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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

BY

COLONEL THOMAS J. KELLY

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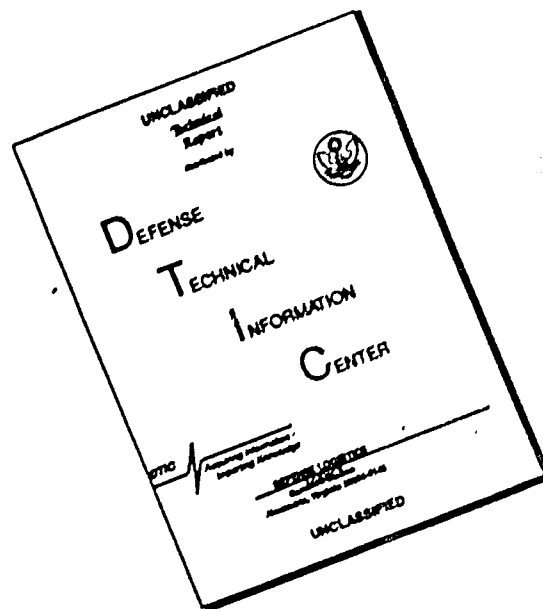
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> Soviet Strategic Culture is a historical concept which describes the characteristic Soviet approaches to international affairs. In its most developed, utilitarian form, it projects probably Soviet political and diplomatic behavior. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent operations provide a perspective from which to judge Soviet consistency with their normally expected methods. This paper examines Soviet performance in Afghanistan to determine its consistency with Soviet Strategic Culture. Conclusions and implications are drawn which show the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan as a significant departure from the traditions of Soviet Strategic Culture. Ongoing Soviet attempts to massively restructure their system thus portend a period of great ambiguity. General Secretary Gorbachev's "new thinking" confounds the use of this historical concept. Hence, the utility of Soviet Strategic Culture as a predictive concept seems greatly reduced. (SDW) 

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION
OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Project Advisor

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan provides a perspective from which to examine consistency between the expectations of characteristic Soviet methods (Soviet strategic culture) and actual Soviet behavior. Inconsistency creates ambiguity and causes unpredictability. Has Soviet behavior in Afghanistan been consistent with Soviet strategic culture? If not, what are the implications of this "new" Soviet behavior?

SOVIET WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

22 JAN 1989

We have not succeeded in everything we planned to do here. ... We came here with an honorable task, with open hearts. We are leaving and we have a sense of not having accomplished our mission to the end.

General Serebrov
Soviet Military Headquarters
Kabul, Afghanistan 1

On 27 December 1979 Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan and in subsequent years conducted a ruthless campaign to support a Communist regime there. Over nine years later, on 15 February 1989, the Soviet Union completed the withdrawal of its forces, leaving that Communist regime direly threatened by insurgent forces.

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Events in Afghanistan have played against the backdrop of major international diplomacy initiated by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness) and announced unilateral Soviet troop reductions in Europe have propelled Mr. Gorbachev into a preeminent international position. The concept of asymmetrical arms reductions to achieve a level of "defensive sufficiency" between the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact (WP) is a promising hopeful development. In fact, NATO solidarity is threatened as never before by divergent interpretations of the Gorbachev initiatives.

In his 7 December 1988 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Gorbachev said

We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions, nor do we urge anyone to abandon theirs. But neither do we have any intention to be hemmed in by our values. That would result in intellectual impoverishment, for it would mean rejecting a powerful source of development - the exchange of everything original that each nation independently created. 2

What did Gorbachev say? "We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions" (We are pursuing the same goals by different means)? --- Or "...for it would mean rejecting a powerful source of development - the exchange of everything original that each nation independently created." (We seek shared peaceful development)?

Despite efforts to restructure the Soviet economy, Soviet citizens are not able to procure those consumer goods considered basic to life in major industrialized nations. Economic indicators show the Soviet economy performing poorly. GNP growth which averaged 5% per year in the late 60's, has hovered at 2% recently. Industrial growth has

slowed from 6.3% to 2.1%.³ Leonid I. Abalkin, Director of the Soviet National Institute of the Economy, estimated the Soviet budget deficit for 1989 at the equivalent of \$165 billion dollars, which is 11% of the Soviet GNP.^{3,4}

A fermenting nationalistic restiveness challenges the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Internal dissent in Poland and Czechoslovakia periodically requires troops to restore order. Estonia and the other Baltic states openly challenge Soviet domination of their societies. Clashes in Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan have required insertion of the Soviet Army to restore order at the cost of significant civilian life. Internal dissatisfaction with the slow pace of change resulting from the Gorbachev reforms is frequently cited in the Soviet press.

National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft recently said that Gorbachev

badly needs a period of stability, if not definite improvement in the relationship (with the West) so he can face the awesome problem he has at home ...I also think he's interested in making trouble within the Western alliance and I think he believes the best way to do it is a peace offensive, rather than to bluster the way some of his predecessors have. 5

Noted Sovietologists Christopher Donnelly and Vernon Aspaturian contend that the Soviet Union sorely needs a period of breathing space to reorder its national priorities. Soviet military spending threatens not only

domestic well-being but also the Soviet ability to keep pace with Western technological progress. 6

STRATEGIC CULTURE AS THE ANALYTICAL CONSTRUCT

The characteristics of each nation's population, geo-strategic positioning, historical experiences and other unique factors form a national style or personality. Certain fundamental influencing factors have proven useful in understanding why a nation thinks and behaves as it does politically and diplomatically. 7 Those fundamental influencing factors are defined as the strategic culture of a nation.

Generally the strategic culture of a nation remains relatively constant over time, slowly evolving and adapting as events unfold. As Colin Gray has observed,

...it is assumed that national patterns of thought and action, the preferred way of coping with problems and opportunities, are likely to alter only very gradually, short of a new historical experience which ... warrants a historically discontinuous response. 8

Soviet strategic culture thus may be viewed as a construct for considering Soviet behavior from the Soviet perspective, rather than solely from Western perspectives. Twining defines this phenomenon:

Soviet strategic culture represents the totality of Soviet views on strategic affairs, to include military traditions and nuclear management. ... It is also reflected in a unique operational style, which for the Soviet Union represents an emphasis on size and numbers, a distrust of foreign cultures, a penchant for secrecy, worst-case planning, and a comprehensive and systematic attention to detail. 9

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Soviet experience in Afghanistan as a manifestation of Soviet strategic culture. Was Afghanistan consistent with normally expected Soviet behavior? Of greatest significance, what implications can be drawn from this analysis?

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER 11

SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

In order to understand why the Soviet Union thinks and behaves as it does, it should be useful to trace that thought and behavior to fundamentally influencing factors, always presuming that there are some fundamentally influencing factors.

Colin S. Gray 1

FUNDAMENTAL INFLUENCING FACTORS

This chapter will define some of those fundamental factors that have habitually influenced, but not determined, Soviet strategic thought. The distinction between influence and determine is significant, for strategic culture is not a precise deterministic concept. It deals in probabilities, in tendencies rather than absolutes. Following a discussion of several fundamental influencing factors, a basic

behavioral template will lead to an analysis of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan.

SURVIVAL AS A CONTINENTAL POWER. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a great continental power reaching across the Eurasian landmass, is the world's largest country. Frequently invaded, the Russians have a near paranoid predisposition for large standing armies and the protection of buffer states. It is a backward country, very suspicious of foreign intentions, populated with a disparate people, 70% of whom are only three generations from serfdom. 2.

Emanating from peasant stock, the population remains close to the land and intensely patriotic. According to Donnelly,

Whatever course Russia's history takes, one thing is certain: that the Russian peoples will continue to be inspired and motivated by intense patriotic fervor. ...This overwhelming love of the Motherland ... helps the Russians to accept the evident injustices and burdens of Soviet society, and makes it very easy for the Communist Party to manipulate public opinion by playing on the 'hostility' of the Western block, and the 'threat' this poses to the Motherland. 3

Two other factors evolve from their isolated continental history: a distrust of foreigners and a propensity to accept a strong central, if not despotic, government as the price for national survival.

FORCE OF IDEOLOGY. In October 1917 the backward masses populating the central Eurasian republics saw the rise of the Bolsheviks, the dawning local preeminence of the Communist Party and the final demise of Tsarist Russia. Thus over the next several years, an area not yet involved in the industrial revolution and accustomed to strong centralized dictatorial government came under the control of the Communist Party.

LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY. The Communist Party directs the Soviet government, which controls the USSR. With a total membership of 19 million (one member among ten Soviet citizens), the Communist Party constitutes a minority elite. In effect, the Soviet Union is centrally directed by the Communist Party. From the Party at large are selected some 150,000 full-time Party functionaries who direct the nation. Donnelly succinctly describes this process:

One of the practical means which the Communist Party has of controlling appointments to senior positions within all elements of society is the **Nomenklatura** system. This means that, at every level of government, a list of key posts (called the **Nomenklatura**) and a list of people approved by the Party for holding office at a given level of responsibility is drawn up.⁴

The **Nomenklatura** are thus the empowered elite of the Soviet system; as such, they have the most to gain from the system. As in any bureaucracy, they will resist change unless the bureaucracy itself is threatened.⁵

Lenin formed the Communist Party as the small elite vanguard to lead the transition through socialism to communism. This use of an elite group to direct the masses was a departure from basic Marxism. Thus, Leninist Socialism holds that "the Communist Party alone will direct society.... determine the economic path...any opposition to the Communist Party must be wrong."6

With Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin assumed leadership and consolidated centralized Communist control through a series of massive bloody purges. It is estimated that some 20 million people were killed in these consolidation efforts.7 The Stalinist purges clearly demonstrated that dissent would not be tolerated.

Communist Party leadership, the Nomenklatura, and non-party governmental administrators adhere to the Marxist-Leninist theory of dialectical conflict between communism and capitalism. They anticipate conflict, not necessarily armed conflict, as inevitable and necessary to continued class struggle, which they believe will lead to the ascendancy of communism as the global ideology and political force.

The Soviet masses, particularly in outlying areas, believe less in communist ideology and are more captives of a rigidly centralized system. So the impact of the

Stalinist purges as a deterrent to dissent continues to constrain behavior.

LESSONS FROM THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR. The impact of the Second World War in the U.S.S.R. is pervasive and powerful. As a result of unpreparedness, the Soviet Union lost an estimated 20 million dead. They suffered one casualty among every four citizens (for the U.S. it was one in 150 and for the U.K. one in 40), lost territory in which 48% of its population lived, lost one-third of its industrial production facilities, and suffered the destruction of over 70% of its housing and industry in the Eastern U.S.S.R. As a consequence, the Soviets, vowing never again to be unprepared for war, have since maintained the world's most powerful military establishment.

SOVIET CONCEPTS OF PEACE, DEFENSE AND THE ENEMY. The Soviet conceptions of peace, defense and the enemy differ significantly from those of the West. From the Marxist perspective peace is merely the absence of war; in contrast, peace connotes well-being in the West. Defensive operations go beyond static defense on home soil to include massive counter-offensives to defeat an enemy on his own territory (an offensively oriented defense). Leninist ideology calls for Soviet defense of fellow Communist states and incursions into third countries to defend the interests of the working class as defensive operations.

The threat is perceived to be Imperialism, which ideologically threatens the whole structure of Communist society. Imperialists are viewed as war-mongers, calling forth visions of the Great Patriotic War. Characteristically, the U.S. is presented as the imperialistic leader forcing the world toward nuclear war.⁹

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

A more comprehensive compilation of the key characteristics of Soviet Strategic Culture is necessary to operationalize the concept. In his paper Soviet Strategic Culture -- The Missing Dimension, COL Twining presents a basic cultural template which is sufficient for this analysis.¹⁰ According to the Twining template, Soviet Strategic Culture exhibits several "core characteristics":

--An insatiable search for security, a quest in which attainment of security in one geographic or substantive arena engenders insecurity in others. Domestic and international precautions are largely motivated by the desperate experience of World War II, the single cultural experience shared by all Soviet peoples.

--A permanent struggle in world affairs, with conflict a normal condition, as an enduring lesson of Russian history. This expectation is supported by a distrust of foreign cultures, dialectical imperatives and the conviction that military weakness has been responsible for past invasions and defeats.

-- A permanent struggle with states, because they or their ruling classes are hostile. States now

socialist are secure only as long as Moscow's suzerainty is maintained. States now capitalistic are subject to conversion by all means short of war because their threat cannot be otherwise attenuated. States considered 'progressive' or 'national democratic' will be watched and aided by all possible means, given the mutuality of elite interests served by Moscow's guardianship and example.

--A permanent struggle between classes. Change is inherent in the world revolutionary process, which is advanced by legal and illegal communist parties, and proxy, surrogate, and sympathetic elements. Classlessness--one large collective--is the only permanent solution given firm, central leadership from Moscow.

--A strong state, guided by resolute leaders, is required to mobilize the entire country and its resources to serve fundamental Soviet security interests.

--Others cannot be depended upon to guarantee Soviet security. The USSR will marshal, coordinate and command socialist forces. Moscow's primacy is essential to insure the sanctity of Soviet soil.

--Continual sacrifice is necessary to preserve the state. Military forces guard the society which it serves and protects. Quantitative, qualitative, political and military-technical dimensions of military power must be sufficient to prevail over all possible enemies, separately or combined.

--The political utility of military power, where superiority at every escalatory level is required to attain the political aim of war through violent or, preferably, non-violent means. The greatest success and supreme achievement of military power is when, by its presence, readiness and capabilities, it need not be used to secure the political objective.

--Readiness to secure and protect the Soviet homeland and its interests. Military forces, despite their size and capability, are useless if they are not prepared to do their duty. Those in responsibility know best the nature and conduct of future war, with its requisite political and military-technical requirements.

--Victory is the goal aggressive offensive action makes possible. This is not narrow military victory, but the attainment of the political objective of war--the reason war was pursued and the goal which governed its conduct. All appropriate methods are sanctioned toward this end.

SUMMARY

A close examination of Soviet behavior, tempered by an understanding of the influence of Russian and Soviet history, thus leads to formulation of characteristic Soviet governmental behavior patterns. These patterns constitute a behavioral template which can be useful in understanding and predicting Soviet behavior -- if Soviet behavior remains relatively consistent over time. However, a significant inconsistency or a historical discontinuity reduces the accuracy and utility of Soviet strategic culture.

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER III

AFGHANISTAN PRIOR TO THE SOVIET INVASION

Afghanistan is a desolate country fractured by high mountains and vast arid region; it is populated by fiercely independent Muslim tribal groupings. It has never been conquered but has often been the scene of regional conflict. A familiarity with Afghanistan, her people and their history assists understanding of current events.

BASIC FACTS ON AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is about the size of Texas -- approximately 640,000 square kilometers. It is populated by some 14 million people of nine major ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazaras, Kirghiz, Arabs, Baluch, Turkmen, Nuristanis, and others. Eighty-nine percent of the

population is Muslim with the more moderate Sunni Muslims the vast majority and only 15% Shiite Muslim. Its two official spoken languages are Pashtu and Dari.

The country is extremely mountainous, with plains and deserts in the west and south. Only 12% of its land is arable, and approximately 49% of its surface rises above 2,000 meters. Thus the country is characterized by rugged terrain, much of which is passable only on foot. The climate is arid to semi-arid, with cold winters and hot summers. In winter months heavy snows block most mountain passes. Tribes often live in isolated valleys and have developed an independent, self-sufficient character; they are often hostile to outsiders.

Afghanistan is a poor country with a GNP of \$3 billion dollars, which equates to a per capita GNP of \$220 dollars. Agriculture produces about 63% of the GNP and employs nearly 70% of the labor force. Industry contributes 21% of the GNP and occupies only 10% of the labor force. The transportation system is not well developed -- only 3,000 kilometers of paved roads. In 1988 there were 34 usable airfields, but only 10 had permanent surface runways. 1.2

Afghanistan occupies an area that has historically provided a buffer between cultures and powers. Occupied but never conquered, its people are warriors who greatly prize

their independence. The land itself, with its fractured topography and difficult climate supports the independent tribal culture that makes up the Afghan people.

THE GREAT GAME

Its location as a buffer state has been the primary attraction of Afghanistan to outside powers. The period 1837- 1944 was marked by intense competition between Russia and Great Britain to maintain Afghanistan as at least a neutral buffer, if not a member of its respective camp. The British came to use the term the "Great Game" to describe their Afghan competition with the Russians.³

Initial Russian interest in the region was to expand Tsarist territory while ultimately securing a warm water port. Over time, Russian interests were expanded to counter British influence in the area in order to weaken the British position not only in this region but also in Europe.

British interests served to check Russian expansion into the area and thereby to protect India from Tsarist influence. Afghans sought to maintain their independence; thus they cooperated with either the Russians or British as the situation required.

From 1837 until 1878 British military forces intervened in Afghanistan three times. After the Bolshevik October Revolution of 1917, Lenin attempted to ally more closely with Afghanistan. But in the early 1920's the Afghans saw Communist diplomacy as simply another attempt toward expansionism and took action to rebuff those attempts. The Soviets conducted three brief Afghan interventions in 1925, 1929 and 1930. While these interventions were not significantly successful they served to increase Soviet influence in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan remained neutral during World War II. Significantly, however, the British decided to withdraw from the area after the war. So ended the "Great Game" between Soviet Russia and Great Britain.⁴

THE SOVIET - UNITED STATES GAME

From the conclusion of the Second World War until 1953, the Afghan playing field was relatively quiet. Both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were to a large degree preoccupied with post-war recovery. United States alignment with Pakistan precluded U.S. initiatives with Afghanistan. In general, U.S. interests were not pursued in this area, and the Soviets likewise made no effort to exert significant influence. As a consequence Afghanistan remained quiet.

In 1953 two major events occurred: the death of Stalin and the installation of Prince Mohammed Daoud as the Afghan Prime Minister. After Stalin's death, the Soviets began to exploit expansionist opportunities in the third world. Concurrently, Daoud defined Afghan interests as rapid development and a quick favorable solution to the Pashtunistan issue, a border dispute with Pakistan. These interests presented the Soviets an opportunity to gain influence in Afghanistan. A major Soviet objective then became to establish Afghanistan as a model client state engaged in mutually beneficial trade with the Soviet Union.⁵ The Afghans accepted Soviet assistance as a means toward their national ends, while carefully guarding their independence.

With the exception of the Pashtunistan issue, all other mutual Soviet-Afghan objectives were satisfied at the cost of some Afghan independence. Afghanistan received nearly \$400 million dollars in developmental assistance and more than \$20 million dollars in military aid from the Soviets. Additionally, some 200 Afghan officer cadets were sent to the Soviet Union for training.⁶

Despite this gains, Afghan dissatisfaction with Prime Minister Daoud's increasingly centralized exercise of power resulted in his dismissal on 3 March 1963. The next ten years, 1963-73, saw five Prime Ministers and little national

progress. This unsettled period supported the January 1965 founding of the pro-communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

Within the PDPA two factions evolved, the Khalq and the Parcham. While both were pro-Moscow, the Khalq, led by Nur Mohammed Taraki, took a more revolutionary, anti-regime line. The Parcham faction was led by Barbrak Karmal; it was willing to work with the current regime. The Khalq gained its strength from the military and rural areas while the Parcham found its strength among students and Kabul intellectuals.

A successful July 1973 coup ended this ten-year period of stagnation; then Daoud, with PDPA support, reasserted his power to seize control. Early in this second Daoud regime, Soviet aid was significant. In 1974 the Soviets granted \$150 million dollars in credits to Afghanistan. Military aid doubled from \$66 million dollars in 1971 and 1972 to \$137 million dollars in 1973 and 1974. The Afghan military grew to a 100-thousand man force with 4,000 officers trained in the U.S.S.R.⁷

However, by 1974 Daoud began to distance his regime from Soviet influence by pursuing a non-aligned policy. Establishing his own party, The National Revolutionary Party, Daoud took an independent course -- initiating

training agreements with India and Egypt, arranging financial aid from Iran and China, and improving relations with the U.S. and Pakistan. Additionally Daoud visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. The worsening of the Sino-Soviet rift and the rise in influence of the oil rich Islamic states set a regional stage that exacerbated Soviet concerns 8

THE SAUR REVOLUTION

The Soviets maintained the Afghan status quo by working with Daoud, while clandestinely supporting PDPA efforts to establish a more pro-Soviet regime. The PDPA was strengthened by closure of the Parcham - Khalq rift in 1976. Renewed opposition then launched a successful coup deposing Daoud on 27 April 1978 and installing a more pro-communist government.

On 30 April the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (PDRA) was founded, with Taraki head of the Revolutionary Council and Prime Minister. The two Deputy Prime Ministers were Amin and Karmal. The cabinet reflected the Parcham - Khalq coalition; for the Khalq occupied eleven seats, and the Parcham ten.

Whereas it can not be proven that the Soviets engineered the April (Saur) Revolution, they very quickly exploited it.

Collins observes that

In the area of economic aid ... in the first twenty months after the revolution the Soviet Union signed more than sixty economic agreements with Afghanistan ... Additionally, the Soviets granted a ten year debt moratorium..... the Soviet Union also received many benefits, such as a ready supply of high-grade cement and nearly 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year at about a fourth of the world price. In the military sphere, by the end of 1978 the Soviets had more than doubled their pre-Saur 350 man advisory contingent.⁹

Taraki launched a repressive campaign during which some 12,000 opponents were killed¹⁰ and a series of decrees violating Muslim precepts was issued. This alienation of the Muslim majority was a fatal mistake. By October 1978 opposition was intense and gaining strength. In March 1979, a developing resistance had created major incidents in half of Afghanistan's 28 provinces and dissident forces controlled the Kunar Valley in eastern Afghanistan.

In March 1979 dissident forces, with army mutineers, captured the city of Herat, massacring the local Soviet advisory group and their dependents. The next month, Afghan troops, along with Soviet advisors, attacked the town of Kerala and massacred 640 male inhabitants.

A Soviet military delegation headed by General Alexei Yepishev, First Deputy Defense Minister, visited Afghanistan to assess the situation. As a result of this assessment measures were taken to strengthen the Afghan Army and

thereby to maintain Soviet influence. Military equipment, including 100 T-62 tanks and 12 Mi-24 helicopter gunships, was delivered; the advisory effort was likewise expanded to include over 1,000 Soviet advisors by April 1979.

In September, Amin deposed Taraki and assumed total control of the government, providing even more despotic control and further alienating the population. Amin attempted rapid, forced compliance with a doctrinal communist model. Shunning Soviet suggestions to moderate this fast-paced approach, Amin continued to drive the Afghan people to revolt while antagonizing his Soviet sponsors.

The situation continued to deteriorate as an expanding resistance gained strength. From mid-August until mid-October, a Soviet high-level military team led by General Ivan Pavlovsky, with 12 other generals and some 50 staff officers, toured Afghanistan (Pavlovsky commanded the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia). Following Pavlovsky's visit, the decision was made to depose Amin in favor of a more moderate head of state. Babrak Karmal was then retrieved from exile for installation as head of state. This transfer was accomplished by an overt Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

THE SOVIET GAME

The Soviet game began with the 24 December 1979 unopposed landing, at Kabul Airport, of elements of the 105th Guards Airborne Division reinforced with elements of the 103rd Guards Airborne Division and a Spetsnaz unit. On 27 December a three day air movement from the Soviet Union into Afghanistan commenced, with an average of some 100 flights per day. On the 29th, two motorized rifle divisions entered Afghanistan from the Soviet Union.

With the subsequent arrival of three additional divisions and several squadrons of MiG-21 and MiG-23 aircraft, a total of 85,000 Soviet troops were in place by March 1980. With the exception of the airborne elements, invading units were composed of approximately 70% reservists on 90 day call-ups. The vast majority of reservists, some 75%, were Central Asians. 11

SUMMARY

Afghanistan, about the size of Texas with a very rugged topography, is populated by some 14 million people who have developed more along tribal than national lines. It is a Muslim nation: 89% of its population is Islamic. Known as fierce warriors, the Afghans prize their independence and

have fought for centuries to preserve it. While never conquered, the nation has often been the scene of regional conflicts.

Russian and Soviet interests have traditionally been to establish a friendly buffer state while moving toward Middle Eastern warm water ports. Access to Middle Eastern oil has become a recent interest. Since Stalin's death in 1924, the Soviets have attempted to expand their influence in Afghanistan. The 1978 Saur Revolution installed a pro-Communist regime; however, by 1979 this regime was heavily threatened by a developing insurgency. In order to maintain a pro-communist Afghan stability, Soviet forces intervened in December 1979.

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER IV

SOVIET PERFORMANCE IN AFGHANISTAN, 1979 - 1989

This chapter describes the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan which terminated with the completed Soviet withdrawal on 15 February 1989. At the macro-level, four interrelated dimensions of Soviet activity will be examined: military, economic, psycho-social and political. Further, Soviet domestic and international issues will be analyzed.

THE MILITARY DIMENSION

MILITARY STRATEGY: Soviet military strategy envisaged a rapid campaign similar to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Their intent was to occupy and secure cities, base areas and major transportation/logistics centers while conducting operations in rural areas to strip

away the population and its support from the dissident forces. The Soviets assumed that without such support the insurgents could not survive.

By all accounts the Soviets badly miscalculated the strength and intensity of Afghan resistance. The resistance quickly intensified into a Muslim holy war, a jihad, against the infidel, non-believing invaders from the north. Hence, the various bands of insurgents became mujahideen, or holy warriors.

Thereafter, the Soviets did not enjoy rapid success, and operations were protracted. In an effort to separate the mujahideen from its bases of support, the Soviets waged a nearly genocidal scorched-earth campaign to eliminate rural Afghans from contested areas. Consequently, an estimated one million Afghans were killed and 1/3 of the pre-war population became refugees. The Afghan countryside is now littered with millions of anti-personnel mines, destroyed structures and fallow fields.¹

THE BALANCE OF FORCES: The Soviet 40th Army, which executed this military strategy, was headquartered in Kabul and included about 125,000 troops (several motorized rifle divisions, one reinforced airborne division, two or more air assault brigades, and support units). These Soviet forces

operated in support of the Afghan Armed Forces, which numbered some 50,000.

Mujahideen active forces totaled an estimated 90,000 with another 110,000 in "reserve". In total, some ten separate insurgent groups have been operating in their own areas. A loose alliance, with a headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan, coordinates the operations of seven of these groups.

In 1987 Mujahideen combat capability increased greatly primarily through an increase in U.S. aid from \$300 million dollars in 1986 to \$600 million dollars in 1987. This 1987 allocation was augmented by another \$60 million dollars nonlethal aid, yielding a total aid package of \$660 million dollars.

Of the newly supplied weapons, the Stinger air defense weapon had the greatest impact; it forced the Soviets to significantly restrict air support and helicopter resupply. As a consequence, the air threat against the mujahideen was greatly reduced, thereby permitting them to mass. Mujahideen freedom of action was further expanded as isolated Soviet outposts had to be withdrawn since they could not be resupplied either by air or ground. Resulting net increases in mujahideen operational capability became decisive factors in the Soviet decision to withdraw.²

SOVIET OCCUPATION FORCES:3 The Soviets initially committed local divisions, primarily from Turkestan, which were brought up to combat strength with 70% local, predominately Muslim, reservists . Soviet forces met with great hostility, particularly from rural Afghans.

Initial Soviet tactics involved large scale sweeps and cordon and search operations. Operations were characterized by large numbers of troops, normally over 1,000, supported by massive fire support. Such operations were largely unsuccessful due to mujahideen intelligence gained through infiltration of Afghan headquarters and through the ability of small mujahideen units to side-step such cumbersome large-scale operations.

To enhance operational capability, Soviet forces in Afghanistan were divided into counter-insurgency forces and occupation forces. Counter-insurgency forces comprised about 25% of Soviet forces; they consisted of airborne, air assault and reconnaissance units, which engaged in some 80% of combat.

Occupation forces made up the remaining 75% of Soviet forces; they consisted of the motorized rifle division (less their reconnaissance units) and all in-country support forces. Occupation forces were assigned security missions, most of which were static. Occasionally they conducted

large-scale (normally division-sized) sweeps. These operations seldom made contact with the mujahideen, who simply avoided contact. In large-scale cordon and search operations, which were similarly ineffective, the occupation forces provided the cordon while the counter-insurgency forces did the fighting.

Troops of the airborne, air assault⁴ and reconnaissance units were specially selected and trained. The airborne and air assault forces, numbering about 15,000, generally operated in dispersed company-sized operations, frequently attached to conventional units. Reconnaissance units, consisting of some 5,000 troops, operated as reconnaissance teams. By all reports these counter-insurgency forces were high-quality, well-disciplined and effective units.

But the same can not be said for Soviet forces at large. The occupation forces presented the Soviet leadership with several problems:

1) New versus Old Draftees: Soldiers are inducted into Soviet forces twice each year, in May/June and November/December, for a two-year term of service. Traditionally the oldest draftees (in terms of service) harass and abuse their younger cohorts exacting near servitude from the newer arrivals. The newest arrivals are forced to do all the manual labor, including personal details. In Afghanistan

the older Soviet troops routinely confiscated newer equipment and belongings from the younger. This rigorous initiation was pervasive and very destructive of the cohesion normally found in combat units. Many AWOL and desertion problems and some violence resulted from this tradition of Soviet forces.

2) Ethnic Problems: In Afghanistan Soviet Muslim soldiers were discriminated against. They fought only reluctantly against Afghan Muslims and had a higher indiscipline rate than other Soviet soldiers. Muslim soldiers did not perform well.

3) Health Problems: Standards of personal hygiene, medical care and evacuation were far below western standards. Medical care was poorly administered by inadequately trained medical personnel. Infectious diseases were quickly transmitted, which lowered combat strength. In Afghanistan only one general evacuation hospital was operational.

4) Drug and Alcohol Abuse: Combat capability was adversely affected by drug and alcohol abuse. Kaiser asserts that

There is good reason to believe that a majority, perhaps even a substantial majority, of Soviet soldiers in the DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) use(d) drugs on a fairly regular basis.⁵

There is some evidence that indiscipline rates, to include theft of military property (including weapons and ammunition), were directly related to drug usage.

5) Theft and Corruption: Soviet forces were involved in widespread black market activities. In Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan Alexiev notes that

The willingness of the Soviet soldiers to steal and sell just about anything of value from their units was confirmed by both resistance sources and Afghan Army officers. ... Former Afghan officers reported trafficking in stolen Soviet equipment was so widespread that a regular bazaar specializing in such items had been established in Kabul.⁶

This pilfering became an operational problem because significant amounts of this equipment supplied the mujahideen. Additionally, funds generated by such illegal activities were often used to purchase black market goods which fed large scale smuggling operations across the Soviet border. Black market goods included not only Western "luxury" goods but also drugs and weapons.

6) Looting and Atrocities: In the "line of duty", looting and atrocities were a tactical component of the strategic intent to terrorize the population, forcing them to move away from contested locations. Soviet activity was "characterized by unusual brutality and blatant disregard for internationally accepted norms and conventions".⁷ Apparently recognizing the possible deleterious effects of

such behavior on military discipline, the Soviet chain of command dealt very severely with "non-line-of-duty" looting and atrocities.

SUMMARY. Soviet military strategy had two basic components: to control urban population and transportation centers and to force rural Afghans away from locations where they could support the mujahideen. Occupation forces did control urban centers but could not eliminate the mujahideen underground. Terrorist tactics did force rural Afghans out of contested areas, but external support of the mujahideen was sufficient to compensate for the loss of extensive local support.

Military performance by Soviet counter-insurgency forces was good, but other units performed poorly. Significant problems in discipline, training, and military effectiveness adversely effected Soviet military performance.

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Soviet economic strategy called for destruction of the economic infrastructure supporting the mujahideen. Four specific tactics were used:

1. Destruction of crops along with mining of fields to discourage further tilling.

2. Destruction of the irrigation system.

3. Procurement of excess food production to reduce food available to the mujahideen.

4. Provision of seeds and supplies at extremely favorable terms to Afghans living in controlled areas as an incentive to encourage further migration into controlled areas.

The consequences of these tactics are nicely summarized by Alexiev:

Agricultural production (fell) to 20 - 25% of pre-1979 levels, prices of most commodities (rose) six to tenfold and severe food shortages with near famine conditions (were) prevalent in many areas.⁹

While the Soviets efficiently pursued the "ways" of the economic strategy, the desired "ends" were not achieved. The mujahideen remained operative even with the loss of support caused by denial of their indigenous support base. This was possible because of the aid efforts of the U.S. and other sympathetic nations.

THE PSYCO - SOCIAL DIMENSION

The objective of Soviet psycho-social strategy was to fragment the Afghan population to preclude both a unified effort and the development of Afghan nationalism. A dual approach was taken: in the north the cultural and familial bonds between northern Afghans (Uzbek, Tajik, Turkman) and their Soviet brethren just across the border was emphasized; and in the south, the Soviets focused on coopting and/or bribing tribal and religious leaders from supporting the resistance.¹⁰

Additionally, mines were widely used as denial weapons to force civilians out of a given area. It has been reported that 30 million to 50 million mines remain in place.¹¹

Further, the Soviets have conducted a near genocidal terrorist campaign to separate the population from the guerrilla. Systematic destruction of crops, villages, irrigation systems and outright massacre of civilians have been routine. After extensive research Laber and Rubin concluded that

In the more than eight years since the Soviet invasion, a third of the population of Afghanistan has fled, perhaps as many as a million have died,

and even leaders of the resistance have feared that 'a whole nation is dying'.¹²

Within the Soviet Union, two domestic factors reflect a lack of public support for the war effort: growing public discontent was widely reported in the Western media beginning the mid-80's. Additionally, the practice of draft evasion or arranging a non-Afghanistan assignment has become a fairly widespread practice within the Soviet conscription system.¹³

The Soviet psycho-social strategy has thus been a failure. Incredibly, the Soviets failed to anticipate the fanatical nature of the Muslim jihad (holy war) against foreign intervention. Various mujahideen tribal bands have cooperated to achieve basic unity of effort in prosecution of the jihad. Internal Soviet dissatisfaction with the war effort has likewise been notable. The Soviet effort has been comprehensive and brutal, but it has not achieved the desired ends.

THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

The Soviet political strategy had three components-- one internal to Afghanistan, a second internal to the Soviet Union, and a third international. Respectively, the Soviets sought to institutionalize the Communist Party in Afghanistan and solidify an Afghan communist state, to

prevent development of domestic anti-war sentiment, and to limit adverse negative international reaction to their Afghan intervention.

INSIDE AFGHANISTAN: Soviet goals were to win over key segments of the population to the Communist Party, to create a new, loyal technological and administrative elite, and to prevent development of Afghan unity or nationalism.

Special favors were used in an attempt to coopt influential Afghans. Efforts were made to force professionals (teachers, religious leaders, and lawyers) into the Communist Party. As a consequence there has been a flight of leadership. For example, 700 of 1,000 university staff have fled, and 1,000 of 1,200 medical doctors have likewise departed.¹⁴

Major efforts were made to win over young Afghans. Reportedly, The Democratic Organization of the Youth of Afghanistan (the communist youth organization) has 125,000 members. Throughout the educational system, including the two Afghan universities (Kabul and Jalalabad), curriculums have been revised to reflect a more positive Soviet slant.

Study programs for Afghan students in the U.S.S.R. have been instrumental in preparing a new pro-communist elite. Short term programs of six months and long term programs of up to ten years have been widely used for children of

kindergarten through university levels. In August 1983, twelve thousand Afghan university students were studying in the U.S.S.R.¹⁵

In late fall 1986, in the early stages of Soviet and Afghan recognition that the war effort was falling, the Kabul government implemented changes intended to broaden its base of support. In September 1987, after a period of instability, Najibullah (the General Secretary of the PDPA) was appointed head of government replacing Karmal. A new constitution was written; it adopted Islam as the official religion and dropped "Democratic" from the official name of the country (from The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to the Republic of Afghanistan). However, these measures failed to stabilize the deteriorating situation.

INSIDE THE U.S.S.R.: Efforts were made to limit Afghanistan information available to the Soviet people. Soldier's mail from Afghanistan was censored.¹⁶ Limited war news, particularly during the early stages, supports the conclusion that news was purposefully restricted. However, as the war continued beyond the mid-80's, public awareness fueled by the Gorbachev policy of glasnost led to increased war visibility. As awareness increased, public support appeared to erode significantly.

THE INTERNATIONAL EFFORT. The proximate cause of Soviet intervention was the direct threat to a newly established communist regime on the Soviet border. Soviet analysis undoubtedly concluded that the short term benefits of a limited incursion to stabilize the Afghan situation would exceed the costs of inaction. Playing to the third world, the Soviets needed to demonstrate revolutionary solidarity while making good on the commitment of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

Additionally, in fall 1979 the Soviets faced deteriorating relations with both the United States and the People's Republic of China. Detente with the U.S. was no longer operative, and the Chinese had just attacked Viet Nam. Both competing powers were supporting the resistance in Afghanistan. Further, the Soviets were concerned with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism into Afghanistan and the adjoining Soviet republics. These situations likely caused the Soviets to inflate costs of inaction.¹⁷

Almost immediately after the invasion, the Soviets called for diplomatic measures supporting a withdrawal. They stated that the incursion was temporary: they would withdraw when armed aggression stopped and international guarantees precluded resumption. This diplomatic offensive was an effort to pre-empt negative international reaction. However, a 14 January 1980 U.N. General Assembly

resolution, which passed 104 to 18, with 18 abstentions, called for an immediate withdrawal. This put the Soviets on the diplomatic defensive. In five subsequent votes over the four following years, essentially the same resolution was passed by the same overwhelming vote.

U.N. sponsored efforts for a negotiated settlement were convened in June 1982. These talks were inconclusive. A second round of inconclusive talks was conducted in April/June 1983. Stumbling blocks included a timetable for Soviet troop withdrawal, measures to end arms shipments to the resistance, and definition of the post-withdrawal form of government.¹⁸

The situation remained in this disarray until spring of 1988, when the Soviets evidently calculated that the costs of the continued Afghan occupation exceeded the likely gains. As a result, in April 1988 an agreement was reached in Geneva for the withdrawal of Soviet forces. After an estimated expenditure of \$50 billion dollars, 60 thousand casualties (25 thousand killed), and increasing political costs,¹⁹ the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw beginning 15 May 1988. The agreement stipulated that the withdrawal would be completed within ten months (15 February 1989) and that Soviet and U.S. arms shipments would remain symmetrical during the withdrawal period. Most significantly, no preconditions for the make-up of the post-withdrawal

government were set. Hence, the Soviets agreed to withdraw without a guarantee of a surviving Communist regime.²⁰

SUMMARY

In December 1979 Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan to defeat an insurgency which threatened a developing Communist regime. The Soviets conducted a near genocidal terrorist campaign to separate the population and its support from the mujahideen guerrillas. Thus over one million Afghans were killed and one third of the pre-war population are now refugees.

Soviet military strategy had two basic components: to control urban population and transportation centers and to force rural Afghans away from locations where they could support the mujahideen. Occupation forces did control urban centers but could not eliminate the mujahideen underground. Terrorist tactics did force rural Afghans out of contested areas, but external support of the mujahideen was sufficient to support their operations without extensive local support. Military performance by Soviet counter-insurgency forces, which accounted for 25% of committed forces, met high standards but other units performed poorly. Significant problems in discipline, training, and military effectiveness adversely effected Soviet military performance.

Soviet economic strategy called for destruction of the economic infrastructure supporting the mujahideen. Even though the Soviets efficiently pursued this strategy, the desired objectives were not achieved. The mujahideen were able to remain operative even with the loss of support caused by denial of their indigenous support base. This was possible because of the aid efforts of the U.S. and other sympathetic nations.

The Soviet psycho-social strategy aimed to fragment the Afghan population to preclude the development of unified, nationalist effort. This strategy was a failure. Incredibly the Soviets failed to anticipate the fanatical nature of the Muslim Jihad (holy war) against foreign intervention. Basic coordination between the various mujahideen tribal bands was achieved, and unity of Afghan effort in prosecution of the Jihad was impressive. The Soviet effort was comprehensive and brutal, but it did not achieve the desired ends.

The Soviet political strategy had three objectives: to institutionalize the Communist Party and solidify an Afghan Communist state, to prevent development of domestic anti-war sentiment, and to limit adverse negative international reaction. As the war evolved, political costs became excessive. International reaction was overwhelmingly negative, domestic opinion was increasingly non-supportive,

and pacification efforts were not succeeding. The Gorbachev initiatives for a period of "breathing space" were not compatible with a stalemated counter-insurgency war in a third-world country. In the spring of 1988 the Soviets apparently calculated that the costs of the Afghan occupation exceeded the gains. As a result, in April 1988 an agreement was reached in Geneva for the withdrawal of Soviet forces. By 15 February 1989, Soviet forces had been withdrawn from Afghanistan in accordance with the Geneva agreement.

ENDNOTES

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Soviet forces and from other primary source data is the major source document. Additional sources will be noted as required.

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER V

CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE AND SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

Discussed in Chapter II, Soviet strategic culture is both a historical and a predictive concept which defines normally expected Soviet behavior. Such prediction is possible because strategic culture normally evolves slowly, remaining relatively constant over time. However, an unpredictable departure from normal expectations can result from a revolutionary event. Is the Soviet experience with Afghanistan consistent with Soviet strategic culture? Or does it constitute a historically discontinuous event?

CONSISTENCY WITH THE FUNDAMENTALLY INFLUENCING FACTORS

In Chapter II several fundamental influencing factors that have major impact on Soviet strategic culture were introduced. These fundamental factors will now be related to the Afghanistan experience.

SURVIVAL AS A CONTINENTAL POWER: The initial decision to invade Afghanistan was consistent with the traditional Soviet defensive penchant for buffer states. This decision was further prompted by Soviet suspicion of U.S. and Chinese regional intentions, as well as fear of developing Islamic fundamentalism.

But the intense patriotism normally expected from the Soviet masses did not generate internal domestic support for the war. This lack of support appears to have been particularly evident among Muslims and other non-Slavic peoples.

FORCE OF IDEOLOGY: The decision to invade was consistent with Leninist ideology to assist and protect developing communist regimes. Since the 1950's the Soviets had supported "wars of national liberation" as a means to expand communist influence. After having used Afghanistan to model the ideal client-nation relationship, the Soviets

stood to lose influence with the third world if the Afghan regime failed.

The total withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was markedly inconsistent with historical Soviet intransigence concerning any roll-back from an existing favorable condition. Allison declares that

... the reverberations in Soviet satellite and client states (will be significant) since defeat in Afghanistan rolls back for the first time the Brezhnev Doctrine of the irreversibility of communist gains. 2

Soviet troops in Afghanistan were not motivated by ideological dedication; in fact, they were demotivated by clumsy attempts to propagandize their war objectives. Soldiers quickly saw that they were not fighting with and for the Afghans but were fighting against the Afghans who were in many cases fellow Muslims. Soviet troops, in the main, were not ideological warriors fighting for the communist ideals; they were mostly poorly disciplined, ineffective soldiers.3

Possibly the most significant ideological impact of the Soviet withdrawal was the implicit recognition that the Communist Party is not the idealist, international vanguard destined to achieve preeminence in the modern world. As Kaiser states in "The USSR in Decline",

Stalin's goal was to create an empire tied together by communist ideology, fueled by communist efficiency and dominated by Great Russian ambitions. But the ideology has failed, the efficiency has proven illusory, and the ambitions are anachronistic in the modern world.⁴

LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY: As stated above, the decision to intervene was consistent with both Soviet traditional defensive concerns and Communist ideology. General Secretary Gorbachev has apparently consolidated his hold on Party leadership and remained firmly in charge. There has been no visible Communist Party opposition to either the invasion or the subsequent withdrawal.

Domestic civil dissent in response to the prolonged Afghanistan troop involvement, while limited, offers testimony to the weakening of Stalinist repression. In the Gorbachev era, Soviet citizens have some freedom to express divergent views. The full success of Gorbachev's initiatives requires extensive involvement of individual Soviet citizens. The all-encompassing centralized leadership of the traditional Communist Party runs counter to current trends and domestic political requirements in the Soviet Union.

LESSONS FROM THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR: Readiness of a large standing Army enabled the initial decision to invade. However, the traditional Soviet application of massive force to achieve military ends was not evident. As the effort

bogged down, why didn't the Soviets increase their force structure to deal with the increased resistance? With only 3% of Soviet force structure committed, such an increase would certainly have been a feasible military option. The decision to fight a war of attrition runs counter to the Soviet predisposition to apply overwhelming strength on behalf of decisive early outcomes. It seems likely that fear of international reactions and domestic unrest constrained Soviet options.

The developing challenge to the traditional Soviet acceptance of a large standing military as a requirement for national survival is a major inconsistency with traditional Soviet thought. Responding to glasnost and perestroika and partly in backlash to Afghanistan, a notable segment of the Soviet population has concluded that

The army is an expensive burden on a weak economy, and not a universally popular burden at that. In the current campaign to elect a new national congress, candidates are finding that two themes with strong voter appeal are cutting the defense budget ... and abolishing the draft.⁵

SOVIET CONCEPTS OF PEACE, DEFENSE AND THE ENEMY: The invasion, a use of force to support a developing communist state, is consistent with the principle of the irreversibility of communist expansion as articulated in Brezhnev Doctrine. Consistent with traditional Soviet

thinking, the enemy was considered as a reactionary force supported by imperialists.

In its final extension, however, the war led to the abandonment of a communist state; the Soviets left the battlefield to the Afghan Armed Forces, who are now opposed by the reactionary mujahideen forces. This final outcome is inconsistent with the normal expectations of Soviet strategic culture.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE BASIC CULTURAL TEMPLATE

This analysis will apply Twining's model of Soviet Strategic Culture to Soviet Afghanistan behavior. Each core characteristic as presented in Chapter II will be discussed in turn.⁶

--An insatiable search for security, a quest in which attainment of security in one geographic or substantive arena engenders insecurity in others. Domestic and international precautions are largely motivated by the desperate experience of World War II, the single cultural experience shared by all Soviet peoples.

The initial decision to invade was totally consistent with traditional Soviet security needs. Inability to achieve a quick, decisive victory and the requirements of "new thinking" caused the Soviets to reevaluate. This assessment considered that the continued loss of international standing and domestic support was greater than

the cost of withdrawing support from a developing Communist buffer regime. Hence, the Soviets decided to withdraw. This withdrawal from Afghanistan is inconsistent with traditional expectations of Soviet behavior.

--A permanent struggle in world affairs, with conflict a normal condition, as an enduring lesson of Russian history. This expectation is supported by a distrust of foreign cultures, dialectical imperatives and the conviction that military weakness has been responsible for past invasions and defeats.

The Soviet withdrawal presents a discontinuity, but it does not indicate any substantive change in the Soviet perception of world struggle. As Gorbachev stated in his U.N. speech, "We are not abandoning our convictions, our philosophy or traditions."⁷ The withdrawal reflects an increased willingness to negotiate.

-- A permanent struggle with states, because they or their ruling classes are hostile. States now socialist are secure only as long as Moscow's suzerainty is maintained. States now capitalistic are subject to conversion by all means short of war because their threat cannot be otherwise attenuated. States considered 'progressive' or 'national democratic' will be watched and aided by all possible means, given the mutuality of elite interests served by Moscow's guardianship and example.

While the principle of struggle remains central to Marxism/Leninism, in Afghanistan the Soviet Union did abandon a major, overt commitment to a developing communist state. This contradiction of the Brezhnev Doctrine will not be lost on insurgent third world leadership. Moscow's restraint in limiting escalation is not consistent with

rendering aid by "all possible means"; it is therefore a departure from classical Soviet responses.

--A permanent struggle between classes. Change is inherent in the world revolutionary process, which is advanced by legal and illegal communist parties, and proxy, surrogate, and sympathetic elements. Classlessness--one large collective--is the only permanent solution given firm, central leadership from Moscow.

Withdrawal from Afghanistan gives no indication that the Soviets have any intention of abandoning class struggle. This concept is so central to their dogma that its direct repudiation would threaten their basic rationale.

--A strong state, guided by resolute leaders, is required to mobilize the entire country and its resources to serve fundamental Soviet security interests.

Soviet behavior in Afghanistan signals a movement away from application of a military solution to a security problem. This might be interpreted as a lack of the resolve required of leaders of "a strong state". The national power required to militarily resolve the Afghan situation was not mobilized.

--Others cannot be depended upon to guarantee Soviet security. The USSR will marshal, coordinate and command socialist forces. Moscow's primacy is essential to insure the sanctity of Soviet soil.

The initial Soviet invasion was the classical response to a perceived external threat. Moscow clearly retains the lead to insure the defense of Soviet soil; however, it is

apparent that means in addition to armed forces will be employed. Continued Soviet commitment to developing socialist states is in question.

--Continual sacrifice is necessary to preserve the state. Military forces guard the society which it serves and protects. Quantitative, qualitative, political and military-technical dimensions of military power must be sufficient to prevail over all possible enemies, separately or combined.

The Afghanistan experience illustrated to the Soviets that military power alone, regardless of the extreme levels of brutality employed, cannot solve political problems. This realization gives impetus to the Gorbachev reforms. The West must realize, however, that there is no indication that the Soviets have abandoned the principle of having sufficient military power to prevail over all possible enemies, separately or combined.

--The political utility of military power, where superiority at every escalatory level is required to attain the political aim of war through violent or, preferably, non-violent means. The greatest success and supreme achievement of military power is when, by its presence, readiness and capabilities, it need not be used to secure the political objective.

The Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan was a failure. Military power proved not to be politically utilitarian. Soviet leadership did not risk escalation to the level required to gain at least a military stalemate. Quite possibly the leadership calculated that the political objective in Afghanistan may best be achieved by other

means. This line of reasoning is not consistent with classic Soviet thought. One can thereby infer that, in consonance with Gorbachev's rhetoric, a new mode of Soviet thought is operative.

--Readiness to secure and protect the Soviet homeland and its interests. Military forces, despite their size and capability, are useless if they are not prepared to do their duty. Those in responsibility know best the nature and conduct of future war, with its requisite political and military-technical requirements.

It is dangerous, and very near certainly incorrect, to infer any reduction in Soviet intentions to remain prepared to defend Soviet interests. Perhaps, Soviet military performance in Afghanistan calls into question the quality of Soviet combat forces and their ability to fully support those forces once committed. But the Soviet military effort in Afghanistan was strictly limited, not a high military priority.

--Victory is the goal aggressive offensive action makes possible. This is not narrow military victory, but the attainment of the political objective of war--the reason war was pursued and the goal which governed its conduct. All appropriate methods are sanctioned toward this end.

The Soviet Union withdrew military forces from Afghanistan after nine years and an estimated 25,000 killed in action -- without achieving victory. The immediate intent of the 1979 invasion, which was political - to secure a communist regime in power in Afghanistan - was not met. The

Soviets waged a brutal campaign in prosecuting aggressive offensive operations.

Displaying a sophistication uncommon for Soviet strategic culture, the Soviets have taken a near-term loss in Afghanistan in pursuit of a more long-term, permanent objective.

SUMMARY

The Soviet experience in Afghanistan was inconsistent with the historically based concept of Soviet strategic culture. The decision to invade and the brutal methods employed were consistent; however, the withdrawal of Soviet forces represents a major departure from previous Soviet behavior. The decision to withdraw challenges the basic theory of the irreversibility of communist expansion. While Soviet behavior was not predictable, it exhibited an increasing level of political sophistication, rather than sole reliance on the military element of power.

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THE SOVIET AFGHANISTAN EXPERIENCE AS A REFLECTION OF SOVIET STRATEGIC CULTURE

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

On 27 December 1979, with the stability of the pro-Communist Afghan regime challenged by a developing civil war, Soviet forces intervened to maintain stability. Some nine years later, on 15 February 1989, Soviet forces were withdrawn without an international agreement on a follow-on government and with mujahideen forces poised to overthrow the Soviet sponsored government. We have examined the Soviet involvement with Afghanistan from the vantage point of Soviet strategic culture. This final chapter will present conclusions and draw future implications.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary conclusions are as follows:

- 1) The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was consistent with the classic expectations of Soviet strategic culture.
- 2) The Soviets employed tactical and operational methods consistent with previous Soviet expansionist campaigns.
- 3) The Soviet decision not to employ massive troop formations to achieve military objectives is a departure from their historic methods.
- 4) Declining Soviet domestic public support appeared to have some impact on the Soviet decision process.
- 5) Soviet military performance was generally poor.
- 6) The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was inconsistent with the classic expectations of Soviet strategic culture.

CONSISTENCY OF THE SOVIET INVASION: Initial Soviet behavior with Afghanistan was consistent with the

expectations of Soviet strategic culture. Traditionally Russians and now the Soviets have been predisposed toward the creation of buffer states to protect their continental land mass. Long-term interests in access to warm water ports and modern interests in petroleum resources were operative. Finally, the invasion was consistent with Marxist-Leninist dogma to extend communism throughout the world. The Soviet reaction to come to the aid of a threatened, developing Communist state was consistent.

CONSISTENCY OF TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL METHODS: The brutality and near genocidal nature of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan is consistent with previous communist behavior from the 1917 Revolution, through the Stalinist purges, and into the Second World War. Similar scorched earth programs were waged against her own people as the Socialist Republic was consolidated. Predictable by Soviet strategic culture, a "total war" against the Afghan people was waged.

The massive effort to form a new Afghan elite by educating thousands of Afghan youth in the Soviet Union is a standard tactic. During the final stages of the Soviet occupation, significant effort was spent to institutionalize the Afghan Communist Party. The success of these efforts will not be known for some time.

THE DECISION NOT TO ESCALATE: Characteristically Soviet forces have employed mass in seeking military ends. In the case of Afghanistan, Soviet troop strength was uncharacteristically limited to 125,000.

IMPACT OF SOVIET PUBLIC OPINION: There is some evidence that Soviet decision-makers were constrained by a developing domestic dissent with the Afghan incursion. This dissent was fueled by the Gorbachev policy of glasnost. Reports reaching the western media cited internal opposition sufficient to support a conclusion that such opposition was an internal political factor.

The widely reported corruption of the conscription system supports the conclusion that patriotic support of the military effort did not generate. The Soviet decision to limit troop commitment to 115,000 troops was influenced by lack of domestic support for increased troop levels.

SOVIET MILITARY PERFORMANCE: With the exception of counter-insurgency forces, which constituted only 20% of in-country force structure but engaged in 80% of the combat, Soviet forces were largely ineffective due to poor training and discipline. The ethnicity of Soviet forces, which included significant numbers of Muslim soldiers, was a significant problem. Drug and alcohol abuse had a significant negative impact on performance. Black market

activity, including trading in weapons and ammunition, was widespread and provided a significant source of weapons for the mujahideen. There is some evidence that smuggling activity into the Soviet Union involving drugs and, to a limited extent, weapons became a problem in the later stages of the war.

FAILURE TO SUSTAIN A DEVELOPING COMMUNIST STATE:

Leninism ideologically requires that the workers' revolution must expand the reach of communist influence. World revolution is an inevitable consequence of the dialectic. Retrenchment, returning to a previous less favorable position, is anathema to a Leninist revolutionary. In Afghanistan the Soviet Union abandoned a major effort to sustain a communist buffer state on her southern border. This is contrary to normal expectations of Soviet strategic culture.

IMPLICATIONS

General Secretary Gorbachev is setting the international agenda as he attempts to restructure not only the Soviet Union but also the post World War II Cold War alliance system. A reliable definition of Soviet strategic culture could assist in writing the Western agenda to meet Mr. Gorbachev's initiatives. But implications of the Soviet

experience with Afghanistan must be considered in framing a reliable, current construct of Soviet strategic culture.

Prediction, offering high probability of accurate forecasts, is a very useful outcome of comprehending Soviet strategic culture. Strategic culture is based on consistency of national behavior over time. Afghanistan is certainly only one short-term event. Thus, implications derived from the Afghanistan experience can not, in themselves, be considered reliable predictors of future events. However, the Afghan situation appears to threaten the previous construct of Soviet strategic culture, since events there appear to represent a significant departure from traditional expectations.

CONSISTENCY OF THE SOVIET INVASION: The Soviet Union can be expected to react strongly when its vital interests are threatened. This is particularly true regarding any perceived threat to the Soviet Union or its buffer states. The military withdrawal from Afghanistan in no way precludes violent Soviet reaction to unrest within the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact.

CONSISTENCY OF TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL METHODS: In Afghanistan, the Soviets waged a ruthless campaign, killing an estimated one million Afghans. Agreed international conventions governing the execution of war were disregarded.

The Soviets displayed a characteristic ruthlessness applying massive operational power. Such methods can be expected any time the Soviets engage in combat operations.

The massive effort to educate young Afghans as a communist-inspired Afghan elite is characteristic of Soviet expansionist efforts. This educated elite may pose a long term threat to Afghan independence.

THE DECISION NOT TO ESCALATE: The Soviets clearly had the military power to escalate the Afghanistan commitment. The decision not to do so reflects a political sophistication not previously expected from the Soviet Union. This sophistication presents the Soviets as a more capable adversary who will become increasingly less predictable and possibly more formidable.

IMPACT OF SOVIET PUBLIC OPINION: Glasnost has legitimized public discussion. Opposition to the prolonged Afghan involvement became a factor in the latter stages of the war. While it can be argued that the actual impact was not truly significant, the future impacts of domestic public opinion on Soviet policy will likely increase.

SOVIET MILITARY PERFORMANCE: Soviet military standards in Afghanistan were far below those anticipated by western analysts. The poor field performance, ethnic problems and indiscipline showed the Soviet Army to be a marginally effective combat force in the Afghan environment. While generalizations based on this counter-guerrilla environment are to a degree dangerous, it can be safely noted that Soviet troops in Afghanistan were not highly motivated vanguards of the Soviet ideology.

At the same time it is important to note that the airborne, air assault and reconnaissance units were effective while conducting dispersed operations at company level and below. These specially selected Slavic troops were effective combat soldiers.

Demographic trends show that such Slavic troops will provide the minority of the draft cohorts at the beginning of the next century. Poorly educated, non-Russian speaking soldiers will become the majority. This circumstance will exacerbate existing training difficulties and perhaps pose long-term leadership and morale problems. As a consequence, the efficiency of the Soviet Army, as currently structured, is likely to deteriorate.

FAILURE TO SUSTAIN A DEVELOPING COMMUNIST STATE: This is possibly the most significant implication of the Soviet

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FAILURE TO SUSTAIN A DEVELOPING COMMUNIST STATE: This is possibly the most significant implication of the Soviet

responses to new adaptive Soviet behavior may be counterproductive to United States' interests.

There are no precedents for current Soviet behavior. Gorbachev's "new thinking" confounds the use of a historically based concepts to project future Soviet behavior. Hence, the utility of Soviet strategic culture as a predictive concept has been greatly reduced.

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