost: Viewpoints From the Soviet Press*, Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1990. pp. 238-247.

25. Lieutenant Colonel Scott R. McMichael, U.S. Army, "Soviet Tactical Performance and Adaptation in Afghanistan," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, Vol. III, No. 1, March 1990, pp. 73-105.

CHAPTER 3

MORALE, LOGISTICS, AND URBAN WARFARE

The war in Afghanistan brought home to Soviet forces the bitter truth that a conscript army is highly unsuited for an unconventional war and that such deployment risks its disintegration. The current wave of unrest sweeping through and around the Soviet Army evidently has its roots in the course of the war in Afghanistan and in public comment about it. This can be gathered from widespread reports of internal demoralization and desertion largely based on interviews with 35 deserters and from many continuing reports of dissatisfaction in the press.¹ However, this demoralization did not simply result from harsh, if not brutal army conditions as these reports imply.

One of the key lessons is that morale does not fall because the troops and officers are corrupt, venal, brutal, or even criminal types. Rather the failure of strategic leadership opens the door to the varied manifestations of demoralization that we have read about. In this case the strategic failure manifested itself in the fact that an army configured for mass and shock in a strategic operation now found itself forced to fight a dispersed war of strictly tactical actions where maneuver, agility, high morale, and independent tactical initiative became paramount. Once an army is forced to fight a war for which it is woefully unready, these 'pathologies' begin to corrode its ability to win. Moscow miscalculated by using Muslim troops in the initial invasion, perhaps out of a misplaced effort to exploit Muslim solidarity. This boomeranged on Moscow once these troops realized they were facing other Muslims and not Chinese or American troops. Moreover, they were unsuited to serious operations because of their poor training, status, and command of Russian. Thus many collaborated with the rebels, forcing Moscow to recall them. This undoubtedly had

a poor effect on the other troops and reinforced the image of Muslims as incompetent and anti-Soviet which became evident in the many instances of ethnic strife that occurred.

The use of conscripts receiving standard training, with insufficient appreciation of the theater's requirements, who had little education relative to the civilians who escaped the draft, also proved to be a demoralizing factor. We now know that the entire process of the draft was riddled with corruption and coverups so that the elite, those who could buy their way out, and the educated did not serve. Farm boys, allegedly disproportionate numbers of minorities like Baltic peoples, and the uneducated served and apparently suffered higher casualty rates. This triggered growing social resentment at the inequality and corruption involved. Thus, today every nationality believes that it served and suffered disproportionately in Afghanistan. Since these soldiers were not sophisticated or educated it is hard to imagine them resisting the urge to act violently when they met resistance or obstruction of any sort, or to be both victims and later perpetrators of the violence endemic to an army where hazing and beatings (*Dedovshchina*) were rife and tolerated.²

Ethnic and personal hazing by officers and veterans, coupled with the low pay (4 rubles a month), led to a situation where soldiers lived much like military serfs while officers batted off their labor and exploitation. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the Brezhnev army reproduced conditions of the serf-like physical and economic exploitation of the common soldier that had been widespread through the Tsarist army.³ Since *Dedovshchina* took place within units and was openly tolerated, it also meant that the NCOs, traditionally a weak point in the Soviet military, lost authority and control over their troops. Here too, reports indicate limited competence of NCOs both as military officers and as disciplinarians and cohesion builders.⁴ Such factors could well have a significant impact on combat performance and cohesion especially in a war like Afghanistan that places greater emphasis on individual and small unit initiative.

In Afghanistan, where tactical actions abounded and no one action could be strategic in nature, the mutual solidarity of

troops in units with NCOs is crucial. These factors of ethnic enmity, serf-like treatment of the men, hazing, and corruption throughout the entire military, undermined both solidarity and combat performance over time, particularly in mixed ethnic units. It appears that the ethnic issue and that of *Dedovshchina* increasingly came together as the war went on because the Soviet Army was obliged to draft more and more minorities as the Slavic demographic pool shrank. Moreover, one recent analysis strongly suggests that even now the 'Brezhnev' command style in the army reproduces a pervasive violence within the military both among rival ethnic groups and between NCOs and soldiers (the latter being either individual or group perpetrators).⁵

Equally telling is the fact that published surveys now indicate that during 1975-86, before the withdrawal from Afghanistan began, a substantial internal demoralization among NCOs occurred. While Afghanistan certainly is not the sole or primary cause, it probably contributed and accelerated an already crystallizing discontent. In 1975, 77.6 percent of sergeants in service and reserves certified their interest in serving and the importance of fulfilling their military obligation; in 1986 that figure was 63 percent and among graduates of schools and professional-technical institutes, 44 percent. By 1990 it was 11.6 and 23 percent respectively, and 66.8 percent of soldiers and sergeants and 41.2 percent of graduates had no interest in serving even though they understood the necessity for it.⁶ Thus it appears that this kind of war intensified an already emerging trend in Soviet society.

In the past much has been made of the deserters like those interviewed by Alexiev.⁷ Compared with the epic rates of desertion in the Civil War of 1918-21 and World War II, these rates are negligible. But the evidence of surveys in the West, for all their imperfections—use of emigres and deserters,—and current Soviet press reports corroborate the portrayal of the Soviet Army as a brutal, corrupt fraternity often led at lower levels by men of limited competence and character. From the operational point of view the relevance of these findings is important because they suggest that this kind of army could not achieve the well-known Soviet operational requirements of

rapid mobility, speed, surprise of the enemy, seizure of tactical initiative and conversion of tactical gains into operational and then strategic ones. For all the talk of deep strike and mobile forces, the Soviet Army in Afghanistan showed itself largely incapable of aggressive mobile operations (except for airborne and Special Forces). Instead they fought a long-term war of attrition in which their demoralization manifested itself in the terror activities the army conducted to pulverize traditional Afghan society. As Engles noted, "Terror is the response of people who are themselves terrorized." These concepts of morale are not abstract for they directly impinge on the content of operations. Michael Elliott-Bateman recently summarized this point.

The three-to-one superiority of moral power over the physical is the central operative principle, indeed the absolute core, of mobile philosophy. . . .Against the enemy the positional culture emphasizes attrition as the means of physical destruction, while the mobile culture seeks, through a superiority of moral power translating into maximized physical power, to force the collapse of their military organisms by *dislocation, shock, and high stress*. (emphasis in original).⁸

The Soviet Army in Afghanistan, as depicted in Western and Soviet accounts, could not (in Elliott-Bateman's terms) realize its tactical, operational, or strategic aims. Even the elite and more professional airborne troops, whose morale was higher, had problems along these lines. But the evidence of Afghanistan confirms that in small wars morale is a major force multiplier and that poor morale stems from deficiencies in military culture, command, and organization.

Actual command behavior as shown in the many cases of corruption and brutality inside the Army, and lying propaganda as well as incompetent leadership prove this. Thus, the propaganda spewed by the Main Political Administration (MPA) saying that Soviet forces would encounter Afghan friendship and were fighting Chinese, Arab, or even Americans there indicated both the MPA's contempt for their men and utter neglect of the importance of moral factors. When the truth was discovered its effects rapidly corroded Soviet combat and MPA performance. Much of the supposed previous

effectiveness in indoctrination now became very suspect.⁹ Finally, all commentators agree that Soviet troops and commanders had almost no inkling of civic action, political operations among Afghans, or nation building. This meant that they possessed an almost exclusively military and operational viewpoint that precluded easy relations with Afghans who, in any case, were generally regarded as inferiors. This fact had to poison mutual relationships as well as morale among Soviet soldiers. Certainly such an outlook contributed to a debilitating sense of isolation among Soviet troops that made it easier for them to engage in corruption, drug use, and terror.

Accordingly, Soviet observers, such as Artem Borovik and Aleksandr' Prokhanov, who represent opposite poles of the Soviet political spectrum, concur that for the soldiers in Afghanistan the passage of time substantially corroded their morale. Although each man gave a different typology of the steps in this process of corrosion, their overall conclusions agreed on this point.¹⁰ Therefore, in moral terms, broadly conceived, as well as in terms of force structure discussed below, Soviet forces in Afghanistan could not execute their doctrine and realize the strategic preconditions for victory. Indeed, it may well be the case that the forces and their organization were 'contra-indicated' to the doctrine, strategy, and operational art professed by the military leadership when it came to actual combat. It is hardly surprising that precisely this point is a pivot around which current arguments for military reform revolve.

Finally, it is clear that after 1985 and the advent of Glasnost', the suppressed public opinion of the Brezhnev period began to accelerate its open discontent with the progress of the war. Certainly some observers indicate or believe that spreading public demoralization at home played a key factor in accelerating the decision to withdraw troops.¹¹ And morale factors also came to play a new role in military thinking as well. In the Sixth Edition of *Marxism-Leninism's Teachings on War and Peace*, in 1984 General D.A. Volkogonov postulated a new sixth law of warfare—a major doctrinal innovation at the time—that related to both the impact

of high precision weapons and morale factors in warfare. It read that,

The development and shift in the methods of combat are dependent upon quantitative and qualitative changes in military technology, and upon the level of morale—military qualities of military personnel.¹²

Logistics.

Just as morale failed due to misapprehension of the nature of the war, in logistics the failure to prepare adequately for the requirements of the theater and the type of war involved had serious consequences. In turn the adaptations made by Soviet forces to the challenges of Afghanistan have also shaped subsequent thinking and programs regarding logistics and engineer support in the European and Northeast Asian theaters.¹³ Soviet planners did not sufficiently take into account the fact that they would have to fight a long war and supply their own and Afghan allied troops virtually singlehandedly from the USSR with almost every kind of supply, from food to gear and medicines. Graham Turbiville of Ft. Leavenworth's Soviet Army Studies Office has identified several problems connected with extensive logistical supply in Afghanistan. These are:

- Absence of rail transport that forced all logistics to come either by motor on a limited and extremely winding and treacherous road system that was severely limited in quantity of usable roads or by air.
- Unpreparedness of Soviet logistics units for either the high mountainous, desert, and temperature extremes of Afghanistan as well as these road conditions, particularly where the roads had to bear so high a volume of traffic.
- Due to these factors logistics convoys on the ground were extremely vulnerable to attacks that disrupted, delayed, or destroyed them and hindered Soviet operational plans. These attacks forced the Soviets to assign many troops—even occasionally up to

battalion strength and airborne troops—to the very slow and tedious but vital work of rear supply defensive operations.

- Similar problems affected aerial transport. The lack of good roads and railroads obliged Moscow to engage its Military Air Transport (VTA) fleet and helicopters very heavily in difficult flying conditions and weather. Once the Mujaheddin obtained anti-air weapons this factor placed Soviet aircraft in considerable danger and further slowed both air and ground offensives since many forces as well had to be assigned to purely defensive operations around airbases.¹⁴
- Even had Moscow wanted to send more troops to Afghanistan and emulate our Vietnam operation (which all in all was a logistical triumph compared to this campaign), the theater simply could not support more than the 100-120 thousand troops estimated to be in the Soviet forces at their peak. Moreover, not only could the theater not sustain larger numbers, it is doubtful that Moscow, given all other claims on its forces in 1979-89 and the inefficiency of its own transport system—one of the very worst elements in the Soviet economy—could have supported a larger force or infrastructure there. As it was, only one-third of Soviet forces in Afghanistan at any time took part in active combat offensives or operations. Logistical concerns siphoned off many troops and assets to defensive escort duties, fortifications, engineering support, and static patrolling around key installations like the Salang Tunnel or air bases.¹⁵

The vulnerability of Soviet logistics and formations to harassing attacks and mines intensified Soviet concerns about logistics during a war in Europe. These considerations led Moscow to make several innovations in rear service support that prefigured the shift to a posture of active or even proactive defense on the one hand and to a force structure that combined various troop missions, logistical support and an active combat function in single unit or sub-units. Some of these innovations were:

1. Moscow created so-called "Pipeline Troops" to reduce dependence on motor transport and construct fuel pipelines linking Afghanistan with the USSR. This fuel supply was vital to air and land operations and was frequently targeted by the rebels. Pipeline troops have therefore become combat units as well.

2. The requirement of combining logistics security with defense against enemy "reconnaissance and diversionary troops" led Soviet commanders to construct fixed, fortified security garrisons to protect key bridges, roads, and other facilities. Roving patrols, traffic control forces, and assigned line units, sometimes reinforced from those fixed points have been detailed to protect them—recalling operations in Eastern Europe in 1944-45.¹⁶

3. The overall resort to a system of deeply mined and echeloned defensive strongpoints and installations guarding key urban and logistical infrastructural centers helped shape the use of forces for both defensive and rapid turnaround to counteroffensive operations. Special forces and airborne forces were frequently assigned to such operations. And the continuing employment of combined active and passive defenses and fortifications successfully stymied Mujaheddin offensives in 1988-90.

4. Convoys and highway troops were integrated into combat operational formations—not only support missions—so that they could defend themselves against attack without resort to other forces. In effect, rear service units have been integrated into actual combat operations and probably formations.

5. Engineer units were also extensively involved in Afghan operations. Indeed, the Chief of the Engineer Troops in 1987 stated that not a single battle in Afghanistan occurred without their participation. One particularly important use of engineer units was in enhanced sensitivity to the importance of engineer reconnaissance along threatened roads. Not only were their activities constantly taking place before and even during operations, they were also able to call upon helicopters for reconnaissance and presumably fire support, mine clearing

forces, and road construction forces. Turbiville argues that the experience of Afghanistan proved how difficult and extensive the requirements for engineer support would be in Europe, and that Mujaheddin success in exploiting the terrain to obstruct easy passage probably surpassed Soviet expectations and raised the even greater problem of fighting NATO's mine-laying, defensive forces, and fighting in built up areas.¹⁷

These adaptations to Afghan conditions did not break the enemy's capability to harass and interdict to the degree hoped for by Moscow, for all their innovativeness. But they did show some capacity to adjust or try to adjust to circumstances and an increasing resort to novel force structures which combined multipurpose forces in multimission assignments. The major innovation in force structure is at the lowest level: the Combined Arms Rifle Battalion (CARB) is only the most striking example of the Soviet effort to create a flexible operational unit. As described in Chapter 5, it is large enough to seize tactical and even operational objectives and equally capable of very diverse tactical missions: reconnaissance, patrols, mining and anti-mining, offensive or defensive vertical envelopment, static and mobile defenses, or simple offensives. The advent of this kind of basic building block of force structure and packaging is part of the broader reorganization of Soviet military forces that accelerated during the 1980s.

Urban Defense.

A third aspect of the war that must be considered is that in defending cities and key installations with rings of mines and fortified defenses, Moscow anticipated its turn toward a renewed emphasis on fortifications and engineer preparation of the battlefield as part of overall defensive doctrine.

Soviet military writers well understand the importance of defense of key cities in warfare based on their own World War II experiences. But in a war like Afghanistan, the political stakes of cities and installations, particularly Kabul, are that much higher. Successful defense of cities must be undertaken before the enemy can get into the city but if he succeeds and

the city is contested, the successful defense provides a boost to morale.¹⁸ A second consideration is the fact that urban combat is small unit combat with decentralized if not discontinuous command and control, a warfare throwing platoon and company commanders on their own—the gravest weakness of the Army in Afghanistan. Extensive mine belts, fortifications, and patrolling of key installations served as a means to forestall warfare which would take place at the weakest part of the Army's chain. Such warfare is long and slow, provides little opportunities for maneuver, kills time needed for winning, which is vital in low intensity conflicts, and generally slows down offensives and strategic movements.¹⁹

A consideration is the fact that these key targets naturally were major logistical depots whose loss to the enemy was to be avoided for both morale and supply reasons. In Afghanistan, cities obtained a disproportionate political significance as well, since by holding them the regime in Kabul maintained its tenuous claim to legitimacy and controlled the lives of residents and the millions of immigrants fleeing to cities as the rural economy was systematically destroyed by Moscow. Precisely because the cities were physical embodiments of PDPA rule they had to be protected very much against infiltration. Infiltration of units into cities would, as in the case of the Honasan coup in Manila in 1989, undermine both domestic and foreign support for the PDPA cause.

Such infiltration obliges the defender, the counterinsurgent, in this case the Soviet forces, to expend scarce military assets and time on street fighting or sieges that erode the very economic-political and psychological support structures that buttress his position. More prosaically it forces an army to destroy what it is supposed to protect, visibly confirming its impotence in the face of such attacks. Recent episodes of urban warfare in Beirut, San Salvador, and Manila suggest a further intensification of the battle for urban strongholds in these conflicts. Accordingly Soviet strategists concentrate on holding cities and see extensive fortification and engineer support as keeping the enemy on his side of the FEBA and the FLOT, not theirs. Afghanistan will provide valuable empirical

lessons and highlight the need to ensure sufficient engineer and reconnaissance forces within the Soviet military structure.

In this respect the experience of urban warfare, like that of morale and logistics in Afghanistan, highlights the need for reforms in force structure and for adaptations in logistics and morale. Indeed, morale and force structure were intimately connected because of the poor and even unhealthy quality of the supplies the Soviet troops received there. Western analysts suggest that this factor certainly contributed to the erosion of troop morale.²⁰ Similarly, responses to logistical shortcomings affected operational art and force structure as did morale and force structure issues in the attempt to develop a professional army. The foregoing indicates the need to consider all of these factors as well as strategy, intelligence, and operational art, as a system whose synergies, positive or negative, manifest themselves throughout the armed forces once war begins. The fundamental mismatch between strategy and the actualities of the war and the theater substantially degraded morale and military performance in Afghanistan. And these deficiencies helped trigger a continuing public critique of the Soviet military and internal dissension within it.

CHAPTER 3

ENDNOTES

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3. Robert Bathurst and Michael Burger, "Controlling the Soviet Soldier: Some Eyewitness Accounts," Center for Strategic Technology, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, 1983.

4. *Ibid*; and Colonel Howard T. Prince II, "The Human Factor in the Soviet Armed Forces: Leadership, Cohesion, and Effectiveness," U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, February 15, 1990, pp. 20-33. An example of this callous serf-like treatment of soldiers and junior officers is the fact, reported at the CNA Seapower Forum in September 1990, that pilots downed in helicopter or plane crashes were frequently reported as MIAs, not fatalities, not only to keep casualties down, but also to avoid pension payments to widows and orphans of those men. This is because such payments go to survivors of war dead, not MIAs.

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14. Turbiville, "Ambush," pp. 32-35.

15. Borovik at Sea Power Forum.

16. Turbiville, "Ambush," pp. 33-35; Soviet Combat Engineers, pp. 563-565.

17. *Ibid.*, both. The significance of these changes in force structure are part of the broader adaptation of force structures to the conditions in Afghanistan described in Chapter 5.

18. John C. Scharfen and Michael J. Deene, "Soviet Tactical Doctrine for Urban Warfare," Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Washington, DC, December 1975, p. 19.

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CHAPTER 4

SOVIET INTELLIGENCE AND THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

A substantial body of literature on small wars confirms that an essential precondition of victory is a superior intelligence network and operation. By this we mean a system of human intelligence that penetrates urban and rural localities and establishes a legitimate as well as covert governmental presence in these areas. This system not only reports back order of battle information of a tactical, operational, or strategic nature, it also supports political operations and disrupts enemy activities. The formation and evolution of such a system takes time and also requires a sensitivity to host and enemy environments, a willingness to confront and act upon objective assessments rather than bureaucratic or military dogma, and rigorous counterintelligence or security of covert operations. This latter aspect clearly pertains to the broad understanding of *Maskirovka* in Soviet parlance.

A successful intelligence and police operation becomes a major force multiplier and economy of force operation. It also consolidates peoples' identification with a government under attack and security from enemy reprisals or attacks. In the Soviet context such a system ultimately also facilitates penetration of the society that renders it vulnerable to totalitarian or authoritarian mobilization for purposes of a socialist revolution. The converse is also true in the case of failure to construct such a system.

In Afghanistan the Soviet record, as found in unclassified sources, is one of tactical, operational, and strategic failure—quite surprising in view of the then ten foot tall image of the KGB and GRU (military intelligence). Nonetheless this failure can be documented in detail and linked to the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan. Intelligence failure is, of course, not the

entire story; there were successes too. But, conceived in an operational-strategic context, performance here was subpar and contributed materially to Soviet difficulties.

This is particularly important for a Soviet war insofar as intelligence penetration plays a historically disproportionate part in Soviet strategy as a force multiplier and compensating factor for military weakness in both low intensity conflicts and conventional wars. Moreover, this failure pertains both to the period leading up to the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as well as to the combat period for Soviet troops in 1979-89. It embraces all branches of the Soviet military-political leadership: Politburo, Defense Council, GRU, International Department of the Central Committee, the Foreign Ministry, the armed forces, and by no means least, the KGB. This failure also includes, and in many cases is traceable to the intrinsic shortcomings of the Soviets' Afghan allies, the PDPA.

These shortcomings have come under increased public attack in the Gorbachev period as part of the wholesale revision of national security policy. Many of the revelations, attacks, and counterattacks on the decision to invade and the war's conduct provide important insights into the nature as well as causes of these failures. To analyze them properly it is worthwhile to divide them into pre- and post-invasion periods as well as institutionally by referring to the particular Soviet or PDPA organs involved.

The evidence coming from the Soviet side must be handled with caution because much of it appears to be an effort at political and personal scapegoating. Much of it is self-serving in ways we cannot always fully grasp. Secondly, it is often contradictory. For instance, in 1983, G.A. Arbatov, director of the U.S. and Canada Institute, claimed that his institute had no difficulty in making its 'bright ideas' known to the leadership. More recently he claimed that he was not even informed of the decision to invade Afghanistan which he would presumably have opposed. Yet in 1983 he fully defended the decision and praised it, indeed blaming American intrigues there as justifying the decision.¹ This example illustrates the nature of the problem we face.

Similarly it seems increasingly the case that there were differences within each intelligence organization. Regarding the KGB, the defectors Kuzichkin and Gordievskii both claim that their agents recommended against sending in troops to Afghanistan.² At the same time a recent Soviet source asserted that in August 1979 the GRU official in Kabul advised against sending in troops while the KGB agent, a General Ivanov, opposed this recommendation, presumably requesting troops.³ To add to this dilemma two recent articles by disaffected KGB men inside the USSR allege totally opposite conclusions about Andropov's and the KGB's recommendations. The first is by Oleg Kalugin and the second author remains anonymous.

I remember a conference in August 1979 attended by heads of the KGB and military intelligence (GRU). The subject of the discussion was events in Iran and Afghanistan. I remember that when possible Soviet military intervention with the aim of helping Afghanistan was being discussed, . . . Kryuchkov said "Andropov is against our military involvement." But the chief of military intelligence, Ivashutin, insisted on intervention. We know that later Andropov became party to the final decision to intervene. He couldn't say no to Brezhnev and his friend Ustinov. At the same time Andropov was against political assassinations. He always insisted on other means.⁴

However, Afghanistan is the greatest political miscalculation of Andropov and his immediate entourage. This would not have happened in the absence of Andropov's purposeful disinformation of the Politburo. We reported from Afghanistan that troops cannot be sent in; our informers—we had them everywhere—communicated that this would bring about bloodshed and antagonize loyal Afghans. Meanwhile the Central Committee was receiving memoranda through Andropov to the effect that they were awaiting us there almost with open arms.⁵

The second view seems more correct. Kalugin is certainly mistaken or worse when he says that Andropov opposed assassinations. The evidence surrounding the attempt on the Pope's life, the assassinations of defectors by Bulgarian intelligence, the assassination of Amin during the invasion itself all point to the selective use of assassination as a valid intelligence operation. Similarly, the involvement of the KGB

in the Afghan coups of 1978-79 and the involvement of the KGB and/or the GRU in Third World coups in Africa and Asia during the 1970s suggests strongly that Soviet intelligence agencies were involved in orchestrating or participating in a series of coups and assassinations throughout the Third World and in terrorism in Europe.⁶ Along with those elements in the military who espoused using the military instrument to advance Soviet interests in the Third World, these institutional forces would likely have seen utility in military intervention and an anti-Amin coup. Added to this is that Kalugin personally confirms Western reports that the KGB under Andropov transmitted deliberate disinformation in 1968 to Moscow concerning developments in Prague in order to incite the Politburo to invade Czechoslovakia. Certainly they were capable of doing that again in 1979.

But whichever account is true, what clearly emerges is that the integrity of the intelligence reporting process was compromised at the top by men who were determined to bring about a particular policy outcome regardless of what their agents reported. In this sense, bureaucratic groupthink, with regard to notions of Third World policy, the role of the United States, the Brezhnev Doctrine, vanguard parties and states of socialist orientation, played an increasingly discernible role. Every account of the political process accords with that finding of political distortion of intelligence at the top. Expert advice on Afghanistan was either disregarded or not consulted. In general, Soviet official analyses of Third World developments were much more sanguine about attempting to build "socialism" and serious about doing so in ideological terms than were experts who were out of the policy process, regardless of Arbatov's claims. The ideological insistence on building vanguard parties and socialist orientation states that emerged from Suslov's and Ponomar'ev's International Department of the Central Committee reflected a dogmatism that was out of touch with the world. Today Soviet writers ascribe the height of folly to these beliefs and policies that quasi-tribal and hopelessly backward states could become 'socialist' in this manner and both support and be supported by Moscow. Given Suslov's and Ponomar'ev's enormous influence and power, it is clear that they too insisted upon a

prearranged conclusion that made Soviet ideology and its "organizational weapon" a force subtractor rather than a force multiplier.⁷

This pattern of dogmatic subscription to what we earlier called "ideological claptrap" is aligned to the secretive or restrictive policy-making on Afghanistan at the top. Committed to building socialism come what may, the leadership apparently saw no need to consult experts on Afghanistan or on the likely American and Muslim world's reaction to an invasion. Men like Dobrynin, ambassador to Washington (Arbatov if he is truthful) and the regularly constituted organs of the regime such as the Politburo—Shevarnadze and Gorbachev—were simply not consulted. In other words the four or five men who made the final decision to intervene militarily constituted an ad hoc group that Brezhnev or Suslov and Andropov and Ustinov knew in advance would come to this conclusion. Thus the final decision was the logical outcome of a decision-making process that was stacked from the outset.

This distortion of strategic intelligence communicated itself to mid-level bureaucracies or officials who either could not or would not challenge their superiors. In Afghanistan intelligence officials tended to identify with the various factions within the strife-torn PDPA to whom they were assigned, thereby dividing Soviet agents into Khalq or Parcham advocates (GRU to Khalq and KGB to Parcham). Thus tribal and political factions in Afghanistan created divided and partisan intelligence assessments.⁸ Foreign Ministry officials in the embassy were clearly incompetents, men who had been exiled there for previous indiscretions, or knew nothing of Afghanistan and reported only what the bosses would hear. Some also intervened on behalf of domestic factions and became committed to those groups rather than to a mere objective awareness of Soviet interests.⁹

These bureaucratic distortions of information and intelligence occurred in the intelligence agencies, the International Department of the Central Committee, the Foreign Ministry, and the Defense Council or Politburo which formally made the fateful decision. Gordievsky's recent

account confirms that Moscow did indeed plan to assassinate Amin after September 1979, even as KGB operatives in Kabul and Moscow Center were forecasting a disaster there.¹⁰ Obviously any assassination of the head of state would only have further increased Moscow's "investment" in Afghanistan even while intelligence analysts were foretelling a disaster should such deeper involvement take place. Yet Andropov ultimately disregarded these warnings and came to see similarities between the situation in Kabul and that in Budapest of 1956 where he had "earned his bones."¹¹ Kuzichkin and Gordievsky both conclude as well that it was the threat of an Islamic fundamentalist faction in Afghanistan defeating Soviet socialism there that was decisive, since Moscow could not tolerate such a blow to its prestige and its unpredictable repercussions.¹² Yet, notwithstanding KGB warnings against intervention, Gordievsky and Kuzichkin concede the KGB's failure accurately to estimate the Afghan army's reaction and the upsurge of the resistance after the invasion. Such an intelligence failure about the nature of the army's likely response undoubtedly helped shape the Soviet leaders' belief that only a brief but massive intervention would stabilize the situation and then they could withdraw their troops. This admission of KGB failure confirms Borovik's observations that pre-1979 operatives in Afghanistan were not experts on Afghan affairs.¹³

The foreign policy institutions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department of the Central Committee, performed no better. By all accounts the ambassadors to Kabul were party hacks of low quality who knew little of Afghan reality and saw the Soviet model as the answer for all problems. They were incompetent men who fell victim to the pathologies of habitual intrigues within embassies and the desire to tell Moscow what it wanted to hear. They meddled within Afghan politics to the point of losing their professional objectivity and credibility. These deficiencies persisted in the embassy throughout the duration of the war, according to Soviet observers.¹⁴ The International Department was no better. It was dominated by a sectarian dogmatic view that strongly favored intervention to save a "socialist oriented state" and "vanguard party," disregarded

alternative advice if it did not come from in-house sources, and totally neglected to consider foreign reaction. As a result it too made policy in "an administrative-command style" from the top down that was intolerant of other views, restricted, secretive, and uninformed.¹⁵ Moreover, on the basis of recent Soviet revelations, it is clear that little if any coordination existed between the MFA, ID, KGB, and the MOD on Afghanistan. Each institution had its own sources which told it what it wanted to hear and in no case is there evidence of any horizontal interchange or interagency discussion before the final decision was referred to the Politburo.¹⁶ Finally, given the physical infirmities of the men on the Politburo, particularly Brezhnev at the time, it seems clear that everything that could distort the decision-making process did so in the case of Afghanistan and many other concurrent issues.

Finally, as we have noted, the military command, both the MOD and of the General Staff, cannot evade responsibility here. Someone certainly drew up the invasion plan—probably Epishev or Ivanovskii, both of whom made inspection tours to Kabul as they had to Prague in 1968—that General Sokolov then implemented. For all that Ogarkov and the General Staff opposed the intervention that took place, they nonetheless recommended intervening with force to hold major urban centers, an equally dubious and unthinking alternative given Afghan realities. And we have already observed that the recommended force package for the mission was one which mindlessly replicated European and not Afghan realities, and was not composed of quality troops suitable for Afghanistan. Thus the invasion represented a gross and monumental failure of both strategy and intelligence that could not be overcome as long as the personnel, mindsets, and institutional constraints of the Brezhnev era remained in place. This insight, which undoubtedly occurred to Gorbachev and his team, almost certainly has helped shape their overhaul of all three aspects of Soviet security policy: ideology, institutions, and personnel. Nonetheless, in Afghanistan, such reforms could only partly compensate for intelligence failures because the PDPA remains gripped by endemic factionalist and tribal warfare and because of shortcomings within Soviet military strategy and operations.

Post-Invasion Intelligence.

It appears that during the war intelligence performance only partly improved. Borovik reports that in Soviet agencies, like the embassy, no single directing line appeared. Thus diplomatic, trade, military and intelligence missions competed against each other, often with incompetent personnel like the ambassadors.¹⁷ He believes that military officers had the best intelligence and sense of the Afghan situation as it developed.¹⁸ Gordievsky, on the other hand, claims that the KGB's reporting after 1979 was much better than the embassy's while the military intelligence, GRU, largely stuck to operational intelligence assessments. Every source also agrees that the PDPA and its government could not maintain security. Thus countless operations and plots were betrayed by members of the government and the party to the Mujahedin. This accords with Western assessments as well.¹⁹

The current Afghan intelligence service, the KHAD run by Najibullah or today by his stooges, appears to be reasonably competent. It is brutal, hated, and unable to check the flow of intelligence even though it has had, and probably will have, its successes. The attempted coup of March 1990 where the Minister of Defense joined with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a leading insurgent who espouses a fundamentalist Islamic state on the basis of tribal affinity, underscores the problem. The unreliability of the Afghans from the Soviet perspective contributed to the Soviet effort to shut them out of their own civil war, a factor that only intensified feelings of resentment against the Russians. And in many respects which resembled the Vietnam war, this civil war led to a situation where Soviet forces and advisors could not be sure of anyone or anything in the country.

Moreover, it is clear that censorship and bureaucratic pressure forced reporters, and presumably agents as well, to report grossly misleading and distorted studies or reports about the conduct of the war. Soviet troops were portrayed for a long time as simply benefactors of Afghanistan; the difficulties and casualties were systematically played down and falsified all along the line. Thus, when Gorbachev wanted

to consolidate support for the return of Soviet troops, he first had to give the press more scope for truthful reporting and analysis of the negative impact that the war had on Soviet interests and resources. In other words he had to generate pressure from outside the closed intelligence and national security groups to mobilize public support for returning the troops. In effect, Soviet intelligence, conceived broadly, had turned into a kind of broken gramophone that played only one line or piece of music that the owner wanted to hear, and it even played that music badly. Such alienation from and ignorance of the theater's real conditions ultimately foredooms the intelligence collection and analysis process to failure.²⁰

An equally important cause of intelligence failure in Afghanistan can be traced to the military strategy by which the Russians first invaded and then shifted gears to fight a protracted war. As noted above, Moscow entered the war believing in the European model of the conflict and with no expectation of its true nature or duration. Its forces and commanders therefore conducted themselves from a strictly military point of view. By this we mean that in current Soviet strategy, as in the past, there is a total absence of any notion of counterinsurgency warfare, especially the political dimension of the conflict.²¹ This shortcoming can be found in the Soviet doctrine and analysis of local wars in the Third World which have been found to rely exclusively on the model of large-scale armored, mechanized, and conventional warfare, not on guerrilla and small-scale actions. There is no sense, in doctrine or training, of the need for the armed forces to win over villagers and townspeople. Instead they were terrorized or forced to flee, or substantially uprooted from their past traditions. Soviet participants in the war concur that having no training for such a war, and knowing little if anything about Afghanistan, Soviet military commanders essentially fought a mindless series of endless tactical operations.²²

For example, until 1984 Moscow relied on large-scale sweeps of major enemy strongholds like the Panshir Valley, launching eight offensives there, all of which failed strategically or operationally even though each time Soviet troops demonstrated growing tactical proficiency. In the absence of

intelligence and political preparation such operations are not only betrayed to the enemy, they also fail to achieve any lasting result and represent a sterile, mindless retracing of the same ground over and over again. Although intelligence performance by KHAD improved to the point where Soviet tactical objectives were more often achieved once appropriate forces were inserted, these successes remained tactical ones and not operational-strategic victories. Soviet commanders did not make effective use of their intelligence because they did not convert it into bold mobile offensives. For the most part they preferred to stick to what one Afghan rebel called "cookbook warfare." They did not use their intelligence effectively because they had no political model save brutal Sovietization and the army refrained from implementing it. That was a party job and it was botched by both Soviet and PDPA cadres. Hence no political program was even really attempted save for co-optation and bribery of tribes which is hardly enough, even in Afghanistan.²³

Moreover, it is apparent from combat accounts that, as often as not, it was the Soviet troops who were surprised, not the Mujahedin. In other words, Soviet forces, after 1979 could not consistently effect operational or strategic surprise and tactical surprise occurred on both sides, probably in equal frequency. Here again intelligence failures combined with lack of initiative or imagination to make it impossible for Moscow, with the assets it had, to realize the prerequisites of its own doctrine, namely the achievement of surprise at all levels. Inasmuch as Soviet doctrine, both before and since the change to defensive doctrine, expressly requires commanders to achieve surprise in order to win, this failure helped to bring about a situation where endless tactical operations would have to make up, over a long time, for the absence of a strategic victory.

Paradoxically, the failure to achieve surprise or adequate intelligence helped to shape a situation where Moscow was forced to fight a war that to be a success required still greater and broader intelligence penetration and preparation of the theater. Lacking this required capability, Soviet forces ultimately had no choice but to put their trust in mass and

firepower as force substitutes for the absent strategic vision and intelligence needed to win. The concurrent failure to build durable political networks beyond Kabul also materially contributed to this situation. Even though the regime hangs on today, its writ is still circumscribed to a few cities and peace is not in sight. Though Moscow's political strategy improved after 1985, the war continues to plague both Afghanistan and the Soviet military. In the case of the latter, the absence of a credible notion of counterinsurgency warfare and of political intelligence as an adjunct to military intelligence constitutes a grave and continuing danger to the peoples of the USSR. This is because there is growing likelihood that military operations within the USSR will be undertaken precisely along the lines of a counterinsurgency operation to hold secessionist minorities in line. If the military has indeed learned little from the Afghan war, the results of such an operation will only tragically validate the observations of both Prokhanov and Borovik, respectively the right and the center-left in Soviet politics, that a major result of the invasion of Afghanistan is civil war inside the USSR. Should that turn out to be the case, the verdict of history upon Brezhnev and his successors, including Gorbachev, will echo Bismarck's observation that "woe to the statesman whose reasons for getting out of a war are not the same as those for getting into it."

CHAPTER 4

ENDNOTES

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CHAPTER 5

AFGHANISTAN AND SOVIET OPERATIONAL ART AND FORCE STRUCTURE

During 1980-81 the Soviet leadership began to adapt to the certainty of a protracted war in Afghanistan. Gradually, a new strategy, structure and definition of missions for the forces there emerged. These adaptations both influenced and reflected the practical implementation of reforms in Soviet force structure that began in the 1980s. These reforms represented efforts to maximize the force and mobility available to Soviet troops under the constraints of Afghanistan's conditions but the ultimate shape of Soviet armed forces remains unclear at present. They also indicated potential future trends regarding Soviet force structure.

The learning process was slow and incomplete. Tactical adaptation to unforeseen circumstances still remains inadequate and training at home remains stereotyped and insufficiently demanding.¹ The figures quoted in Chapter 1 illustrate continuing deficiencies that could only have been worse in the early days of the war when mindless stereotyped exercises based on armored sweeps and mounted armored attacks in the European theater were the rule,² and Soviet thinking about desert and mountain war called for using regular Motorized Rifle Divisions with as few TOE modifications as possible. That reliance upon armored forces directed Soviet logistics to a few easily targetable roads and paradoxically led to a force which therefore could neither obtain strategic or operational surprise nor move quickly in combat situations.³ The war's abiding paradox was that the forces and strategy by which it was initially fought were fundamentally incompatible with Soviet strategic maxims and requirements. Actual tactics, forces, and strategy were at odds with doctrinal requirements.

Particularly in the war's early phase, Soviet troops were themselves often tactically surprised. Tactical operations, like the sweeps of the Panjsher Valley, frequently repeated the same basic components, often in predictable fashion, and led to diminishing returns. Moscow apparently never developed a special mountain force or counterinsurgency unit as such during the war, using instead Spetsnaz and elite airborne or heliborne forces for these tasks.⁴ And Moscow apparently disregarded its own doctrine for mountain warfare that specified the importance of aggressive dismounted infantry patrols. Instead troops stayed inside fortified zones or their armored personnel carriers or infantry fighting vehicles and for quite some time were reluctant to employ airborne assets to seize high ground. Instead they preferred armored sweeps.⁵

Glaring deficiencies also turned up in the area of tactical command and control. Repeated injunctions to NCOs to adopt flexible and independent tactics never materialized. Instead early operations manifested a top heavy command and control. And the Soviet military structure continues to suffer, even today, from a shortage of competent NCOs who could exploit tactical surprise or breakthroughs. Calls for air or artillery support had to go through higher echelons first. According to the French observer, Oliver Roy, it appeared that all important decisions, including the conduct of certain offensives, had to go through Moscow first.⁶ These observations concerning tactical performance are confirmed by foreign observers like Scott McMichael and Mark Urban.⁷

NCOs and junior officers not only suffered from inadequate training and competence, they were often barred from developing experience and competence by headquarters' rigid planning of offensives. According to *Newsweek*, sergeants and company officers had no maps or radios until 1987. When one realizes that radio was the main form of communication in the army at that time, the implications are staggering. Essentially these forces were blind, deaf, and dumb when they went into operations.⁸ The folly of such an approach is that unconventional war is precisely a war of company and platoon commanders. Only when airborne troops dominated did they receive the encouragement to think for themselves and act

accordingly.⁹ Many of these flaws can be traced to Soviet tactical doctrine which stated that the lower the level of training of staffs and commanders, the more the success of offensives depended upon the greatest possible centralization of control. This precept was exactly the opposite of what was needed in Afghanistan.¹⁰

After 1980 Moscow realized that it was in a war of attrition. Unlike the United States in Vietnam, it could not deploy 500,000 men for domestic economic-political reasons, and because of Afghanistan's undeveloped infrastructure. This realization led Moscow to adopt a new overall strategy that sought to adapt to the theater and to overcome some of the factors hindering the optimizing of force and mobility. Aerial platforms, fixed and rotary wing, became the main conveyors of both fire and mobility for offensive operations while the regular general purpose forces mainly conducted static defense behind expanded fortifications and mine networks to protect key installations, cities, and roads. Between 1980 and 1986 Soviet strategy in Afghanistan gradually came to rely almost exclusively on airpower, staking everything on airpower's capabilities to deliver ordnance, interdict supplies and reserves, isolate the battlefield from the rear, destroy the agricultural basis of the society and the 'fishbowl' from which the rebels drew their means of sustenance, and rapidly move troops from point to point.

The changes in Soviet force structure began in 1980. Over time, tanks went from 1000 in 1980 to 300 in 1981 while helicopters rose from 60 to 300. Several independent detached squadrons were deployed under command of army units, giving army commanders their own air assets—airborne assault and bombing units (and air defense). The force structure changed from seven MRDs to three MRDs, two independent motorized rifle brigades and two independent motorized rifle regiments. Later the reforms led to the formation of the combined arms rifle battalion, a formation that further integrated air and ground assets under the battalion commander's authority.¹¹ These processes also led to a buildup of logistics and C³ infrastructure for the long term. For

example, airlift vastly expanded and communications links were now switched to hardened land lines for signals traffic.¹²

Soviet operations increasingly resorted to vertical aerial envelopments, an operation that has since found its way into Soviet tactical and operational manuals. For instance, Kuznetsov strongly recommends that in mountainous terrain, tactical airborne landings or forward detachments (suggesting thereby that an airborne assault unit or air assault-heliborne unit can be equated with a detachment) be inserted into high ground and/or the enemy flank and rear as part of a march formation in anticipation of an engagement there.¹³ Dragunskiy and his colleagues, writing about the motorized tank battalion—the basic combat unit of the Soviet army—endorse the idea that battalions operate as flanking detachments that could be combined with tactical airborne landings.¹⁴ Still more compelling evidence of the flexibility of this battalion force for use in envelopment operations is the author's statement that,

A motorized rifle (tank) battalion may advance in the regiment's first echelon or comprise its second echelon (*combined arms reserve*). It also may operate as an advance guard, covering force, or flanking force, be assigned to conduct reconnaissance in force, or carry out other missions. In addition, a motorized rifle battalion may be used as a tactical airborne landing force.¹⁵

The same principle holds true for companies as well, particularly in mountain terrain. Outflanking and envelopment operations in conjunction with a frontal attack are the "usual operations of a company in the mountains."¹⁶

These recommendations concerning envelopment missions and airborne or heliborne forces for them are, at the same time, not restricted to difficult terrain alone. Soviet authors of tactical and operational doctrine make this explicit. Similarly these recommendations pertain whether one is on the offense or defense since, in Soviet doctrine today, defense combines stability and mobility and should be conducted to secure opportunities for counteroffensives and to seize the initiative.¹⁷ Indeed, "a well-prepared maneuver (and airborne envelopments are a prime example of such) combined with

nuclear strikes is considered a basic principle of conducting a defensive battle."¹⁸

Writing about meeting engagements in general, Dragunsky and his editorial collective state that, "Special importance is attached to the capability of subunits and units capability to conduct a broad and rapid maneuver to strike the enemy's flank and rear."¹⁹ But these views about the increased importance of tactical air assaults and the imperative to attack deeply and rapidly using such methods is not confined to the battalion level or to one set of authors. Sverdlov's authoritative book on forward detachments makes it clear that, in the Soviets' view, envelopment by air assaults combining airborne and heliborne strikes and landings is assuming a greater importance. This is due to the fact that they are independent operations separated from that of the main forces and can accomplish difficult missions on their own.

The revolution in military affairs that has led to the swift development of new strike systems, the use or enhancement of new principles for conducting combat, greater width of maneuver and its constancy, surprise, continuous coordination of air and ground units, decisive concentration of combat efforts in the decisive axis, etc. has enhanced such operations' importance.²⁰ Accordingly,

The increased firepower and mobility of units and subunits and their use of new principles for waging combat have increased their independence and provided for the possibility of operations when greatly separated from the main forces. This is also the basis for the assertion that in modern combined arms combat the role of forward detachments—mobile subunits operating in front of the main forces—is increasing, and that broad possibilities for their use are opening up.²¹

Sverdlov also concurs with Dragunskiy and his colleagues that a tactical air assault or airborne force can operate with or in place of a forward detachment since their missions are quite close in nature. A tactical airborne or air assault force can also be constituted out of motorized rifle divisions or battalions often from the second echelon. The operations described in their books take place at all levels right up to and including nuclear

ones.²² One implication that becomes apparent from these analyses is that the Soviet military leadership seems to be aiming at generalizing an airborne if not heliborne capability across the board for its general purpose forces. Sverdlov confirms this by stating,

The composition of a forward (enveloping) detachment for an offensive in mountains will differ, depending on the mission and nature of the terrain. For an offensive on an accessible axis—along roads or a valley—the forward (enveloping) detachment will include tank subunits reinforced with motorized rifle artillery and combat engineer subunits. On an axis with difficult accessibility it is appropriate to have motorized rifle subunits in the forward (enveloping) detachments.²³

Therefore the pattern of force changes that we saw in Afghanistan in connection with changes in logistics is part of the broader process of restructuring the Soviet armed forces during the 1980s and 1990s. Afghanistan is a major part of this experience as the Soviets refined the concept of the *combined arms rifle battalion* (CARB)—a formation created by combining specialized units, engineer, air, airborne, air defense, etc. to a standard motorized rifle battalion depending on its mission and terrain of operations. That innovation is fully in line with the recommendations of Sverdlov, Reznichenko and other major military figures.

The CARBs deployed in Afghanistan were no longer, as in the 1970s, simply tactical formations in advanced detachments. Rather, and as Sverdlov, Dragunskiy, and others have indicated, they have become integrated into the operational level formation. Because they were tasked with conducting independent missions like vertical envelopment and given many more assets than regular forces, their command and control was more flexible and independent, and morale was correspondingly higher. They became the main forces conducting operations in Afghanistan and it appears that their specific composition varied with the mission and terrain.²⁴ The CARB is an emblem of the process underway to make combined arms a reality, not just at the tactical level but also operationally.

The effort to create such flexible multipurpose forces capable of conducting air and ground operations and able to act independently through a more decentralized and flexible C² is one of the most significant outcomes of Afghanistan and applies to general war as well. If one examines the Soviet literature on airborne forces and air assault forces one finds that their only mission is to conduct operations behind enemy lines in support of ground offensives. Participation in a large continental conflict is their primary mission.²⁵ At the same time, military writings on the tactical operations of these forces in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Third World,

usually take place in a generic theater and have a great deal in common with Soviet coverage of local wars waged by 'imperialist' states. It appears that the authors of these two types of articles are concerned with generic tactical experience of local wars which could be just as useful in a large conventional conflict in a continental theater and display little interest in peculiarities of local warfare.²⁶

This observation could be expressed in other forms, namely that Moscow has a generic warfighting doctrine, not a small or low-intensity or counter-insurgency doctrine, and a big war doctrine.

Operational Art and Force Structure.

The stress on vertical envelopment and deep strike using air, heliborne, ground (and naval where appropriate) assets as well as associated force structure concepts is not exclusively or necessarily primarily an adaptation to Afghanistan. Rather, the adaptations that took shape in Afghanistan are tactical and operational, if not strategic, responses to the revolution in warfare that coincided with that war. These mission and force requirements are not merely tactically dictated or chosen to obtain tactical or even operational advantages in combat, they are profoundly aligned to a revolutionary strategic concept of war. For Dragunskiy's collective modern combat is primarily a continuous fire opposition by the combatants.²⁷ Only by effectively combining fire with maneuver to maximize the potential inhering in maneuver by units and subunits and by fire can the commander lead his forces to victory.²⁸

Sverdlov's remarks are even more to the point. He sees the opportunities presented by airborne and heliborne forces' and strike platforms' capabilities as representing the arrival of air/ground (land) warfare. This Soviet conception of combined arms warfare assigns a great and increasing role to such assets as he noted earlier. It also gives the commander and command authorities the means and requirement of forecasting the ways and means by which the enemy will conduct warfare.²⁹ Sverdlov observes that air/land warfare will in the future be waged even on a tactical scale. Tactical operations like airborne landings by tactical forces are a perfect example of this. Second, and more importantly,

According to this concept, the role of elements of combat power not subject to quantification is increasing, such as, for example, maneuver by ground and air, which is no less important than the effects of fire...Enemy implementation of the concept of air-ground combat operations means the use of all elements of combat power, from psychological operations to the use of nuclear weapons. The sphere of combat operations may include any area of terrain and may directly influence the outcome of combat.³⁰

It follows from these essentially tactical manuals that the resort to a strategy that placed heavy reliance on air and airmobile forces is not only a function of a specific theater and its peculiarities, though these are vitally important. Rather Afghanistan became a laboratory where new concepts of war were tried out and tested after 1980. To understand the implications of that fact fully we must understand the operational-strategic dilemma that this war posed after mid-1980. Once it became clear that it would be a long war and that Moscow could not or would not spare several hundred thousand men to the theater for both logistical and political reasons, several factors came to govern military planning.

First, the troops and the command and control setup in theater were structurally maladapted to it, but it would take a long time fully to overcome those problems. Second, it would also take years to reconstitute the Afghan army into a force capable of defending its government. Third, Moscow faced a situation where no single operation could provide a decisive strategic victory. Rather, victory (leaving aside what that

meant) could only come about after protracted tactical engagements over several years. Armored and MRD forces showed their incapacity for such a war in that theater. The only forces available to Moscow for effective conduct of tactical operations were the air and heliborne forces. They alone combined mobility—because the Soviet definition of a Desant, air or heliborne, includes the units' subsequent maneuver from the landing zone to enemy targets—with force, BMDs (Boevaia Mashina Desantnaya-Airborne Infantry Fighting Vehicles) and air power, rotary or fixed wing.

The early experience of regular general purpose forces in Afghanistan confirmed that they were too heavy to move. Or, in more doctrinal terms that experience provided the first empirically based indicators that the Red Army could not achieve its stated missions by the mere piling up of quantitative parameters of force, heavy armor and mechanized infantry divisions. Whether or not Moscow fully realized it, the combination of airmobile forces, rotary and fixed wing aircraft, and ground forces' fire, when integrated together, offered a force multiplier at the tactical level if the tactical or operational commander could control it. Maneuver by fire and its integration with mobility that could gain tactical or operational surprise offered the best way of winning that war and of preparing to launch offensives in the theater war which was the priority subject of military analysis. Coinciding as it did with a revolution in military affairs due to technological advances in weaponry and automated systems, the experiments in force structure offered a chance to test new tactical concepts. In this regard Moscow followed an old Tsarist procedure of trying out new concepts in its Asiatic and Eastern wars only to disseminate and refine them later on its European borders.³¹

Casting our analysis of this development in Soviet thinking about force structure and operational art yields several benefits.

- We gain a broader insight into the nature of Soviet thinking about contemporary and future war and the forces and missions necessary for it.

- We can trace changes in force structure to those in doctrine and operational art more closely than before.
- We can see the evolution of airborne forces, and of thinking about helicopters' role in warfare in broader historical terms.
- The evolution of the role of Spetsnaz forces—specially designated forces (Voiska Spetsial'nogo Naznacheniiia)—becomes clearer. They are not merely commandos or hit squads or the kinds of forces quasi-hysterical recent analyses talked about.

Airborne and Heliborne Forces.

The revolutionary changes in tactics, operational art, and strategy due to technological revolution and the impact of those factors upon performance in Afghanistan are among the forces driving changes in all aspects of Soviet military thinking and policy today. The war in Afghanistan led to changes in force structure and operational art that magnified the role of airborne and heliborne units as Moscow's first response to or effort to conduct combined arms operations there. Twice during the 1980s, clearly in response to the revolutionary changes in warfare on Soviet ways of waging war, the Soviet army rewrote its tactical manual (*Reznichenko's Taktika*).³² Reznichenko's concluding remarks in 1987 indicate the forces that led to this rewriting and link together technology and the empirical experience of warfare.

Thus, modern combined-arms battle tactics not only differ fundamentally from those of 1940-45, but even from those of the 1970s. That is, the tactics initially employed in Afghanistan have been superseded or become obsolete. That is due to the revolution in military affairs that spans nuclear weapons and the latest advances in weaponry and information technology. Troop capabilities have grown dramatically on both sides giving unprecedented mobility, diversity, and fluidity to the battlefield and decisiveness to operations there. Battle's spatial scope is greater than ever and new principles of control and troop organization have developed. Finally the volume of former combat support measures, among them airborne

forces' operations, "have ceased to be support measures and are now included within the main content of battle."³³

Reznichenko's writings are literally textbooks for commanders and he indicates that battle today requires constant continuous integration of aerial and ground based platforms and fire to achieve victory. Airborne and heliborne landings can be both strategic—carried out by frontal aviation— or tactical by army aviation. Each organization now has assets for such an operation, imparting a more flexible and decentralized C² structure, but also placing great responsibility upon commanders to integrate those forces properly.³⁴ The impact of fixed and rotary wing aircraft has led to three-dimensional warfare, aerial envelopment being the third dimension. One might think of the initial air campaign versus Iraq in such terms, as air power not only knocks out key targets, it inhibits enemy movement and breaks up troop formations as well, thus making it easier to carry out ground and airborne operations. This three-dimensionality is coming to resemble the Afghan picture in which no stable front line exists, and troops are commingled with each other in a fragmented front. It is a combined-arms concept, not just in a mechanical sense of combining arms. Rather, and this is only implied, modern air/land warfare requires a control system that effectively integrates fire and maneuver together to optimum advantage.³⁵

The approved method of putting this concept into practice is deep strikes that combine all forces and fire. Reznichnko states that combined arms formations from the front, nuclear strikes (if called for), the wide use of airborne troops, airmobile troops (heliborne), mobile combat and operational groups forward detachments (ranging from a reinforced battalion tactical group to a division) and special purpose troops in the rear all combine for the purpose of destroying enemy platforms, first and second echelon troops, interdiction of the latter, and so on. Vertical envelopments are a key aspect of this new three-dimensional battle.³⁶ And in defense not much changes. Successful defense must be active and mobile, it should not be confined to static positional defense but combine

with active measures against airborne and heliborne landings and counterattacks by these forces.³⁷

In Afghanistan the resort to vertical operations was designed to win the war and achieve the necessary tactical victories in the shortest possible time. This is not to say commanders felt any pressure to win by a certain date, at least before Gorbachev, though afterward they probably did. Rather these forces, by virtue of their mobility and air supremacy at least until 1987, could force the pace of the war and bring it to the Mujaheddin in a way that inhibited their mobility and forced them to keep pace, which they could not do. That became clear during the period of greatest success (1985-86), until the Stingers restored some balance and the political pressure on Moscow to withdraw grew too great to be dismissed. The same holds true for Reznichenko. While the forces and weapons systems he describes are not inconsistent with protracted and "measured" operations, those operations do hinder their effectiveness. Preference must be given to dynamic mobile troop actions that force the pace, maintain the initiative, and can thereby achieve decisive results sooner rather than later.³⁸

Reznichenko, Dragunskiy's collective, and Sverdlov all published their works around the same time. This suggests a profound reappraisal of tactics and forces during this period of the middle and late 1980s and that is not inconsistent with the public record. What clearly emerges from them, particularly Sverdlov and Reznichenko, is that the enhanced reliance on airmobile and airborne forces is linked to a revolutionary concept of three-dimensional war that forces a comprehensive rethinking of the whole notion of contemporary combined-arms combat. At the same time the greater emphasis on the three kinds of forces studied here: airborne, helicopter, and special forces, all develop not only from empirical observation in Afghanistan but also from a prior period of Soviet military forecasting about future trends in warfare that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Soviet thinking, like much of its policy, thus appears to be incremental. Force developments can take up to a generation to appear based on prior forecasts concerning the nature of future war, the troop formations and weapons

systems that are required and so on.³⁹ Certainly this is the case with regard to airborne, helicopter, and special forces.

Any effort to grasp fully the lessons of Afghanistan for Moscow and from its point of view must take account of this. It is not only that the need to field new enhanced battalions combining high-tech strike and mobility packages is driving changes in C³ and force composition.⁴⁰ Rather the operations and forces with which Moscow experimented in Afghanistan materialized past forecasts and the first glimpses of Soviet air/land battle. This may be a prime reason for the promotion of so many generals who saw active service in Afghanistan into the key commanding ranks of Soviet armed forces.

It might seem strange to describe Afghanistan as the first attempt at air/land war fought by the USSR but the development of forces there accentuated force requirements called forth in 1966 when Moscow began to consider the conventional theater option for Europe and local war abroad in detail. Force developments in the 1980s reflected the essential transferability of those force packages, tailored to specific missions as Moscow saw fit to tailor them.⁴¹ The 1966 article, in the authoritative journal *Voennaia Mysl'* (Military Thought), linked airborne forces to the effectuation of the deep strike concept of operations and to the new vistas opened up by improved airlift and transport capabilities. The helicopter also opened up the possibility, clearly one that impressed the authors, of using regular ground troops, not trained in airborne operations for them. In other terms, helicopters provided for a broad diffusion of airborne or heliborne capabilities among motorized rifle divisions. The desire to achieve high rates of post-landing mobility became a reality with the creation of the BMD (*Boevaia Mashina Desantnaya—Airborne Infantry Fighting Vehicle*). Ground troops also were now, as in Vietnam, being rapidly equipped with air and helicopter assets. Large-scale airborne operations, i.e., those of an operational or strategic character as, e.g., Prague and Kabul, were in the deep rear of the enemy and were now possible as were smaller operational and tactical landings.

Increasingly the person responsible for the use of an airborne operation was the commander who organized it on a

corresponding scale. Ultimately this entailed giving even tactical, army level commanders air and heliborne assets. These operations, to achieve maximum success, had to be precisely coordinated with ground, naval, or even nuclear assaults. Significantly the authors also postulated that changes would occur, specifically forecasting Reznichenko's notions concerning a land and air echelon of troops though they used the term, groups of forces. In that connection they stressed creating the necessary C² or command element to coordinate them. That requirement led straight to the resuscitation of the TVD idea for strategic operations and at lower levels to the increasingly combined arms character of battalions. In each case tactical conditions drove changes in command and control. Finally Soviet writers then foresaw the trend towards commingling of airborne and ground based troops who could perform ever higher level missions as well as tactical landings.⁴²

Force developments in the 25 years since 1966 represent a fulfillment of those forecasts and calls for meeting requirements for combat. In the naval infantry, by 1981, when the capability became public in the maneuvers of that year, battalions, if not all units, displayed a parachute capability that must have been deemed crucial to the conduct of amphibious operations as well as for tactical or operational airborne and heliborne operations.⁴³ The creation of operational maneuver groups and forward detachments during the 1970s and 1980s was based on units drawn from airborne divisions and general purpose forces, all of whom were trained in airborne operations. They filled the gap between tactical landings of motorized rifle divisions by helicopter and operational and even strategic airborne drops. "More specifically they were to cooperate with the forward detachments and OMG's of the army and front and assist their penetration to operational depths as well as perform other missions in the operational-tactical depth."⁴⁴

These forces were organized at the brigade level at the front and as battalions at the army level and gave commanders their own organic assets for air and heliborne operations without having to go to the strategic airborne divisions at TVD

level or above.⁴⁵ Finally, helicopter regiments have simultaneously been created at both army and front levels to give those forces their air assets, and the weapons and BMDs these regiments need have also been assigned to them.⁴⁶ Holcomb and Turbiville also believe that Moscow is establishing permanent tactical air assault units at the division level.

All of these force refinements are part of a broader program of continuing evolutionary change in force and mission structure. For example, Soviet military dictionaries and encyclopedias between 1983 and 1986—the period of greatest reliance on airborne *Desanty* in Afghanistan—show that Moscow embraced the concept of tactical and operational-tactical landings. In 1982 it also was revealed that the airborne troops were removed from MOD control and now included in the ground forces as a separate combat arm. The results were that, "From the operational-tactical point of view, this has promoted closer coordination of the combat operations of airborne assault forces with those of combined arms formations and field forces."⁴⁷

It is clear that Afghanistan was a kind of laboratory where Moscow experimented with the idea of giving *each level of command* its own airborne and heliborne assets for conducting combined operations and the maximizing of their power took place. This case holds true whether we talk about defensive or offensive doctrine and operations. It is also the case that an air transportable (either by fixed or rotary wing) capability is being diffused across all forces, probably even more so after the CFE treaty reductions are completed in an attempt as well to combine maximum mobility with maximum fire capability. Finally, it appears that increasing interest and resources will be devoted to airlift and landing resources and units to materialize still further the evolving requirements and opportunities that Moscow perceives in air assault and airborne units.

Various options present themselves today as a result of the CFE treaty in Europe and the stringencies forced upon Moscow by its own economic crisis. One analysis of the defensive posture that should dominate in the years to come

sees air assault forces being removed from division and army levels and concentrated (in peacetime) at the front level.⁴⁸ An earlier assessment suggested that the dissolution of some front level (army group) air assault units in Europe during 1989-91 and the distribution of their personnel and equipment to new air assault units that will be organic to a new brigade and corps organization is also a possibility.⁴⁹ There were two motorized rifle brigades in Afghanistan whose motorized rifle and air assault battalions both took part in heliborne operations supported by helicopter assets from nearby fields. Turbiville suggests that these brigades might be the experimental nucleus for a counterinsurgency force.⁵⁰

What appears to be the case, however, is that Moscow is, as indicated above, also diffusing a generic airmobile capability throughout its domestic and general purpose forces for counterinsurgency at home and abroad and theater warfare beyond or at its borders. Particularly with regard to helicopters the Soviets seem to have grasped the notion that they enhance all essential aspects of the ground/air battle: reconnaissance, fire strike, fire support, interdiction, antitank, anti-helicopter landings, anti-landing operations, and extraction of troops, supply, and aerial C³. Thus all forces are going to be organized and equipped with helicopters of various types as their principal means of mobility.⁵¹ There is no doubt that Afghanistan validated Soviet thinking about the utility of helicopters as it did for air and heliborne assaults and landings.

And the importance of helicopters and of airborne assets for the conduct of the active defensive is as important as it was for the offensive. Soviet doctrine expects the enemy to use airborne, heliborne, and raiding (Spetsnaz among them) assault assets as an important element in his offensive plans. The defense, to repulse that attack, must also maneuver actively, otherwise it could not maintain its overall positional stability. The struggle against those airborne, heliborne, and raiding actions are among the 'most urgent' tasks of the defense. Since maneuver and fire constitute the basis of counterattacks (and attacks), the defense must retain its maneuverability and not let those forces into its rear and second echelon at tactical, operational, or strategic depth. The

defense must be able to employ combined arms fire platforms and maneuver by fire to the greatest possible degree because the delivery of such conventional fire is probably the principal factor in counterattacks.⁵² Indeed, given the likelihood of airborne and heliborne attacks as part of the offensive, the struggle in the defensive zone will assume a maneuver character from the outset.⁵³ All forces, including special ones, must forestall such strikes in the rear lest they disrupt the entire defense or worse.⁵⁴ It is clear from even this one analysis that the Afghan experience of the effects of landings involving airborne, heliborne, and 'special forces' was viewed by Soviet commanders as likely to produce this unhinging effect. If they cannot use it in the offensive they must, first, deny it to the enemy and, second, use it in the defense which they postulate will be proactive and assume a mobile, maneuvering nature.

It is here that the newfound significance of the helicopter and of the heliborne troops emerge. The first *Desantno-Shturmovye Brigady* (DShB-Air Assault Brigades) were called Brigades of Special Designation indicating that they were an analogue of special forces. However, Vietnam and the Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969 indicated both the need for more mobile forces and what could be done with them. Battalions at Army level emerged to provide Army commanders with a flexible mobile force for deep strikes, raids, or interdictions. The battalions could serve with or as forward detachments or part of an OMG of which the forward detachments are no more than a tactical level equivalent.

In Afghanistan these forces matured not only to include general purpose forces who were trained for airmobile operations and the MVD and KGB border troops. Estimates cannot be precise but apparently DShB troops in a varying number of battalion strength formations were rotated in and out of the country for counterinsurgency operations. Apparently they were most effective in convoy security, rapid response missions when alerted by intelligence or reports of enemy activities, and vertical envelopments. Vertical envelopments took essentially two forms: 1) *Blokirovka* (blockade) to surround and destroy rebel units, and 2) *Procheska* (combing operations) to seal off an area by

enclosing it and then searching for enemy units. As a result of Afghanistan there are now ten DSh brigades generally built around three battalions, one of which is fully jump-trained (others may be, depending on circumstances) and equipped with BMD air transportable mechanized infantry combat vehicles (MICVs).

Inasmuch as these forces were used in Afghanistan to seal off escape routes and channel enemy forces into killing grounds or break up their cohesion and split them up, it appears that similar tactical missions will be assigned to them in vastly different conventional theater operations. Much care will necessarily have to be given here to suppressing enemy air defenses and fire along the route of the landing force's flight and descent to the ground and one response will have to be accompanying helicopters in a fire support role.⁵⁵

Such considerations demonstrate that not only did the heliborne forces come of age as units combining fire with mobility, the helicopter also came of age as a kind of flying tank combining heavy firepower assets for use as fire support, close air support, interdiction and reconnaissance. As Galeotti observes and as we have noted elsewhere, the Soviets view the helicopter as a kind of aerial successor to the tank or APC. Indeed Moscow is thinking about replacing reserve tank units with attack helicopters.⁵⁶ In addition, the combined arms aspect, combining fire from ground and air assets (both rotary and fixed wing), with landings, also suggests an evolution toward considering the *Desant* as an operation conducted along lines not dissimilar to that of a combined arms ground operation.⁵⁷ Further evolution along these lines leads to a concept of combined arms that effectively unites the air and land dimensions as called for by Reznichenko and Sverdlov. One other experiment with such forces which has been suggested is "Helicopter Assault Landing Regiments" (ShDVP) that are fully integrated. They unite a battalion of paratroopers with integral assault helicopters, two squadrons of helicopters, two squadrons of helicopter gunships, and a Spetsnaz company in what Galeotti calls "a futuristic, fully motor-mechanized whole."⁵⁸

While that may be a premature call, the helicopter is undoubtedly for Moscow a weapon of the near future. Apart from the missions described above, Moscow sees it as well as the ideal antihelicopter and antiheliborne landing weapon system. The fact that helicopters are 'owned' in practice by local commanders also optimizes the present and future capability for rapid, flexible, and independent response to unforeseen contingencies, something highly desirable if difficult to attain in the Soviet military.⁵⁹ Helicopters will also free fixed wing assets for other missions besides support of landings or attacking them and will raise the importance of heliborne and airborne landings to the point where they alone could be decisive operations. Certainly Moscow hoped for such a result in 1968 in Prague and 1979 in Kabul.⁶⁰ Fixed wing aircraft could then more freely conduct C³I targeting, strategic bombing, and economic and ecological targeting as occurred in Afghanistan and in Iraq.⁶¹

Similarly, heliborne forces carrying their own air defense assets can be used for all sorts of landings, ranging from simple raids into targets in the enemy rear, or infiltration/exfiltration missions, to the landing of OMG forces in the enemy rear, thereby employing the vertical envelopment at the front if not theater level.⁶² As Hansen states, contemporary military developments are leading to a situation where a separate and distinct air force operational art is emerging that conforms to combined arms warfare principles but claims the right to execute independent missions under the auspices of the General Staff and planned by Air Force officers. Since combat helicopters constitute another form of mobile artillery added to towed and self-propelled artillery, this new form of army aviation would free soviet frontal aviation for other requirements at all levels: tactical, operational, and strategic.⁶³

The uses to which helicopters can be put, as demonstrated in Vietnam and Afghanistan, have influenced Western thinking about using them as force multipliers, particularly with regard to fire support and troop mobility. For instance, South African commentators, in discussing a scenario where both sides have equivalent opportunities for mobility, note that this could bring

about a stalemate. The helicopter, replacing the flanking and enveloping function formerly reserved for cavalry, validates a doctrine of maneuver and mobility just as in the Soviet case.⁶⁴ This analysis highlights the helicopter as performing close air support, deep strike, rear, and counter-air operations.

The technological revolution is also enhancing the role of the helicopter due to its speed and capacity for mobility and surprise. Moreover, it can and probably does function as a component in a RUK system, notably in acquiring targets and transmitting the data to the deep strike platform. This analysis highlights the utility of the helicopter in an environment that is rapidly changing. The technological revolution that is leading to the combination of surveillance and firepower in the RUK is eliminating the utility of troop concentration. The requirement for mobility from widely dispersed bases to arrive at the target in concentrated force rapidly and with surprise enhances the role of the helicopter.

The lowered utility of force where military victory nevertheless leads to political-economic loss is also causing a trend towards special forces type operations using helicopters. State-sponsored terrorist incidents at great distances from home forces are also occurring widely. Finally, the growing need to achieve and maintain surprise increases the need for weapons systems and platforms which can do these missions. The cost of weapons is also forcing a turn to smaller, more mobile and mechanized forces away from the mass deployments earlier this century.⁶⁵ The trend will culminate in a swing towards mechanized light forces away from heavy ones. In turn, this gives way to both air and heliborne forces carrying their own combined arms (and I would include air defense assets and RUK systems as well). In Ellis' words, "A heliborne assault force comprising specialized heliborne troops in MTH, supported by combat support helicopters, will become the ultralight cavalry of the future."⁶⁶

The use of such aerial platforms for the weapons of the future, as well as the "cavalry" of the future, integrating RPVs, ground, air artillery and C³I assets in real time to bring about the RUK heralded by Soviet writers is emerging as well from actors in what the Soviets call local war—a category embracing

both the classically conventional Israeli-Arab wars and Afghanistan.⁶⁷ The latter, being the first high-tech war fought by the USSR, will undoubtedly stimulate developments in this direction, especially in view of the effectiveness of the Stinger and the need for such front line anti-air systems. By the same token, the logistical capabilities of the helicopter are also being closely examined due to the problems connected with the continuing supply of logistics over heavily mined and poorly designed roads as in Afghanistan or in a Europe devastated by war and possibly chemical weapons.

Special Forces.

The force structure issues raised by the Afghan war, (and those such as surprise and deception that are not covered for reasons of space) indicate the continuing adaptive process or learning experience underway in the Red Army.⁶⁸ Afghanistan is hardly the only example of this process of learning and adaptation in the Soviet military. Rather, adaptation continues for all possible contingencies right up to an intercontinental strategic exchange. However, airborne, helicopter and heliborne forces are not the only innovations in doctrine, operational art, and force structure brought on by the war, nor will the process of learning about low intensity conflicts be confined to foreign contingencies. The domestic crisis of the USSR and efforts to deal with it have forced Moscow to reconfigure its regular and special forces to handle domestic as well as foreign conflicts. That process of configuration raises many prospects but in the context of Afghanistan's lessons the use of special forces must be examined.

Inasmuch as the helicopter has become what one Soviet analyst calls "the universal air weapon," the airborne and heliborne insertion of troops has become possible to a degree previously undreamt. This development offers a wide scope for the use of various categories of special forces above and beyond the previous Spetsnaz forces familiar to foreign audiences. The extensive use of these forces in roles that go beyond their previous first assignment of target acquisition, reconnaissance, and neutralization of key political and military targets to preempt the stability of enemy defenses became a

hallmark of operations, particularly encirclements in Afghanistan. At the same time we are witnessing the development of various categories of forces designated by Soviet authorities as "special forces" (either *Osobyie* or *Spetsial'nye* in Russian) for internal and external security missions that build on the experience of airborne and heliborne operations in Afghanistan.⁶⁹ That development suggests a trend towards creating a generic special force. That special force would then be available at home or abroad and possess rapid striking power and mobility as well as its own means of logistics support in accordance with the requirements outlined above.

Helicopters as aircraft, and technological innovations are making it possible to employ deep strikes across the depth of the enemy if those aerial strikes are properly coordinated with land power and strikes (and naval forces too). Exploitation of the vertical dimension allows for the use of firepower across the entire front and rear of the enemy and could even possibly have a decisive impact on the process of a campaign.⁷⁰ But for that to happen Moscow must secure air superiority if not supremacy across the corridor of the main axis of operations and exploit it in order to maximize the potential, whether tactical, operational, or strategic of a *Desant*.⁷¹ The experience of local wars in the Third World confirm that air superiority is decisive for victory there and is directly involved in generating the need for airmobile, amphibious, and special forces.⁷² This is because a major target of those forces is enemy airbases, airfields, and associated C³. The use of tactical aviation continues to be regarded as one of the principal means of achieving tactical if not operational and strategic surprise despite the proliferation of ballistic missiles.⁷³

At the same time the developments in aircraft and air defense entail a struggle to overcome enemy air defenses by means of comprehensive electronic warfare and the rise to space as a theater either of operations or of substantial C³I activities to control the air dimension.⁷⁴ Thus, the "verticalization" of modern warfare logically calls for moving on to the next stage to secure control or command of the air for

both land and naval warfare. Soviet authors recognize the increasing volume of space C³ activity within the overall communications activities of armed forces and see in space a means of improving control and command over the panoply of combined arms in battle as well as a platform for the performance of automated operations linked with reconnaissance systems.⁷⁵ This linkage of terrestrial and space dimensions of warfare certainly bears out a Polish analysis that, "The formation of the theory and practice of air-land combat operations must be acknowledged as the most significant developmental tendency in modern tactics of ground forces."⁷⁶

At the same time as Soviet analysts are linking the need for control, if not command of space to gain control over the air and subsequently naval or ground theaters, they also postulate that modern warfare requires an early suppression, neutralization, or degradation of enemy electronic capabilities and use of combined arms platforms against enemy efforts in this field directed towards the Soviet forces and C³.⁷⁷ Certainly, failure to compete in any or all of these spheres impelled the reforms in the Soviet military and security policy in the 1980s and 1990s. But these considerations also apply substantially to the prosecution of any future local wars in the Third World, against countries possessing both ballistic missiles and sophisticated air and EW capabilities. Lacking sufficient means to project aerial power by suppressing those defenses at once, or if successful, to sustain a *Desant* behind enemy lines (and the same holds for amphibious operations as well), Moscow finds the local war option increasingly unpalatable.⁷⁸ It can only contemplate such operations in the Third World or beyond its immediate borders where it can be certain of winning quickly without any international complications. Special Forces can play key roles here. Afghanistan is an obvious example where such miscalculation of early victory took place and its denouement will certainly inhibit easy consideration of similar operations in the future.

Thus for political, as well as military reasons of an operational nature, local war is not a particularly feasible option for Moscow at a time when its neighbors are arming

themselves to the teeth with sophisticated if not state-of-the-art weapons. The very asymmetry of power that Moscow possesses relative to these "neighbors" makes either escalation to a high intensity of conventional warfare or overwhelming surprise the only remotely possible options and the disadvantages accruing to them are well known and daunting. Accordingly, these considerations enhance the role of special and covert operations abroad and the search for ultra light or miniature means of infiltration of forces in small teams for specific missions, as off Sweden or in 'Mosquito' helicopters.⁷⁹ Thus, as helicopters' and airborne forces' role, and that of space increases, so too does that of warfare at the "bottom" of the spectrum, i.e., the use of small numbers of men assembled and deployed for specific missions that must be carried out rapidly and often covertly.

In this connection the rising role of Soviet "special forces" must be considered. The experience of Soviet special forces and Soviet literature suggests that their missions have gone beyond those of target acquisition, reconnaissance, and neutralization of targets to include full-fledged combat operations. In the Manchurian campaign of 1945, land and sea-based Spetsnaz forces participated in the strategic level combat termination phase. At the operational level they seized key targets that facilitated the commitment to battle of follow-on forces. And at the tactical level they executed missions any commando unit would have been expected to perform then.⁸⁰ That experience, as do Afghanistan and the submarine incursions into Sweden in the 1980s, demonstrates the many means of insertion these forces have against either pre-positioned intelligence or combat targets. They can move via any medium and thus the forces talked about in this chapter, Airborne, Air Assault, Spetsnaz, and Naval Infantry, all can be moved around or tasked for so-called special missions. Every regular motorized rifle division has what Burgess calls a "pseudo special operations capability" and Spetsnaz forces are available at all levels above division.⁸¹ Since actual combat groupings appear increasingly to be tailored for missions, the flexible deployment options offered by the proliferation of air portable and/or special forces present multiple options to Soviet commanders.

Increasingly Soviet doctrinal statements mandate the use of such special forces—translated as Diversionary forces—for the conduct of operations either from a defensive or offensive point of view and up to the strategic level in the theater. A recent study of the evolution of operational art concludes that one major aspect of modern local wars is that while all forces participate in them, it is noteworthy that after Vietnam most Western local war operations were conducted by special forces. Also among the important "universal" missions of the helicopter in the Falklands war was the insertion of sabotage groups.⁸² Sabotage forces also are directed to neutralize enemy command, control, communications, and nuclear weapons.⁸³ The advantage of special forces, armed as are regular general purpose or heliborne, naval, and airborne forces, is that they are a force multiplier by virtue of their combination of firepower, mobility, and ability to achieve surprise at any level if they successfully accomplish their mission. The advent of the revolution in military affairs that has brought about a new generation of high-tech fire platforms has brought about a situation that presents Soviet commanders with a nightmare. To wit, offensive forces, starting with a surprise attack from the standing position with equal forces, or having "crept up to war" stealthily, can use maneuver and all available forces and fire platforms to maximize mobility and fire as they unleash a surprise attack. General Salmanov stated that,

Even with a roughly equal balance of forces before the start of a military action, the enemy, having started the war by surprise, will attempt to shift this balance in his favor on individual axes. Evidently, such a situation can be attained during an air-land operation with the use of powerful fire strikes on corridors through our combat formations *and by rapid insertion of strong groupings from mobile infantry units, large scale air assaults (Desanty), army aviation, specially trained diversionary and reconnaissance detachments and so on.* (emphasis author)⁸⁴

The significance of reconnaissance and special troops also continues to grow because the transformation of the battlefield under present levels of weapons and future trends in their development continues to enhance the importance of the initial period of war as one in which even decisive strategic

operations may be carried out. Hence intelligence and reconnaissance are vital in determining targets—as in Iraq—and in allowing commanders to engage in the required engineer preparation of the battlefield. The capacity of specialized forces to disrupt C³I still further augments the force multiplier aspect of their use and makes it possible as well to use them to bring about a rapid strategic success or even victory. War, i.e., strategic operations, is being telescoped into shorter and shorter timeframes. Hence the time now available to conduct a strategic operation is roughly equal to that formerly needed to conduct a tactical one and make tactical decisions.⁸⁵ Any force that leverages the time factor becomes crucially significant particularly if it combines fire and mobility with speed and a multiplier effect for successful missions. Lastly the advent of new weapons that have so greatly increased the firepower available to units also makes it possible to use smaller forces, formerly assigned only tactical or operational-tactical missions, with strategic ones. Spetsnaz and other special forces units' which could be configured from a platoon to a division and at every stage in between, are particularly well suited to realize that principle in combat situations.

For all of these reasons we can expect a growing move towards both air and heliborne forces' growing diffusion and importance throughout the Soviet armed forces as a whole, and their deployment for the entire range of missions on land, sea, and air. This trend also includes the now air portable Naval Infantry forces, too. We can also expect to find new mission-specific special forces units designated in flexible configurations and size and also movable by land, sea, and air, to emerge more visibly as part of the Soviet order of battle. They will be used mainly to create havoc in the rear, seize key C³I targets, and neutralize centers of resistance or of fire capability. Tactical, operational, and strategic missions will also be assigned to the heliborne, airborne and Naval Infantry units in amphibious assaults or *Desanty*. Such operations will resemble that of Kabul in 1979 and the vertical envelopments—both of the blockade and of the combing operations conducted in Afghanistan. At the same time, given the domestic crisis of the Soviet system and the incapacity of the regular militia to

keep order that has become clear since 1986, the pressure of events and of forces determined to defend that system is leading the Soviet military into an ever greater internal security role. Those forces who distinguished themselves in Afghanistan due to their combination of force, mobility, and capability of achieving surprise—Airborne Troops, Air Assault Brigades, and Spetsnaz—will be the nucleus if not the exclusive agent of such internal security and counterinsurgency forces.

Precisely because Moscow still lacks an adequate response to the threat of low intensity conflict as demonstrated by its utter failure even to secure one province of Afghanistan, it appears that there is no other rapidly deployable and strong enough force available to it for those purposes at home. But the deployment of the Red Army as policemen not only ultimately degrades the combat capability of the army relative to the types of warfare that pertain to current and immediate future conditions, it also confesses an inability to make the Soviet system militarily competitive. If the history of previous Russian revolutions is any guide, that deployment of the army also heralds a new Russian civil war.

CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

DOMESTIC SECURITY OPERATIONS AND THE LESSONS OF AFGHANISTAN

During the 1990s Moscow will almost certainly face what we call low-intensity conflict at home and what Soviet planners term local war. Moscow well understands that this kind of conflict could begin either inside the USSR or outside it and spill over into its territory. From all accounts, the configuration of forces deployed for those contingencies, their missions—to rapidly neutralize enemy command, control, communications and capacity to resist—and the process by which these mission-specific forces will be organized hark back to Afghanistan and subsequent operations there. The Baltic interventions of 1991 to suppress nationalist movements and the abortive coup of August 1991 represented just such an operational challenge. The Baltic operations make it clear that many Soviet armed forces—including mainly KGB, MVD forces—were increasingly organized and deployed for domestic counterinsurgency missions. In the Baltic and Moscow operations, elite, Spetsnaz, (specially designated forces, in Russian, *Voiska Spesial'nogo Naznachenie*) and airborne forces (the latter only in the Baltic and 1990-91 rehearsals for Moscow but not in the actual August coup), precisely those forces who distinguished themselves in Afghanistan, took the lead.

In 1990-91, Moscow reorganized these forces that conduct both internal security and low intensity conflict missions in conformity with its traditional practice of tailoring force packages to missions. These forces' composition, missions, operational art, and strategy reflect lessons from Afghanistan, particularly those relating to the invasion of Kabul and the political tasks of dividing ethnic groups among themselves. Their operational structure conforms, on the other hand, to the later organization of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Finally,

these Baltic operations followed a strategic operational plan called Operation Metel' (Winter or Snowstorm) that involved the use of combined KGB, MVD, and army forces to suppress mass unrest. It was first employed during the anti-Moscow protests in Kazakhstan in December 1986.¹

Force restructuring is also being driven by the profoundly altered global security landscape that features rising threats of local war along Soviet borders, continued perception of a threat from the West and its technological progress, and internal unrest. The steps taken in conjunction with Operation Metel' substantially helped military planners respond to these threats and restructure Soviet armed forces for conventional options along Soviet borders. Thus, Soviet perceptions of domestic and foreign threats came together to pose challenges answered by Operation Metel' and the Moscow coup's force deployments.

To grasp the domestic and foreign significance of these developments we must start with definitions of the kinds of conflict involved. It is well known that Western and Soviet nomenclature significantly diverge in meaning even though both sides use the same word. The gap between the Western terms for low-intensity conflict or counterinsurgency and the Soviet term, local war, highlights the difficulties involved in understanding Soviet military thinking and the enduring differences between the two militaries. The very notions of low-intensity conflict or counterinsurgency are, or at least were, Soviet "blind spots."² They were seen as Western concepts for subcategories of what Moscow calls local war, and Soviet analysts have shown no readiness to examine unconventional war scenarios since 1945. This is despite their own extensive counterinsurgency and partisan warfare experience. Recent Soviet examination of local wars in the Third World focused exclusively on conventional scenarios and provide no operational-strategic lessons for prosecuting antiguerrilla wars.³

These conceptual lacunae in Soviet thinking exist in official dictionaries and encyclopedias. The most recent English-Russian Military Dictionary has no Russian equivalent for "local war," "low-intensity conflict," and "unconventional

war." And for the term "guerrilla" the definition is either "partisan (soldier) or a 'Diversionary-Desant' (the term for airborne or heliborne Special Forces or Spetsnaz in current parlance) force applying partisan tactics."⁴ The more recent *Dictionary of Military Terms* also omits any term for LIC and defines "local war (*lokal'naia voina*)" as follows: "A war, distinct from a world war, embracing relatively few states and a limited geographical area. Local war often appears due to the guilt of imperialistic states."⁵ The 1986 *Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines counterinsurgency activities or operations—*Protivopovstancheskie Deistviia*—as a purely imperialist series of police, military, and subversive operations of a punitive nature taken against the national liberation movements.⁶ Its definition of local war is also the basis for the 1988 definition.⁷ Thus Moscow has had no adequate situation-specific doctrine, strategy, and operational art for scenarios where it is the counterinsurgent force. Yet Soviet authorities conceded that despite a defensive doctrine that seems to rule out nuclear and theater-strategic European scenarios, local war remains a real possibility. In other words, involvement in local wars is still possible. Reformers, too, agree that despite the decreasing utility of force, such wars, ranging from guerrilla conflicts to conventional wars, still have political objectives that can be realized militarily.⁸ Preserving the Soviet empire is obviously a political objective for which force could be and was mandated.

At present the impact of the many crises and transformations in the Soviet security environment have led some to suggest introducing the concept of low-intensity conflict into Soviet military planning. In 1988 Gorbachev and others discussed this term only to dismiss it as an inapplicable imperialist concept.⁹ Since then, however, military commentators have resurrected it and suggested applying it to the Soviet context as Moscow learns from the American example. Sergei Ignat'ev favorably cites the American development of highly mobile "light" general purpose and special forces during the 1980s and their continued upgrading. Calling for Moscow to field similar forces Ignat'ev links foreign threats and domestic ethnic unrest as contingencies requiring "light" forces. Referring to the American forces deployed in

Panama in 1989-90, he approvingly commented on the specialization of units with reference to their mission.

Thus ground forces alone have within them Ranger battalions (rescue and sabotage actions—i.e., Spetsnaz actions—military operations in urban conditions [author]), battalions for psychological operations, groups of "civil administration", etc. Also, the use of special operating forces—(again Spetsnaz [author])—is closely linked up with operational plans of general-purpose forces.¹⁰

Ignat'ev recommended that Moscow develop analogous forces particularly since military, KGB, and MVD troops were used within Soviet republics to mount peacekeeping operations, form civil administration agencies, evacuate refugees, rescue hostages, and lift blockades, as in Transcaucasia and Central Asia.¹¹ Therefore specialized professional forces must exist within the framework of the regular armed forces. Their missions and operations in hot spots should also be "agreed and closely linked with general operational tasks of the armed forces in ensuring reliable defense of the country."¹² In other words, internal and external security forces and missions should be closely coordinated.

Ignat'ev's article must be taken seriously because subsequent moves followed his recommendations. Since then Moscow acted to specialize certain units and make KGB, MVD, and MOD forces "interoperable" for internal security missions as well as for conventional military missions. The KGB Border troops' and MVD forces' military experience and training date back to World War II and were refined in Afghanistan. When combined with Spetsnaz formations, existing within KGB, MVD, and all the regular armed forces, they formed an increasingly fungible resource to be "farmed out" to commanders at the theater level or below.¹³ And it is increasingly the nature of the mission, not the name of the force that determines both these forces' composition and the "specialness" of their designation.

Since troop deployment and commitment to missions is invariably a planned operation that must be integrated with a *Maskirovka* plan as described below, and the attainment of

surprise at all levels, it now appears that we were witnessing a new force structure and a doctrinal innovation. Those linked innovations pointed to the creation of a Soviet equivalent of the "Rapid Deployment Force" (keeping in mind that we used the 82d Airborne Division in Detroit in 1967) for domestic or foreign contingencies. This force can be rapidly mobilized from ostensibly nonmilitary, i.e., "militia" or "paramilitary" forces for assignments at home and abroad. It also is a force made up either of airborne divisions, airmobile Motorized Rifle Divisions, or elements of either group, heliborne Air Assault Brigades, and/or the Airborne Troops. The existence of such forces without a prior Soviet doctrine, strategy, and operational art covering their use would not conform to traditional Soviet military practice. This fact suggests that a doctrinal innovation compatible with the character and composition of these forces will soon appear to overcome the absence of a counterinsurgency doctrine as such. The creation of such a force structure, and the related C³ reforms described below also suggest the fulfillment of prior operational planning, in this case Operation Metel', calling for integrated, fungible forces. The attempted use by the plotters in August 1991 of just these types of forces also suggests the continuity from the Baltic and formalized nature of this innovation into a lasting contingency force. At the same time the doctrinal innovation would have retained the traditional flexibility inherent in Soviet definitions of local war by linking foreign and domestic contingencies together and tying them to the flexible combined arms forces available to wage these conflicts.

An added benefit gained by creating these "fungible" and flexible forces for low, middle, or high intensity missions and counterinsurgency was that Moscow could use its most reliable ethnic, professional, and political forces. The airborne and Spetsnaz forces are among the best, if not the best, physically trained elite formations, overwhelmingly Great Russian in ethnic background, and probably have a stronger cohesion than do most other units. They approached the new ideal of the "professional" army rather than the traditional one of conscripts and reservists. Those units also belonged to the General Staff and were therefore thought much less likely to have morale problems in internal security work. Therefore, in

the event of "small wars" breaking out along the Soviet peripheries, such professional forces would have enabled the regime to bypass the problems inherent in the growing Islamic draft age population and quality of the regular armed forces.¹⁴

We must also note that the creation and/or deployment of these forces does not mean that the Soviet military is restructuring itself solely to fight low-intensity conflicts. Regarding the Soviet Air Force, its CINC, Colonel General Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, emphatically ruled that out. However, he also indicated the air force's full determination to take advantage of the experience of Afghanistan. The lessons learned there include:

The actions of the Soviet Air Force in Afghanistan were of (a) local and specific nature. We have accumulated experience of using aircraft in mountain and desert conditions, of close interaction of aviation and ground units, of search and rescue operations, the control of aviation in conditions of dispersed deployment, as well as the preparation of aircraft for flights at short notice, the airlifting of material resources, the evacuation of ill and wounded in emergency conditions and repairs in field conditions.¹⁵

Shaposhnikov's actions during the coup bore out his previous statements. But these domestic security or Soviet RDF forces still represented an attempt to deploy multipurpose flexible forces for contingencies across the entire spectrum of conflict, i.e., for low, middle, and high intensity conflicts.

This newly formed combined arms Soviet force would have included not only VDV (Airborne Troops) forces under regular military control and those seconded to either the KGB or the MVD. Motorized Rifle Divisions, or forces under regular command could be and were reconstituted for such purposes along with various Spetsnaz forces in the Army, Navy, MVD, KGB, and Soviet Naval Infantry forces who have received parachute training. These Spetsnaz units and units taken from the regular forces apparently should have operated under the operational command of the front or theater commander who is directly under the Stavka VGK—The Supreme High Command—and its superior organ the new Security Council of 1990. And the airborne and Spetsnaz forces, as well as KGB

and MVD forces, would also be commanded by Stavka and the Security Council.

These Spetsnaz and Airborne Forces, like the MVD and KGB Border Troops, have substantial combat training and experience dating back to the civil war. Much of it specifically pertains to the many counterinsurgency operations of the Red Army since 1917. Since the end of the civil war these include suppressing peasant and national insurgencies during the 1920s-50s (including the Basmachi, in Central Asia, collectivization and counterinsurgency in the Tambov region in 1921 and probably Georgia in 1924, Baltic and Ukrainian insurgencies 1944-53); operations abroad in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39; Finland, 1939-40; World War II rear and front operations; consolidation of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe after 1944; Czechoslovakia, 1968; and, Afghanistan.¹⁶ More recently these forces underwent substantial reorganization and deployment. Within the MVD, Spetsnaz forces were formed in 1988 to conduct antiterrorist, anticriminal (anti-"Mafia"), and counterinsurgency operations.¹⁷ In the regular armed forces during peacetime each Military District was assigned a Spetsnaz brigade which can be used by Front Headquarters only in accordance with General Headquarters. Army-level Spetsnaz have come under Army Headquarters since 1986—a move designed to give armies more independence and very likely a reflection of Afghan experience pointing to a decentralized and flexible command and control.¹⁸

A recent Soviet account of KGB Border Troops' activities in Afghanistan demonstrates the extent of their training and combat experience. These troops came into the war to deploy within Afghanistan's northern borders and guard Soviet borders. They were made up, at first, by combat detachments from the Central Asian and Eastern Border Districts, often of volunteers from those units. At first they were positioned as small garrisons to prevent Afghan insurgents from reaching the Soviet border. In time, a so-called 'zone of responsibility' was established for these troops that included part of all of Afghanistan's northern provinces to a depth of almost 100 km. They performed heliborne and air assault tactical missions (the

two operations are listed separately hinting that air assault meant airborne operations) with Afghan and/or Soviet regular forces. Outwardly they could not be distinguished from the 40th Army, the regular Soviet forces there. Soldiers and officers wore the same uniforms while shoulder boards were altered into combined arms shoulder boards. Finally all rear services and combat operations support, and border aircraft were situated on the Soviet side in border troop detachment dispositions.¹⁹ This account confirms that the Border Troops also have their own air assets.

In similar fashion the MVD created specially designated forces, often based on Afghan veterans, to fight crime, drug running, rioting, inter-ethnic strife, and counterinsurgency operations. These forces are distinct in some sense, although not always a clear one, from the MVD Spetsnaz forces. It is evident that the KGB, MVD, and regular armed forces were restructuring to expand the number of trained and experienced units who could be tasked as professionals to conduct "special" missions and act as Spetsnaz forces. Increasingly the term Spetsnaz was not confined to the forces previously identified as such by Western observers.²⁰ Indeed, the original airborne battalions were identified in the 1930s as Spetsnaz as were the original heliborne forces in the 1960s, a fact indicating that what was special was their mission, not their designation within the military structure.²¹ Thus the term became mission specific and the principle that Soviet force packages are mission tailored continued.

Indeed, it now appears that, to realize the full requirements of Operation Metel' by mid-1990 and the August coup in Moscow, this process of force restructuring for domestic contingencies (national self-assertion, civil unrest, strikes, and crime) became a planned operation. Its consequences first became visible in the Baltic, the dispatch of troops to a total of seven republics, and the decree of December 29, 1990 (only announced on January 26, 1991), putting the military into a police role across the country. This force restructuring has also been accompanied by an orchestrated threat assessment that has been publicly disseminated to create a pretext for

military intervention, and an accompanying *Maskirovka* plan comprising:

- Deception;
- Psychological warfare to keep the targets off balance;
- The alternation of threats with ultimatums and seeming invitations to negotiate; and
- Disinformation for foreign and domestic audiences regarding both the dispatch of troops to the Baltic and the issuance of orders to use force.

It must be remembered here that every Soviet commander must, when planning an operation, devise a surprise and *Maskirovka* plan at the corresponding level of the operation—tactical, operational, and strategic. We contend that this has happened here as well. Therefore it is necessary to trace, in detail, force restructuring among the following forces: MVD Internal Troops (Vnutrennie Voiska); KGB Border Troops; the Airborne troops (VDV); Naval Infantry; and Spetsnaz (i.e., those forces previously known to be or identified as being Spetsnaz). After examining troop restructuring we can observe the Soviet threat dissemination process concerning the Baltic that served as a pretext for the coup in early 1991 and offers clues concerning Soviet assessments of the domestic threat.

Force Restructuring.

Planning this multipurpose force for rapid deployment to both foreign and domestic "theaters" began in mid-1990. It also appears that future force restructuring will build on the work of the 1980s and on responses to the threats of that time. Afghanistan is of special relevance here since Soviet forces there conjoined the mission to orchestrate a coup from without with a force structure that combines force with mobility. In the invasion of Afghanistan special and regular forces were gradually inserted into the country at its own request or to augment existing facilities for them. The actual coup began with a massive invasion of airborne forces and various Spetsnaz units coupled with a ground invasion from the north.

In that invasion the airborne units and Spetsnaz performed the strategic-operational mission of an Operational Maneuver Group to neutralize enemy command, control, and communications, and air forces in the deep rear and served as the outer ring of the encirclement forces on land and in the air.

The force developments traced here also represent an effort to maximize the potential for conducting rapid operations with highly mobile forces in the initial period of war or operation to achieve decisive results as soon as possible. Already in 1981, referring to the European theater, General Salmanov stated the requirement for a better combination of force with mobility, noting that during offensive operations Soviet forces "still are not always able to achieve a well-coordinated combination of fire and movement, and consequently a high-speed offensive."²²

Therefore, Soviet force developments today represent an effort to combine maximum applicable force and mobility under the dramatically altered threat environment and stringencies of the 1990s. And to some degree the changes in force structure towards greater mobility derive from the Afghan experience. The Soviet forces then moved to an almost two-tiered structure where the regular forces performed mainly static defense, patrolling of defensive fortifications and the ground wing of vertical envelopments. The main combat forces increasingly became those units configured for rapid mobility on fixed and rotary wing aircraft to perform various types of encirclement operations.

Also relevant to Soviet force planning is the fact that the CFE agreements and economic stringency at home have forced Soviet military commanders into a situation where available manpower and quantitative parameters of force have declined. Accordingly, any force planning for the rest of this century and beyond must not only strive, as Soviet military leaders often say, to fulfill qualitative parameters. Greater mobility and flexibility must now compensate for reductions in firepower and manpower. Therefore reforms in force structure, either for domestic or foreign threats, aim to enhance mobility to substitute for firepower and to maximize the two within existing constraints. And by all accounts the mobility involved

is aerial mobility as demonstrated by the operations of airborne and heliborne troops in Afghanistan.

Since military planners must now plan for domestic and foreign conflicts, they must anticipate both domestic and foreign scenarios and prepare pre-operational force packages for them.²³ Evidence of such prior planning is the fact that at present MVD, KGB, and railroad troops are being developed for domestic and/or foreign contingencies. The shakeup of the MVD in 1990 led to rumors that, with General Gromov's transfer to the post of Deputy Minister of the MVD, regular army divisions (presumably removed from the European equation) are being transferred to the MVD. Second, the new Security Council can be seen as an attempt to unify command of all available armed forces at the highest single centralized level. Third, the appointment of the Head of the Airborne Troops, General Achalov, a passionate Russian nationalist, as Deputy Defense Minister in the summer of 1990, can also be seen as facilitating those troops' use for internal security missions with the MVD and KGB. Finally, MVD efforts to transfer republican control over MVD troops to Moscow harmonize with moves to centralize control of all forces directly under Gorbachev for any contingency. Afghanistan's lessons in this context are that the troops most readily used to quell internal unrest are the same ones who led the invasion and who were most useful in Afghanistan: airborne, heliborne troops and Spetsnaz.

In each branch of the MVD, KGB, air and heliborne units, we can trace the development over time of a force capable of conducting internal and external security operations. Modernization of the MVD forces has accelerated in the wake of a rise in crime and interethnic unrest. The commander of the MVD Internal Troops, MVD Colonel General Yuri Shatalin, an Afghan veteran, has created so-called Operational Designation Units (*Operativny Naznachenie-OPNAZ*). The largest one was the Dzerzhinsky MVD Motorized Rifle Division in Moscow that guards key government facilities. Since 1988 it was fragmented to deal with many domestic crises, but it also provided most of the OPNAZ troops who served in Afghanistan. It also was slated to play a prominent role in the Moscow coup. Increased interethnic violence during 1988-90

led the state to raise the OPNAZ's numbers and quality with the aim of professionalizing them. A second MVD "special" force was the MVD Spetsnaz, numbering "several companies." A third force, subordinated to republican authorities, was the antiriot force, the OMON, (*Otryad Militsii Osobogo Naznacheniya-Special Purpose Militia Detachments*), the so-called Black Berets, some of whom are, again, Afghan veterans. Finally antiterrorist forces were formed within the MVD. It is hard to distinguish them from the MVD Spetsnaz. The KGB also created an antiterrorist force whose active combat element would be deployed alongside that of the MVD. Its personnel could be recruited from other sources such as the Border Troops and the KGB forces assigned to protect key party leaders and offices, not to mention more shadowy KGB departments.²⁴

The MVD forces spent 70-80 percent of their time policing interethnic conflicts and cannot fully cope with criminal actions, e.g., narcotics trafficking. Soviet media reports increasingly called for and admitted the presence of forces answering to the OMON description for use against criminal activities. These troops were heavily staffed from former airborne, naval infantry and MVD Spetsnaz elements. Since the KGB has traditionally handled smuggling and cross-border infiltration issues, the formation of such units provides a basis for expanded coordination between the KGB and MVD. In any case, the KGB had thoroughly penetrated the MVD since Brezhnev's death when Andropov's men took over the MVD and thoroughly reshuffled it.²⁵ The counternarcotics effort is particularly concentrated along the Soviet southern borders in Central Asia, an area of concern for ethno-religious reasons as well. Frequent press reports allege cross-border religious infiltration from Afghanistan along with or apart from drug smuggling and one threat provides good reasons for expanding the border forces to fight the other one as well.

Special Sections (*Osobyie Otdely*) of KGB Counter-intelligence, a military counterintelligence formation, present in troops down to tactical levels and charged with preventing subversive activities among them, are also active antidrug actors. At least some of the spokesmen for these formations

have linked antinarcotics operations to ethnic unrest in Transcaucasia. In antinarcotics operations helicopter forces have also been used. Simultaneously, the rising tide of ethnic unrest has placed severe burdens on the MVD as a whole and its internal Spetsnaz forces in particular, as well as upon the regular army and KGB forces. Thus,

There is a potential, then for military participation in counternarcotics roles that could eventually involve the heavier use of aviation components, military counter-intelligence (KGB *Osobiye Otdely* elements), intelligence-gathering resources of the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), lower-level military-intelligence reconnaissance units, and ground maneuver or special operations (Military Spetsnaz) forces.²⁶

On the other hand, Soviet special forces and forces configured for domestic operations easily became the units used to quell national independence movements. In Moldova (formerly Moldavia), Gorbachev gave the new republic until January 1, 1991, to rescind its independence or else he would send in troops, and it then backed down. In March 1991, just before the referendum on the future of the USSR, he again sent in troops apparently to intimidate the republic into a pro-Moscow vote. Particularly noteworthy in this connection is the Baltic where many Soviet forces are stationed after being withdrawn from Europe. In talks with Defense Minister Yazov in late 1990, the Finnish Defense Minister, Elizabeth Rehn, voiced traditional Finnish concerns about movement of troops to the Baltic.

I was interested in possible material and troops, especially if their numbers are increasing in areas close to Finland. I received very unambiguous replies that if there is an increase, then there will be reductions at the same time, so that the number would remain unchanged. *It is a question of special troops, which would possibly be increased, but at the same time other troops will be withdrawn.* (author emphasis)²⁷

These restructurings suggested that Spetsnaz and airborne troops' (the first to be sent to domestic hot spots) Afghan experience would be adapted for use at home. Second, these forces were configured to combine maximum

force and rapid mobility to enter and seal off trouble spots quickly. Martial law or coup scenarios at home like the Kabul operation or Jaruzelski's coup in Poland were obviously real scenarios. The Baltic coup in January 1991 was an almost textbook example of such a strategic operation that duplicated those in Warsaw and Kabul not to mention Prague in 1968. In the Baltic case troops were reportedly inserted into the cities and key areas from elite units, reportedly paratroop (VDV) ones. The MVD, KGB and regular army forces (in support roles) were also apparently involved in seizing key political and C³I installations, in the bloody crackdowns in Vilnius and Riga in January 1991, and in installing a supposedly active "Committee of National Salvation" that ostensibly invited them into Lithuania and Latvia. The army was also active in operations in Baku in 1990.

From the accounts of the attempted coup in Vilnius and Riga and the dispatch of troops to six other republics to keep them in line it is impossible to determine to whom these troops belong operationally. Nevertheless, it is clear that by mid-1990 the stage was set for a possible deployment of MVD, KGB, Spetsnaz, VDV, and regular troops as described by Western reports and as called for in Operation Metel's plans. Even more compelling is Yazov's admission to the Finnish Defense Minister and the recently announced moves of restructuring taken in tandem with the CFE treaty and Gorbachev's assumption of dictatorial powers in November 1990.²⁸ Those moves, taken together, strongly suggest the development of an operational-strategic plan for Operation Metel' to meet national unrest with force. The plan apparently coincided with Gorbachev's brief period as a virtual dictator to restore or preserve imperial unity and with the first moves to implement a General Staff, MOD, KGB, and party agenda having profoundly negative implications for democratization and Soviet international policy.

Moscow also stripped the airborne divisions returning from Europe of their BMD's (*Boevaia Mashina Desantnaya*, Airborne Infantry Fighting Vehicles) and gave them to the MVD Internal Troops instead.²⁹ Those troops thereby gained an airborne capability and can also fulfill operational requirements

for a *Desant* (airborne landing) which include not only the actual landing but maneuver from the landing zone to strike at key targets in the enemy rear.

These developments materially enhanced the MVD and KGB forces who really controlled the former's ultimate disposition. Indeed, both the MVD and KGB substantially increased their forces in 1989 and 1990 and the KGB retained its republican assets even if they remained somewhat in the background during national unrest.³⁰ These developments also gave the Soviet High Command a reliable Russian striking force to replace the local MVD forces and perhaps some KGBs in the republics which have not stopped unrest. As Victor Yasmann observed, the unrest in Tbilisi, Baku, and elsewhere seriously undermined Kremlin trust in the local police who have local sympathies and subordination to these republics. In the Baltic, Moldavia, and the Transcaucasus, the process of forming national police, intelligence, and paramilitary formations had begun to take off in the second half of 1990 as well. These actions must have engendered enormous alarm over a people's capacity to defend themselves, a fact that has been—according to analysts of Soviet interventions in Eastern Europe—the major catalyst for panicking Moscow into intervention.³¹

The shakeup of the MVD in the fall of 1990 can also be seen in this context of operational planning. Gorbachev fired MVD Minister Vadim Bakatin, appointed a former KGB chief in Latvia, Boris Pugo, as Minister, and the popular ex-commander of the Afghan interventionary force and then head of the Kiev Military District, General Boris Gromov, as his deputy. These moves assured maximum coordination with the KGB and the readiness of MVD forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Gromov's appointment in particular solved several problems connected with the army's takeover of these republics. It provided slots for retired soldiers and officers to be kept in readiness or off unemployment and maintained a high degree of training and readiness among these elite troops. Gromov's appointment also commanded respect from the ex-Afgantsy who have either joined local MVD or quasi-MVD forces or the new

paramilitary or police functions under KGB control.³² Bakatin was almost certainly fired because he would not interfere with the republics' MVD according to the statutes placing them under republican control, something Gromov and Pugo will not repeat.³³ Finally Gromov's appointment ensured a military chain of command for the operation while it removed the stigma of conducting internal security operations from the regular forces.

Historically the Russian army was very ambivalent about internal security operations in 1905. Later it broke down in February 1917 under the prospect of such activity. It does not want to regain the stigma attached to it for the massacre in Tbilisi. And the events in August 1991 again showed this inclination to be the dominant one. Thus, force restructuring took place to suppress domestic unrest by forces ostensibly operating under a different flag. A careful investigation of the Baku massacre in early 1990 indicates that the KGB orchestrated the affair. The armed forces' attitude can be seen in an interview with the recently appointed head of the Airborne Troops, General Pavel Grachev, who emphatically rejected use of regular forces in quelling nationality unrest. That, he said, was a job for the MVD or KGB's troops. At the same time the armed force's reluctance to be involved in internal security evidently does not extend as much to the non-Russian peoples as can be seen from the Baltic operations.³⁴ Gromov's appointment finessed these problems. The counter-insurgency operation ostensibly came under the MVD's banner even though it was strictly a military force and operation.

At the same time similar moves within the KGB indicate its resort to a covert plan to build up its overall striking powers. First of all there is much evidence that KGB assets have deliberately incited nationalist unrest, as in Azerbaidzhan in 1989-90, in order to bring it to the point of open insurrection and thus justify the resort to force. Indeed, the local Second Secretary of the party, a former KGB man who had specialized in fomenting interethnic strife in Afghanistan, apparently led the process of inciting Azerbaidzhani nationalism against Moscow, or else KGB forces (not only military ones but agents

too) have stood by in cases of interethnic unrest or violence either egging it on or doing nothing until the violence reached a high point.³⁵

Even more interesting is the account of the September 1990 maneuvers of Airborne Troops jointly commanded by the KGB and the army. Airborne and Air Assault forces were mobilized secretly and armed to the standard of operations in Afghanistan. They were secretly airlifted to undisclosed destinations and placed under KGB authority. Formerly the Airborne Forces belonged under the Supreme High Command not the KGB. In other words the KGB, for the first time since Beria, has taken over operational command of conventional MOD forces, and elite units at that. More recent evidence indicates that among the forces seconded to the KGB were the 103d Airborne Division in Vilnius, formerly an MOD Airborne Division but now operating under KGB command according to available evidence.³⁶ Though in the past Airborne Troops were used to quell rioting, there was none then. It appears the operation was a rehearsal for a coup, or fed the rabid fears of the right wing (there is no other suitable term for those fears) of a 'coup' by reformists against the government because the Airborne Troops were issued live ammunition and flak jackets.³⁷

The KGB's role then became even more sinister. The *Dresdener Morgenpost* reported that forces returning from the DDR, including motorized battalions and construction units along with other forces in the Moscow Military District are now under KGB command. This represented another enhancement of KGB power even beyond Beria's day. The recent draft legislation on the KGB which it contrived to write to protect itself gave it control over the Border, Signals, Construction, and Special Troops—an unprecedented situation for the KGB.³⁸ Added to its effective control of the MVD this put the KGB in an equally unprecedented position in the Security Council. And the KGB used the occasion to link publicly domestic and foreign "enemies," call for Soviet citizens to spy on each other, suggest a return to terror, and win the right to oversee the entire economy's operations.³⁹

The new Security Council was the nerve center of the military campaigns against reformers and nationalists. It linked together, in a single organization, the MVD, KGB, and regular military forces in a structure operating directly under Gorbachev's exclusive control, but which could act without him as we saw in Moscow, and which can move forces from agency to agency. It was hardly accidental that its arrival opened the door for the army and MVD to call for increased budgets and authority. Pugo claimed that the draft union treaty that spells out the constitutional rights of the center and republics gave the MVD too little power. The MVD should go beyond merely coordinating the struggle against crime.⁴⁰ Another MVD officer called for a round-the-clock Security Council Staff (*Shtab*) that would operate in every district (*Rayon*), region (*Oblast*), and republic with a plenipotentiary power to act under the direction of the USSR President (Gorbachev). The author decried the fact that in prior instances of national unrest there was inadequate coordination among the KGB, MVD, and regular military forces who operated independently, often in parallel, with no liaison. And he concluded that the Council's staff also needed specially trained subunits armed and equipped for emergency operations.

These troops, let us call them "security troops" or "national guard," could be formed on the basis of units of the internal and border troops, the KGB, civil defense formations, and a number of existing rescue structures.⁴¹

Other articles on the Security Council also emphasized its coordinating role and warned that the army might have to act on its own if coordination from the top did not take place.⁴²

All these moves were part of the creation of a rapid deployment force for domestic contingencies that is equally capable of low-intensity or conventional operations. It comprised several hundred thousand men, airborne capabilities for them, heavy Infantry Fighting Vehicles—the BMD—the creation of a new command center merging them for operational purposes when necessary, and the systematic exclusion of these forces from any outside scrutiny or verification from the Soviet legislature or the CFE process. We see here an updating of past Soviet covert mobilization and

deployment measures to create rapidly constituted and deployable forces for a variety of contingencies.

This entire sequence of covert organization and deployment of the force and restructuring of military C³ took place in the Czechoslovakian intervention of 1968, in Poland in 1981 with Polish troops of the regular and security police, and in Afghanistan in 1979.⁴³ In each case, as well, Moscow orchestrated a deception plan to surprise audiences who might resist. This time, however, the coup's leaders pretended that the government did not give the orders for the forcible seizure of buildings and the use of violence to kill unarmed protestors. Such a course of action is quite unbelievable. Admiral Ivanov, commander of the Baltic Fleet, admitted that not even he can introduce martial law in the smallest garrison, only Gorbachev could do that.⁴⁴ And Victor Tomkus, a Lithuanian deputy who participated in the investigation into the Tbilisi massacre of 1989 said that the inquiry into the incident showed that military orders to employ paratroopers in action could only have come from Yazov or Gorbachev.⁴⁵ But in August 1991, it became clear that such remarks were in error. Nevertheless the role of the new security council in concentrating command was rightly feared.⁴⁶

To sum up, the Afghan model is instructive here. Over a period of time Moscow entirely put together troop formations outside of any international scrutiny, organized their command and control to be absolutely solid, launched a media campaign of orchestrated threats and disinformation (described below), rehearsed operations, gradually inserted troops into the theater, prefabricated a rump political formation under its control ostensibly to invite it into the country to protect it from anarchy, civil war, or repression, and did so at a time when it could achieve maximum surprise. A virtually similar process occurred in 1979 in Kabul; in Prague, 1968; and in Jaruzelski's coup in Poland in 1981.⁴⁷

We see here a capability for rapid and covert mobilization and/or deployment of uncounted forces. In this case the fungibility of these forces whose operational command was shuffled around within the Security Council as its leaders (Yazov, Moiseyev, Pugo, and Kryuchkov) saw fit, introduces a

new element of flexibility and a much fuller realization of the combined arms principle into Soviet military forces than before. These Soviet forces were clearly under the command of the Security Council and Supreme High command as are the regular MRD, VDV and Spetsnaz forces.

But whether they were originally VDV, Soviet Naval Infantry, Motorized Rifle Divisions, MVD Internal Troops, or KGB forces; their training and equipment increasingly lent itself to their deployment by land, sea, or air to either domestic or foreign hot spots for the conduct of tactical, operational, and/or strategic missions. These forces came closer to realizing the tighter linkage of force and mobility, called for by Salmanov in 1981, for operations within today's constraints, than previously existing forces. They are at once a Soviet equivalent of a rapid deployment or counterinsurgency force and have a dual capability for either task.

At the same time, however, their massive use (early 1991) presaged a rapid decline of the USSR into revolution or perhaps later ethnic or civil war. These troops were configured and deployed to meet a certain threat assessment and realize a certain agenda. Apparently the High Command has calculated and concluded that the risks are worth the effort to impose this agenda at home and in Soviet security policy. To understand the possibility of civil war and of continuing evolution in Soviet military strategy it is necessary to examine the media campaign which contained a one-sided public view of the threat and that highlights, if not always intentionally, the real fears of the Soviet High Command and military-political leadership. In this sense the *pre-intervention Maskirovka* campaign, required for any operation, reveals the prospect for continued domestic unrest and its possible connection with external forces as well.

Soviet Threat Assessment and Domestic Counterinsurgency.

The Soviet press' threat assessment of the last few months, particularly in the military media, identifies several concurrent threats to order and security that clearly have been used to

justify the Baltic coup and similar actions in other republics later on. These threats include:

1. Crime—often associated with nationalist separatism.⁴⁸
2. Nationalist separatism in its own right, increasingly associated with incitement to violence against or harassment of military personnel and their families.⁴⁹
3. Violations of the rights of minorities in those republics, particularly the Russian minority which in fact has been, in its organized political components, an outspoken advocate of chauvinist policies.⁵⁰
4. Threats of violence against other minorities increasingly aided or condoned by local governing and police organizations.⁵¹
5. The formation of domestic police, military, and paramilitary formations.⁵²
6. Draft evasion and local collusion with it.⁵³
7. Frequent direct charges that link nationalist movements with foreign subversion by the 'special services' of foreign countries.⁵⁴

These particular charges have a long lineage in Soviet politics and serve as well at home as they have abroad in 1956, 1968, 1979, and 1981. Many of these attacks, again in the military press or by military authors and those connected to it, evince particular concern about Afghan raids into Tajikistan. The larger phenomena of Islamic fundamentalism and Zionism also arouse what can only be described as hysteria.⁵⁵

These articles do betray real fears, however, apart from their use to justify military action. As in the Czechoslovakian and Afghan cases these charges reflect the deep fears over the loss of the empire and its strategic and political repercussions. The similarity in tone from Czechoslovakia, to Afghanistan, to Poland in 1981 to now at home, suggests a continuity in Soviet threat perceptions. That threat is the unraveling of the imperial momentum or the empire itself. Large sections of the military are still not emotionally reconciled to the loss of Eastern Europe, and their campaign of vilification

against the Foreign Ministry helped ease the way for Shevardnadze's fall. In an earlier article I argued that the 1968 coup in Czechoslovakia represented a turn away from political solutions to crises within the Warsaw Pact and the USSR to a resort to force.⁵⁶ In all subsequent crises the Soviet armed forces created a new command and control organization and sent in airborne and elite security forces to the threatened areas in order to terminate the threat. Thus it seems likely that confronted with a similar domestic threat in 1990-91, the military authorities, the MVD, and KGB have reacted in the only way they know how, force.

Certainly the loss of the empire seriously complicates Soviet defense planning, and many of the rationales for continued dictatorship in the USSR. But other threats to the elite are equally important. Russian colonialist settlers will lose their privileges and this includes the officer corps as well. Economically the Russian territories will suffer tremendous disturbances in an already catastrophic situation. Throughout Russian history, freedom for one group stimulates demands for democracy at home. That is happening now, and will continue as long as the nationalities are not crushed. Freedom for minorities also threatens the deep-rooted imperial vocation of the Russian elite which has never accepted the idea of a non-imperial Russian state. Indeed, some have argued that without an empire the Russian state would perceive itself—rightly or wrongly—as counting for nothing in the world.

In less grandiose terms it is clear to foreign observers that the authorities were "haunted" by what might happen in Central Asia if cross-border raids lead to a replacement of the existing MVD troops by Uzbek and Tajik ones.⁵⁷ The Afghan situation is particularly interesting here. One Soviet commentator, lamenting Moscow's connivance in ending Afghanistan's former neutrality, candidly stated that the present Afghan regime is Moscow's sole guarantee that its southern borders will remain free of such cross-border efforts to rouse Soviet Muslims, a judgement seconded by foreign observers.⁵⁸

Soviet concern about such phenomena goes back several years. In 1988 one report mentioned an "Islamic military doctrine" supposedly hatched in Iran but in existence since the

late 1960s. It is an attempt to formulate an all-Islamic system of views on war, its preparation, and conduct, and to unify the Muslim world.⁵⁹ Since then, the editor of *Voenno-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, Major General Viktor Filatov, one of the most outspoken and well known reactionaries on the Soviet scene, has called for a reinvasion of Afghanistan precisely for this purpose. At the same time, clearly the current 'threat' consists of some raids across the Afghan border and perhaps some clandestine broadcasting or religious interchange. Soviet accounts concede that arms, for example, are not being smuggled from Iran into Azerbaidzhan.⁶⁰ It is likely that much of the alarm raised is at the same time an effort by local KGB forces as in Tajikistan to beef up central support or general efforts to alarm the public and portray nationalist unrest as the work of criminals, drunks, or fanatics, while no policy exists for resolving Muslim Russia's horrendous socio-economic problems.⁶¹

Meanwhile the real immediate danger and cause for efforts to crush Moldova, Baltic republics, Georgia, Azerbaidzhan, and Armenia now was those republics' moves to create their own indigenous armed forces. That made reconquest too costly and stimulated further domestic unrest against the army.⁶² And in April-May 1991 Moscow struck at Armenian armed units. Certainly the crime situation is a pretext, as former MVD Minister Bakatin observed when he noted that it is only the anticonstitutional forces that interfere with the MVD's operations.⁶³ It is rather that the military, as indicated by former Central Committee Secretary Oleg Baklanov, the Moscow coup's grey eminence, viewed the charges against it as an organized, 'not innocuous' campaign to destroy its morale, standing, and privileged status in Soviet politics.⁶⁴

The Soviet General Staff also saw enhanced threats to the USSR due to the loss of its former satellites. It saw Baltic secession, and popular antimilitary opinion, nationalist and Russian, as clear threats to its privileged position and operational mission. During the spring of 1990 it became clear that the high command was becoming disorganized since the new legislation on Gorbachev's Presidential Council made it unclear who commanded the armed forces: the President, the

Council, the Defense Council, or the Legislature. The military demanded reintroduction of one man rule in the form of the new Presidency and the Security Council in order to shield it from public scrutiny and control and to continue controlling the agenda of doctrinal and force reform.⁶⁵ In a recent interview Marshal Akhromeev laid out many of the military's preferences. The military opposes republican formations and will support the president; views the United States and NATO as abiding threats; cannot see its way to an all-volunteer army and thus must enforce the draft laws; and will support introducing martial law "only to prevent an armed confrontation."⁶⁶ Akhromeev also formulated the real driving force behind the military's effort to gain control of its agenda. "At the same time it is the armed forces that ensure stability and permit the president to carry on his normal activities."⁶⁷

In other words, as party control over the armed forces ebbs, the military is moving to assert its control over its domain and to keep Gorbachev within the boundaries of previous policies which privileged it across a wide range of military, political, and economic issues. This perhaps explained, at the same time, the rise in KGB control over key Moscow military district forces. It represented a possible effort, within the framework of a right-wing agenda, to balance off the main props of that agenda, the army and the KGB. Two major elements of the agenda are the integrity of the empire, as Marshal Akhromeev made clear in an ominous speech of November 1990, and the silencing of the media that has criticized the military. The military clearly made the latter a high priority and Gorbachev's moves, immediately after sending in troops to Lithuania and Latvia, to muzzle Soviet TV and print media fit right in with these points which Akhromeev went out of his way to link together.⁶⁸ The KGB's agenda, which also comprised imperial integrity and preservation, if not extension, of its rule over the country was equally ominous.

The strategy of coercion against the Baltic states since mid-1990 can be seen as combining elements of an increasingly refined operational plan for Operation Metel'. First, Gorbachev sought to blockade Lithuania. Soviet doctrine stated that in certain conditions blockade can be a

strategic end in itself to which military operations are subordinated.⁶⁹ Soviet doctrine also recognized that the subsequent efforts at ideological mobilization of non-Lithuanian audiences in Lithuania and offers to negotiate which were no more than ruses also played a part in the strategy that developed in 1990 and represented diplomatic and ideological "operations" and *Maskirovka* of valuable military significance. Indeed, General Gareyev linked diplomacy and ideological warfare directly to economic warfare, such as the British blockage of Germany in World War I, as important forms and means of struggle. For Gareyev ideological struggle helped to deprive the young Soviet regime's enemies of part of their troops in the civil war. Diplomacy too plays a vital role in war.

Skillful diplomacy not only creates good conditions for conducting military actions; it can lead to the establishing of a completely new military-political situation for conducting armed combat. . . . Thus a true Marxist-Leninist understanding of the examined question comes down to the fact that a war is primarily the continuation of politics by violent means. It is a *sociopolitical phenomenon* and represents a clash (struggle) of classes, nations, states, coalitions, and social systems employing armed violence which is combined with other forms and means of struggle (economic, ideological, diplomatic, and so forth).⁷⁰

While Soviet doctrine rules out a political justification such as Gareyev's for nuclear war and for war in Europe other than defense, his observations certainly apply to local wars like Afghanistan and to domestic Soviet unrest.

Following the resort to blockade and diplomacy which continued unabated through 1990 came the reorganization of both Soviet force structures and of command and control for the operation. These measures, which partake of a creative 'entrepreneurial' approach to new problems even as they build on existing traditions, firmed up the C³ for Soviet forces as the leaders combined political orchestration of threats with economic warfare and diplomacy to keep Baltic negotiators off balance. Indeed, as Christopher Donnelly has pointed out when comparing Poland and Kabul; and, as Jonathan Shimshoni has more generally suggested, such organizational

moves to combine existing assets—technological or manpower in nature—can become decisive points of leverage in combat situations.⁷¹ The economic blockade finally triggered a domestic crisis in Lithuania that forced its government to triple prices. That decision aggravated a political crisis where Moscow could pretend to be defending the people's interests. Thus the combined economic, diplomatic, and military operations worked towards a common goal.

We cannot be sure as to why the Soviet forces have not crossed the Rubicon of an outright coup before August 1991. Perhaps Gorbachev shied away earlier from the domestic and international uproar that would then result or feared becoming hostage to the military.⁷² Be that as it may, Soviet pronouncements on local war indicated that victory is still a relevant criterion and objective for military operations in that contingency even if victory's meaning has changed to comprise not only or necessarily the holding of land, but the installation of a favorable socio-political order in the defeated country.⁷³

The domestic and foreign implications of the coup are, despite its defeat, not without future relevance. Should the current revolution fail to resolve the enormous economic and national problems confronting the country and a political breakdown then develop, force might well come to be seen as the only answer either to economic collapse or ethnic discord as in Yugoslavia. In that case the precedent and lessons of these coups and of Afghanistan would again have immediate relevance.

- Moscow demonstrated how its forces may be used, and covertly built up its capability for offensive action.
- It also appears that the General Staff retained control of the military agenda and created the Soviet equivalent of our Rapid Deployment Force. This force met the military requirement for a force capable of dealing with either low-intensity or higher scale conflicts in and around the USSR, a requirement that has been called for for some years. (To the extent that the supposed Naval Infantry divisions with the heavy

armor attached to them are part of that force, the analogue with the Rapid Deployment Force would be complete.)⁷⁴ For example, a recent article on regional conflict in the Third World observed that,

It is absolutely clear that the situation in the Gulf is only the first of future conflicts that may arise in connection with the Third World. If the Soviet Union goes on acting without an integrated conception of how to respond to different conflicts, possibly not excluding the military aspect, our position will be unenviable.⁷⁵

- The creation of multipurpose flexible forces, all of which are transportable by air or sea, is a logical answer to the problem of maximizing force and mobility under current restrictions. It also signifies the retention of a capability for offense at home or abroad. Since these forces are largely Russian and of elite background they can be covertly tailored for domestic or external contingencies with high chances for achieving at least tactical surprise.⁷⁶ Similarly, restructuring forces to conduct small unit operations with high-tech systems from a more combined arms base highlights the Soviet effort to use high-tech forces more than ever as the force component of new units that combine force with mobility.

At the same time, confirmation has now appeared that these events have been planned for some time—some would say almost 2 years. Several of the laws pertaining to states of emergency and the powers of the KGB and MVD were put through in 1989, setting the stage for the augmentation of KGB and MVD powers.⁷⁷ A KGB defector, Vladimir Grigoriev, who worked for the KGB in Leningrad and the Baltic for 12 years, told a Swedish reporter that the planning for the January coups in the Baltic began in 1989. Grigoriev reported that,

Two years ago I received information from a highly placed KGB officer in Tallinn, who said that Perestroika was to be used by the KGB as camouflage to advance KGB positions in the West, and also to prepare a change in the entire policy in our case in the Baltics. This change could come as soon as two or three years time, that is, during 1990 or 1991.⁷⁸

Grigoriev's job was to infiltrate those groups. He also contended that the reason for the deployment of the General Staff's Spetsnaz, MVD Black Berets, and KGB Special Units in the Baltics was that they were directly under Presidential and General Staff control while regular general purpose forces were mistrusted concerning their readiness to conduct this mission.⁷⁹ Lt. Col. Viktor Alksnis, head of the Right-Wing Parliamentary faction, Soyuz, stated that the leaders of the national salvation committees in the Baltic told him they did everything Gorbachev wanted them to do to create a "dual power" situation there to precipitate a political crisis to justify military intervention.⁸⁰ Other Soviet sources confirm central KGB and MVD direction that involved these committees' local leaders in the incitement of the troops to action.⁸¹ Propaganda charging the restoration of pre-war bourgeois and even "Fascist" military and political organizations was a prominent part of such actions.⁸²

Postscript.

Since the attempted coup in January 1991, the sequence of events leading up to it has become clearer, as have several organizational moves pertaining to the Army, MVD, and KGB forces. These newly revealed events further establish the preplanned deliberate nature of the operation, and taken, together with subsequent events—introduction of Army-MVD urban patrols, banning of street rallies in Moscow, neo-Stalinist economic policies, and a continuing refusal to negotiate with the nationalities—highlight the return to an authoritarian and imperial structure of government.

In the spring of 1990 Chief of Staff Moiseev lauded the introduction of the presidency as an instrument of centralized power favorable to Soviet military development because it streamlined the system of control over the defense forces making it easier to reform them. The former Defense Council was then abolished and transferred to the broad cabinet, i.e., the Presidential Cabinet. In wartime that Council would change into the State Committee for Defense, the World War II supreme command body led by Gorbachev. His powers included the power to declare an emergency which entailed

"temporary presidential rule" enabling him to overrule any local decision, e.g., secession. Moiseev specifically suggested giving Gorbachev virtually total powers over the call-up, deployment, and use of all military forces including the right to oversee implementation of military legislation, a process that would nullify legislative control over the military. He also suggested that Gorbachev declare null and void the liberal legislation on military affairs and the moves by republics to secede. These moves include alternative service, republican troop formations, and controls over military deployments in peacetime.⁸³

Since mid-1990 the process of tying together the MVD, KGB, and Army has also intensified. Paragraph 17 of the new law on national security places the KGB in charge of coordinating the internal security operations of all other military and para-military forces of the USSR. The KGB has set up a special 6th Directorate in the MVD towards this end.⁸⁴ In September 1990, as preparation for the later coup, the decision was taken in the absence of Interior Minister Bakatin to place the Black Beret Forces (OMON forces of the MVD) of Riga under the MVD command rather than under the republic as mandated by Soviet law (which Moscow claimed to be operative there then).⁸⁵ This decision placed those troops effectively under Pugo's, Gromov's, and Kryuchkov's command and at the service of the Latvian party and its shadow "Committee of National Salvation." More generally the OPNAZ forces were doubled and General Shatalin was placed under Gromov's authority and command. The expansion of these forces and of the MVD's Black Berets on a national scale with a professional salary of 300 rubles a month took place parallel to the expansion of the KGB's internal security force as the 103 Guards "Vitebsk" Division has been attached to the KGB Border Troops since early 1990.⁸⁶ And the MVD OPNAZ and OMON forces became no longer subordinate to the republics but to the All-Union MVD from Moscow.⁸⁷

Other evidence strengthens this sense of a mature and well-thought-out plan of long duration which was brought to a head in early 1991. Petras Jonaitis, a senior officer at the First

Section of the Lithuanian KGB, stated that Moscow ordered a plan for future mass action in Lithuania in September 1989, a combined action by the local and Belorussian-based KGB and military forces which was rehearsed in minute detail. The plan was approved by the head of the Lithuanian KGB, and shock troops, which cannot be assigned without Kryuchkov's approval, were sent into Lithuania in April 1990.⁸⁸

By far the most damning piece of evidence was published on January 29, 1991, by *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (The Independent Newspaper). It was a report by Politburo and Secretariat member O. Shenin of his August 1990 trip to Lithuania. As part of his report Shenin advocated an All-Union propaganda campaign to blacken the Lithuanian independence struggle, attempt to provoke a Polish-Lithuanian rupture, acceleration of work to force through a new Union treaty, political stress from Moscow on the issue of Lithuanian violation of the military draft laws, reaffirmation of All-Union property rights over organizations and enterprises of a key political nature in Lithuania to create a pretext for the stationing of guards there, party intervention on behalf of the 'healthy forces' in Lithuania, and making a KGB military detachment from the republic KGB part of the Lithuanian Party. By far the most insidious element of his report was its Paragraph 7 that called for the CPSU State and Legal Department, the Department that also supposedly oversees the KGB, to employ Communists in legal, police, and judicial positions to execute criminal and administrative (i.e., without open trial) prosecution of nationalist and "Anti-Soviet" political formations, deserters, and extremists. For this purpose it was necessary to coordinate the USSR Procuracy, MVD, KGB, and Supreme Court. The decree was secretly ratified on August 29, 1990, by Vladimir Ivashko, the number two man and Gorbachev's deputy in the All-Union Party. And it is hardly likely that Gorbachev did not see it before then.⁸⁹ The course of events so closely followed Shenin's script that it is inconceivable that this was not part of the ultimate plan for the coup in the Baltic.

Events in the army were also moving towards a showdown. On September 3, 1990, Gorbachev had transferred control

over the Main Political Administration of the Army and Navy from the party to the state. On November 15, 1990, a CPSU Secretariat resolution called for strengthening Army-Party links. Ignoring the September decree the Secretariat ordered the MPA to develop new means of patriotic indoctrination of soldiers in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. This resolution came from a Central Committee commission on military policy which is made up of the highest party officials on military affairs and the topmost military and MOD commands, who also now urged Gorbachev to act immediately against republican 'anti-military tendencies.' And on November 16, 1990, the Politburo met to discuss measures to stabilize the country's condition, with particular reference to Lithuania.⁹⁰

After the initial coup, on January 18, 1991, a new Control Commission for the party organization in the armed forces was set up to coordinate its actions with all the other military and para-military and law-enforcement organs in the country. On January 31, another commission to coordinate all law-enforcement agencies was set up under Yu.V. Golik 5 days after publication of a pre-dated decree calling for joint military-police patrols in the urban centers ostensibly against crime. Finally, it was also confirmed that the forces leading the actual assault into Vilnius were from the 'Vitebsk' Division, now seconded from the Airborne Forces to the KGB. This division and members of the elite 7th Directorate of the KGB were previously used in the violent suppression of unrest in Tbilisi and Baku and in the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.⁹¹

Events in Moscow, leading up to the coup of August 1991, evidently were equally systematically planned though ineptly assessed and carried out. Evidence indicates the coup's plotters working for months if not over a year, towards this end. Thus the wheel has come full cycle from the invasion of Afghanistan, an operation undertaken to hold that state within the Soviet empire, to domestic counterinsurgency for the same purpose. It is also now true that the Army has been called into action seven times since 1986; in Kazakhstan, Baku, Tbilisi, Uzbekistan, the Baltic and recently Tajikistan and against Armenian villages in Azerbaidzhan, to quell ethnic unrest and suppress dissent. The earlier episodes were warnings to

Gorbachev before August and to us as well. In order to quell Baltic independence movements Soviet leaders broke with the notion of a law-governed state and resorted to covert and backstage decrees and secret organizational moves suggesting the breakdown of a lawful and legitimate state order. Second, they found it necessary to repress the media. Third, Gorbachev's reforms unwittingly drew the armed forces, the KGB and the MVD included, into politics and made them open and active players for power in a fashion unprecedented since Stalin, even if one admits that they were always important factors.

By bringing about this state of affairs Gorbachev and his military commanders have effectively ended 74 years of indoctrination that the Soviet people need no forces for domestic security, that the army and the people are one, etc. Thanks to the Baltic coup the Army's command element and its sister forces have transformed their mission into one, not of providing security against foreign attack, but rather, one mainly of domestic security for themselves and their ruling structure.⁹²

In seeking to continue in power that present structure showed itself ready to gamble on civil war in August 1991. And for its troubles, it only precipitated its own extinction.⁹³

Today the civilian leadership is a revolutionary one. But failure to meet the pressing demands of the moment could accelerate trends already visible in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Transcaucasus to violence based on ethnicity or the desire for simple survival. In that case the lessons learned from Afghanistan and applied by the coup plotters will once more become terribly relevant. As yet nobody is contemplating crossing that Rubicon. But should the situation become steadily more desperate and seemingly incapable of resolution, all that could change. When Caesar crossed the Rubicon he knowingly wagered on civil war. Yazov, Kryuchkov and their generals made a similar gamble. But if the new revolutionary leadership does not usher in a Soviet Augustan age, it is likely that failure will herald a new time of troubles for an already devastated country.

CHAPTER 6

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