



## 3-D SOVIET STYLE

Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

Dr. Anton Minkov, SJS-DSOA, Dr. Gregory Smolynech, CEFCOM-ORAT



Defence Research and  
Development Canada

Recherche et développement  
pour la défense Canada

Canada

# Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>OCT 2009</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2009 to 00-00-2009</b>			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>3-D Soviet Style. Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Defence Research and Development Canada, Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM-ORAT), 101 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0K2,</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
		12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>			
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>Counterinsurgency Leaders? Workshop, 27-29 Oct, Fort Leavenworth, KS</b>					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>94</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			



## State of Research

- Russian assessment inadequate
- DRA officials memoirs in Dari
- Most studies usually portray Soviet experience in negative terms or dismissed it outright as irrelevant
- Focus usually on the military campaign
- Discussion of Soviet COIN as comprehensive effort (military, economic development and state building experience) virtually non-existent



## Presentation Overview

- Relevance of Soviet Experience
- Defence – military ops
- Development – social, political, economic
- Diplomacy – internal efforts
- Conclusion – Lessons (to be) learned



## Chronology of Soviet Engagement

- 1979 Soviets invade & bear brunt of fighting
- 1985 Increased Afghan Army role
- 1986 Soviets limit combat operations
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal



## The Costs

### Soviet Union

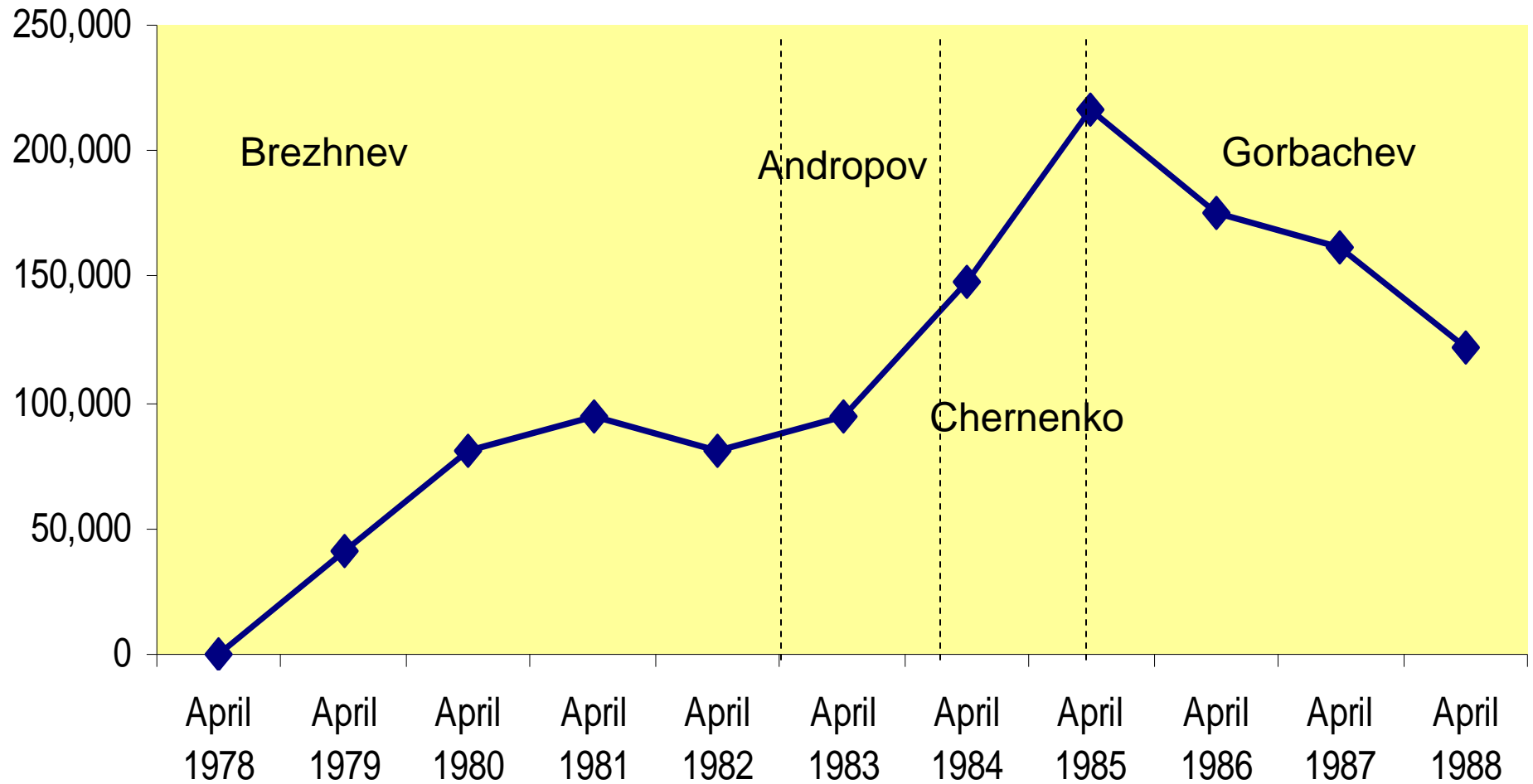
- Killed..... 15,000
- Wounded..... 54,000
- Illnesses.... 416,000
- Political failure

### Afghanistan

- Killed ...1-1.3 million
- Refugees.....5 million
- Civil war, failed state



# Afghans Killed per Year





## Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Afghan geography
- Ethnic & social divisions are persistent
- Basis for state legitimacy still very elusive
- The border with Pakistan





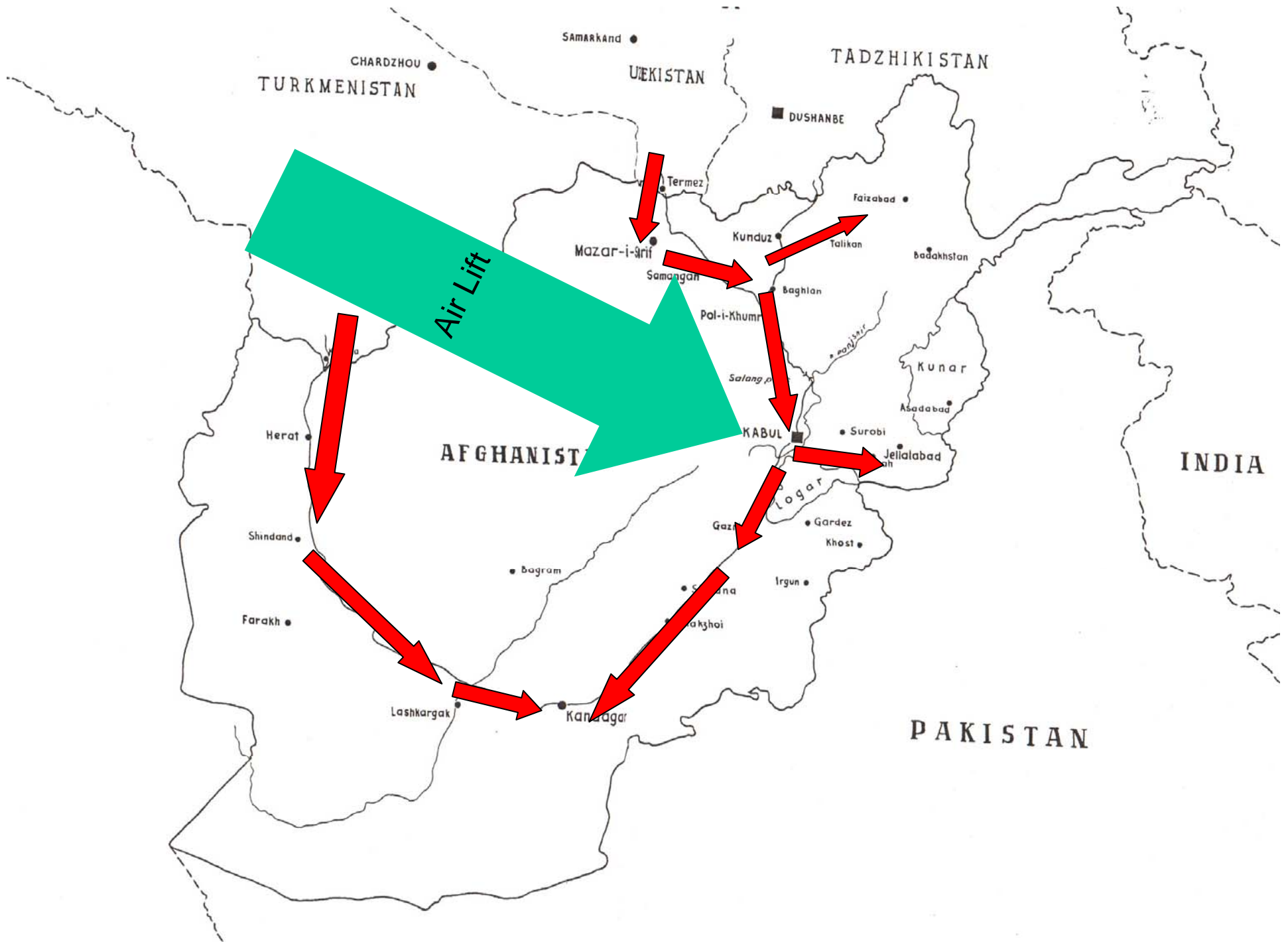
## Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Military presence needed to provide security to the new regime
- Challenge of balancing military ops with civil affairs
- Underrated insurgency – culture of resistance & the ideology of Jihad
- “Limited Contingent”



## Military Ops - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
  - Elusive and decentralized enemy
  - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
  - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- Overriding principle - minimal casualties



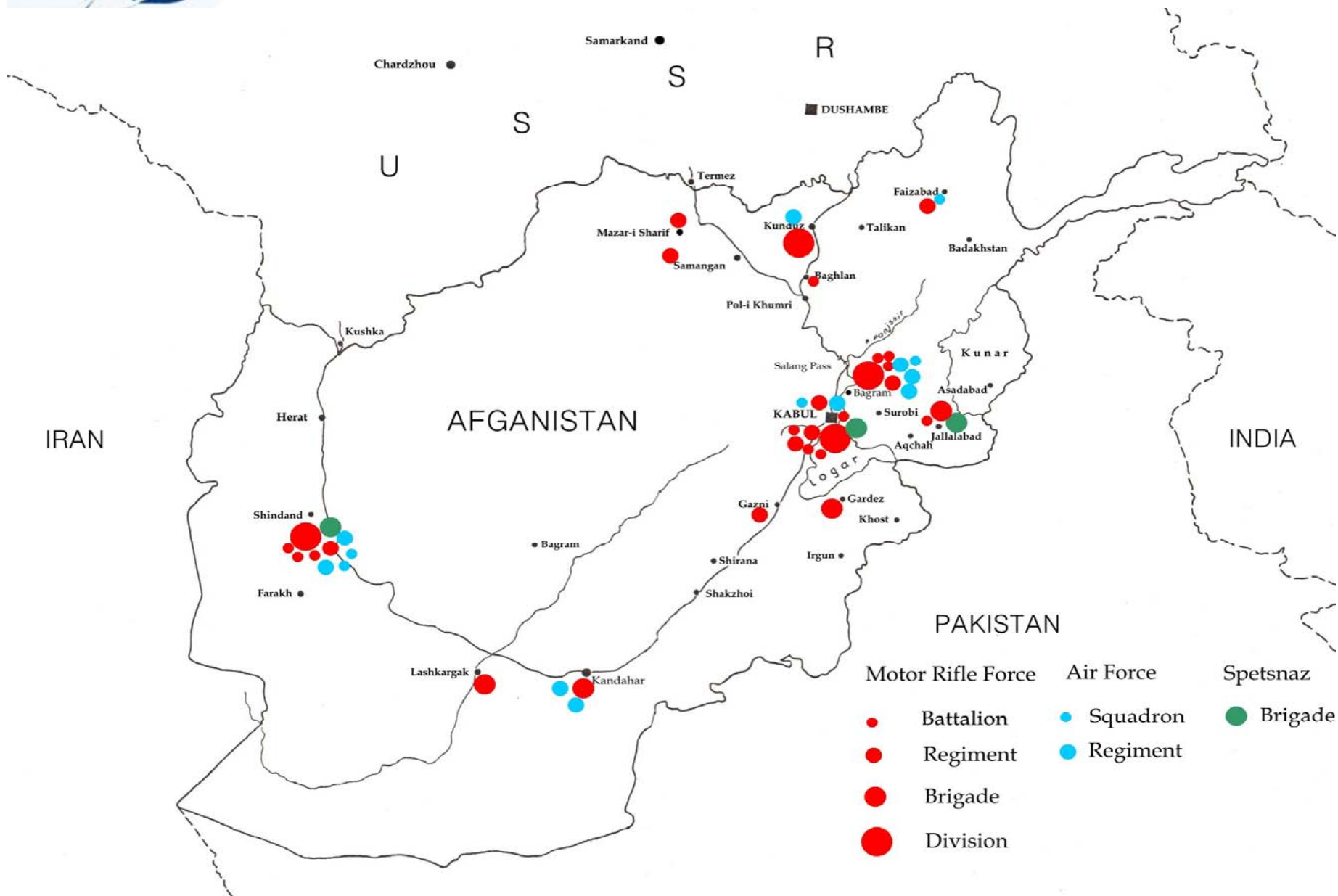


## Military Ops - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
  - Elusive and decentralized enemy
  - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
  - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- Overriding principle - minimal casualties



# Soviet Bases





## Defence - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
  - Elusive and decentralized enemy
  - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
  - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- Overriding principle - minimal casualties



## “The War of the Roads”

- Mujahidin’s standard tactics: the road ambush & road mines/ IEDs
- Blocking roads - a strategic goal: Mobility / re-supply & Afghan economy critically affected
- Soviets devote large forces to route protection
- Mujahidin mine/IED ops sophisticated: plastic mines
- Losses due to mines: 11,289 trucks, 1,314 APCs, 147 tanks, 433 artillery pieces, 1,138 command vehicles



# Mines & Ambushes







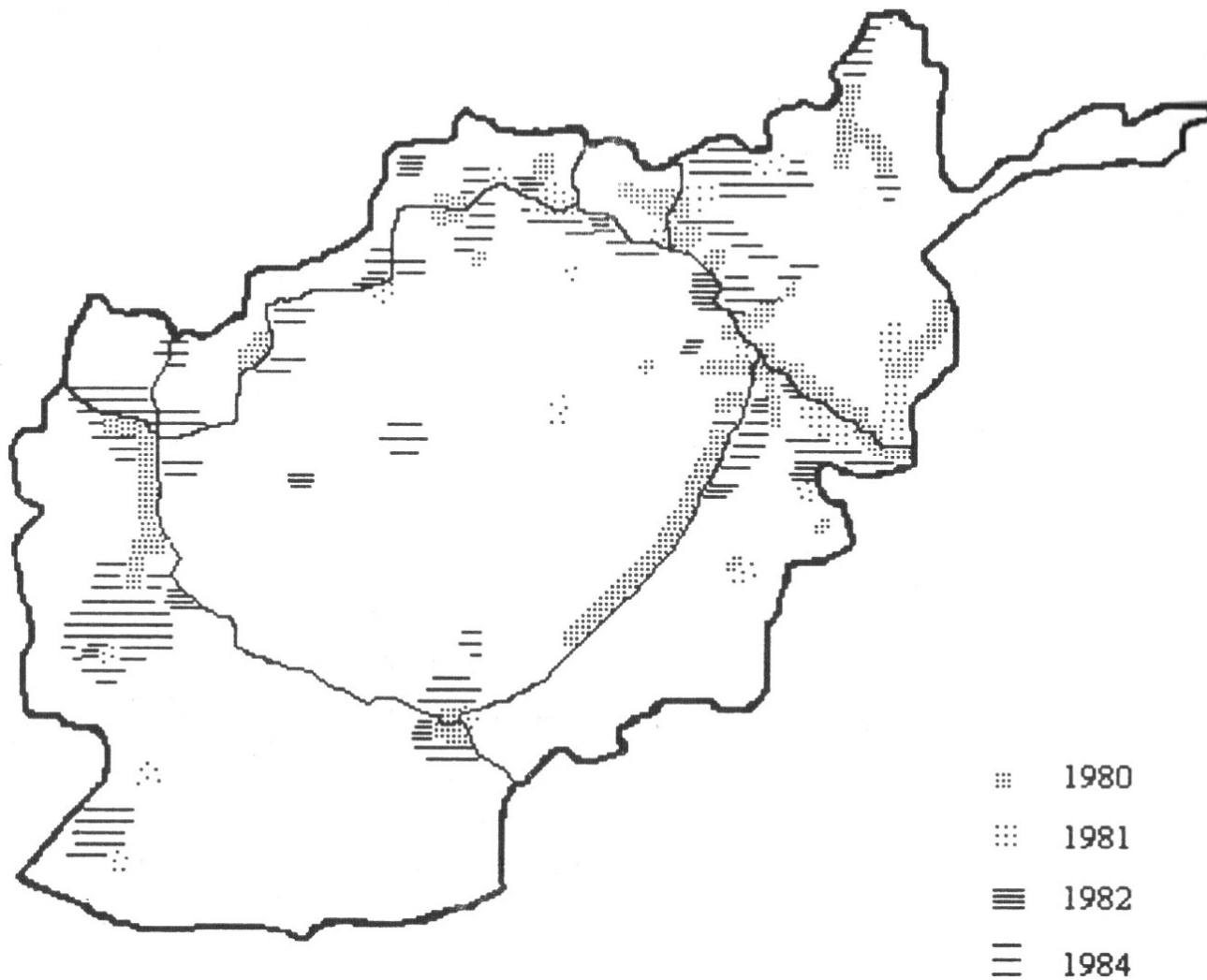


## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



## Military activities 1980-84





## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



## Soviet Counter-Insurgency Approach

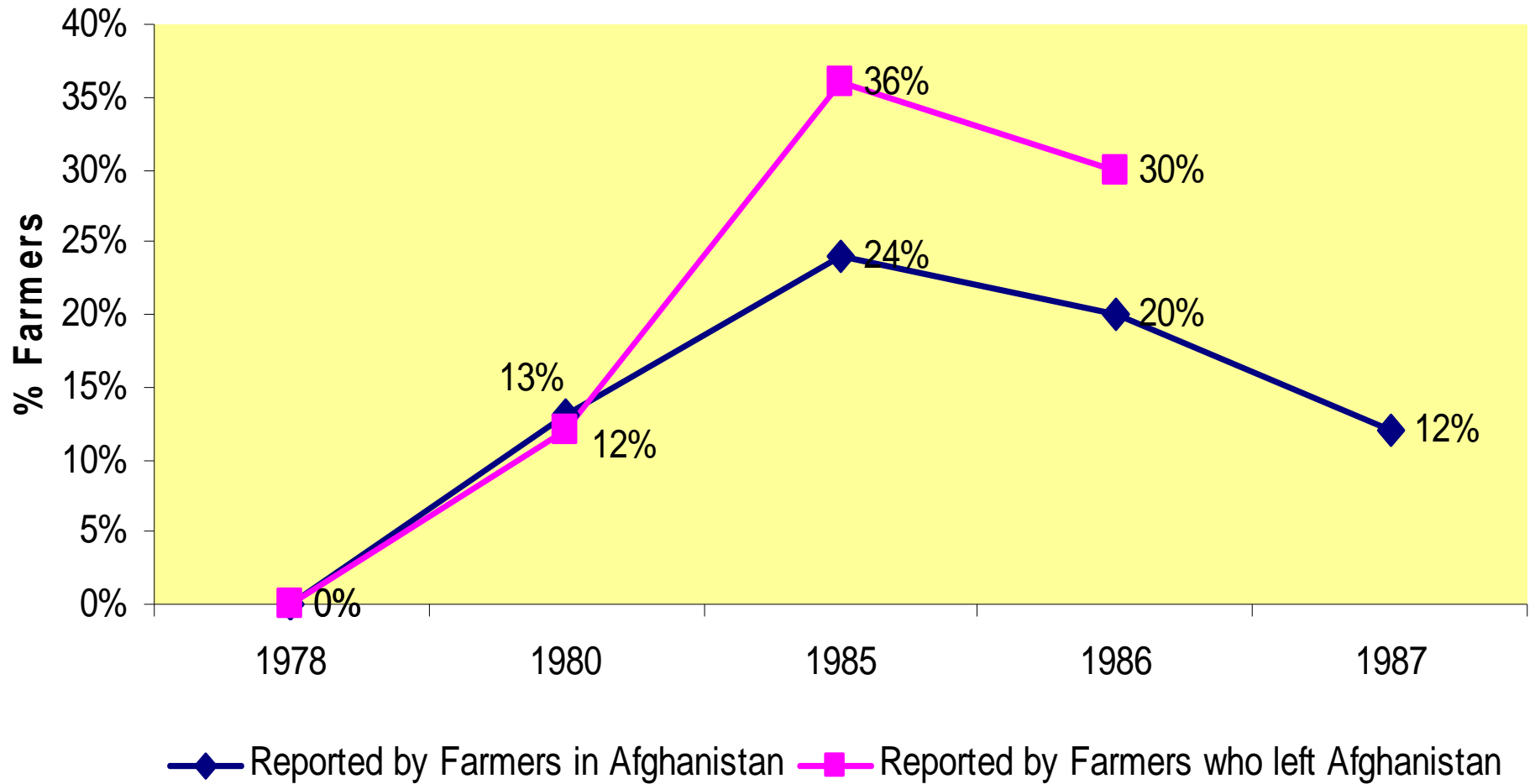
“I hold it a principle in Asia that the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on your enemy.”

General M.O. Skobelev,

Conqueror of Turkestan, 1881

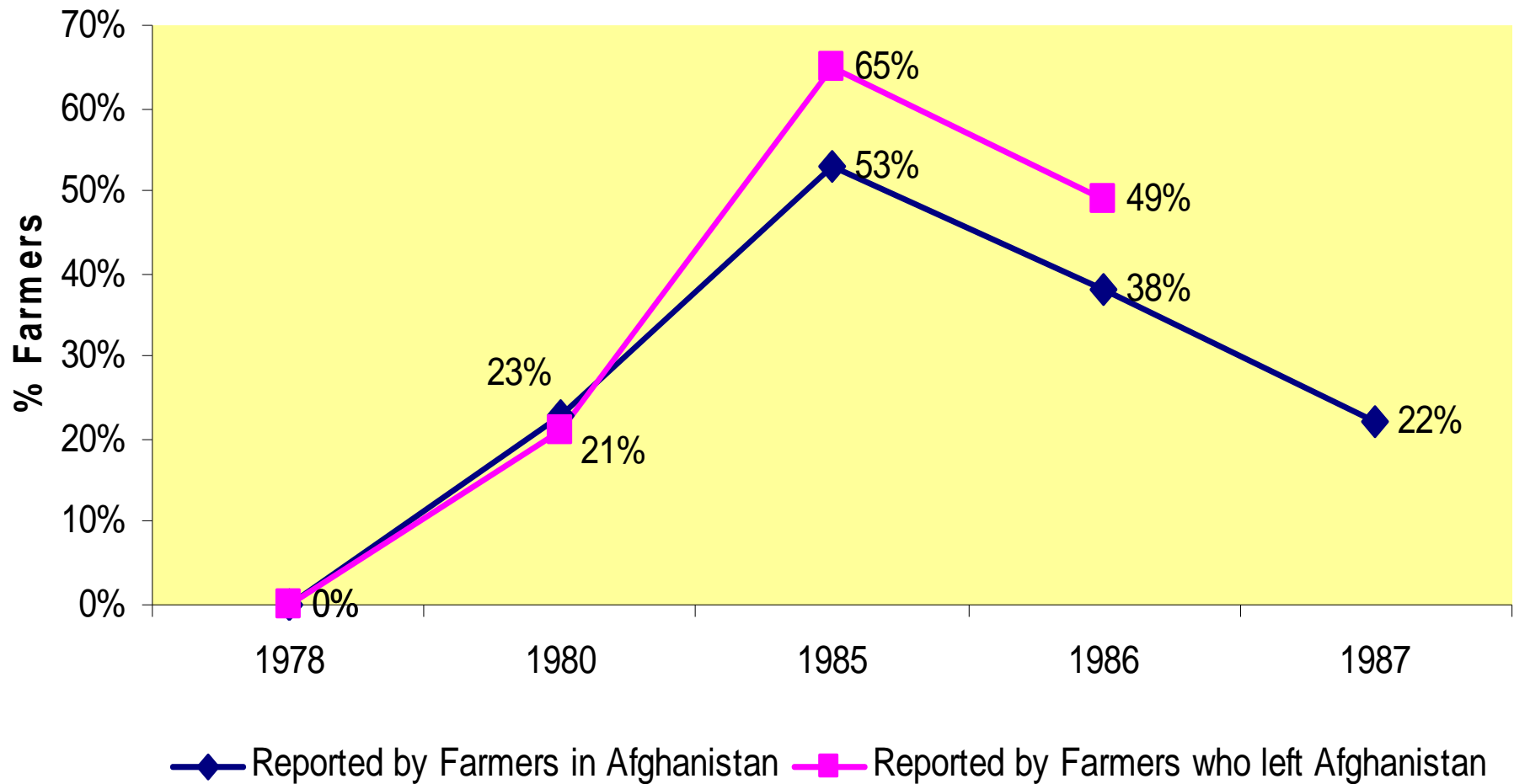


# Effects of War - Destruction of Irrigation





# Effects of War - Bombing of Villages









## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



**Fayzabad, Village Sari, The regiment's command in negotiations with the local elders**





**Soviet soldiers and “friendly” mujahidin. Ceasefire**



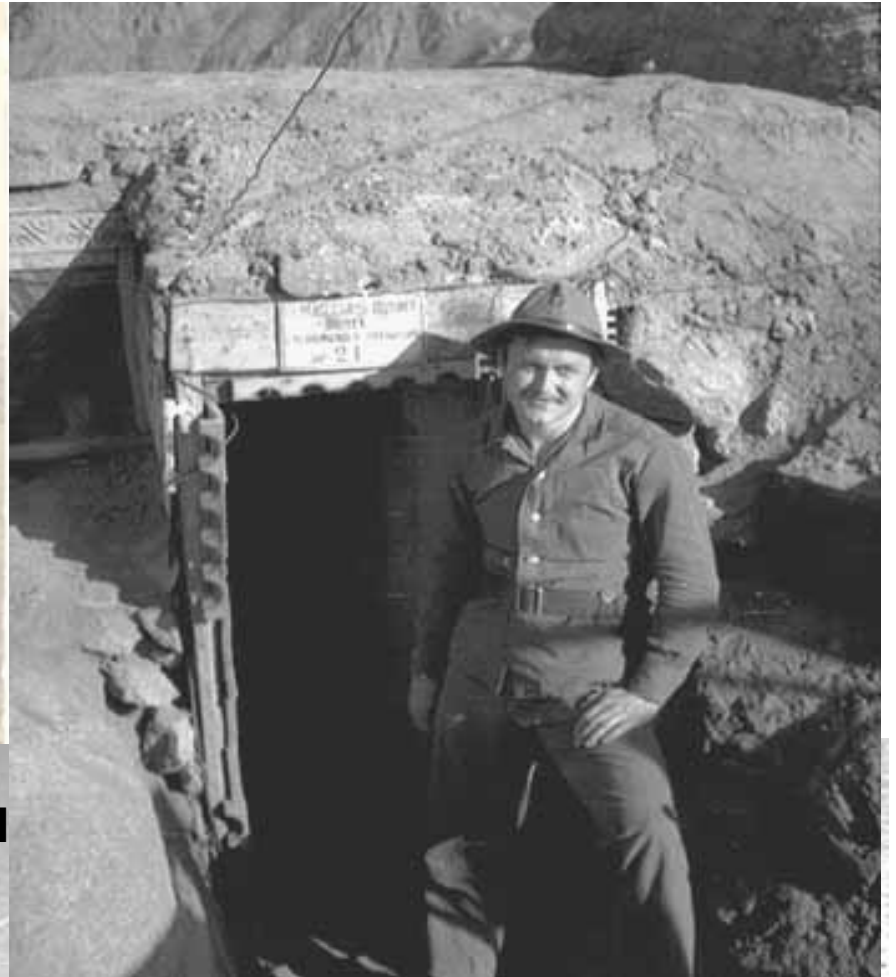
## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- **Security outposts**
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



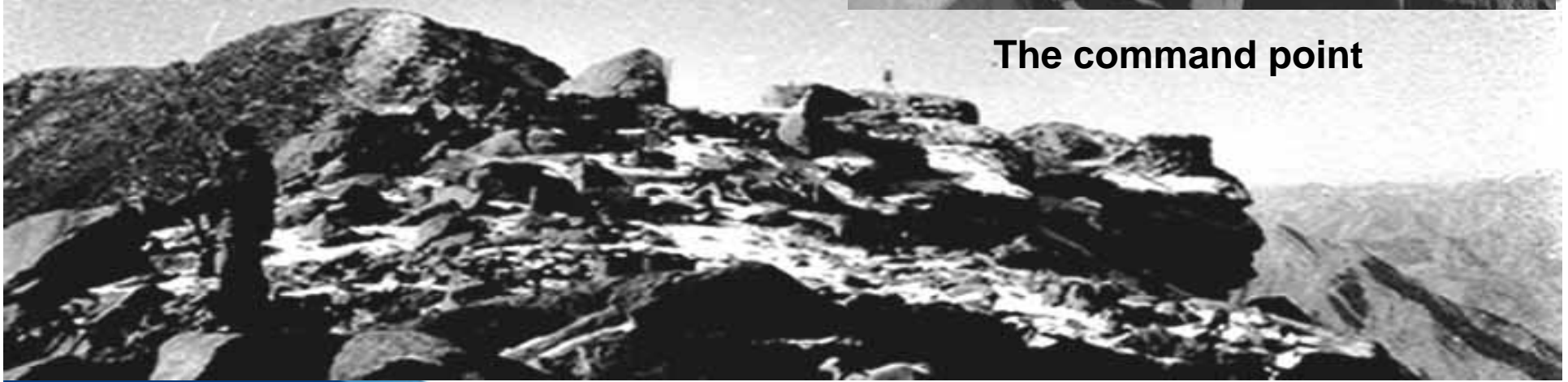
# Outpost 21, Rukha, Panjshir Valley



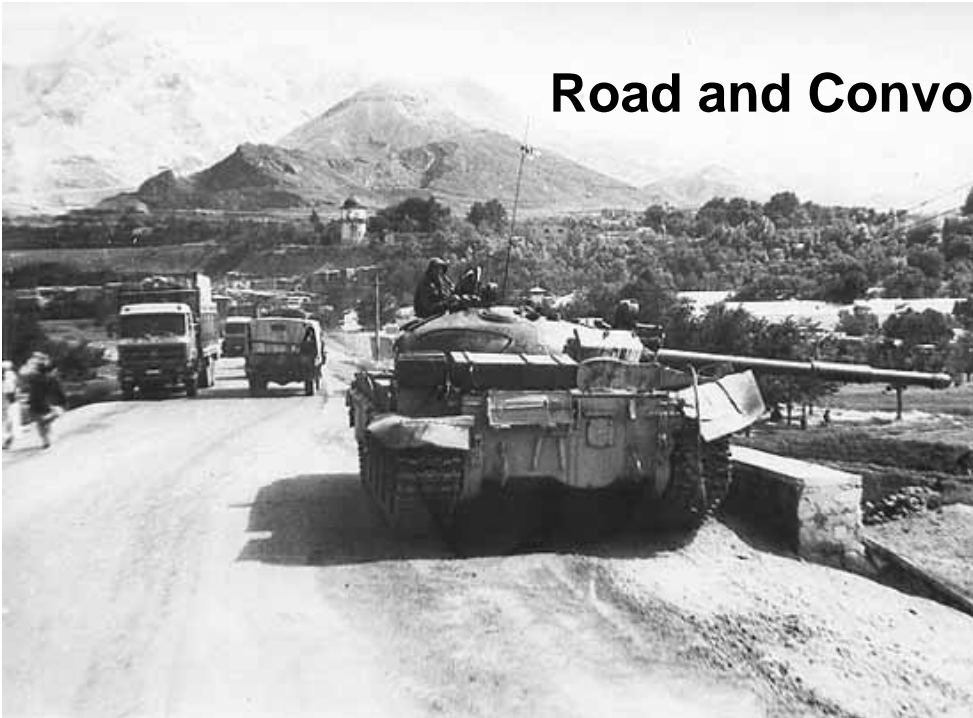


**Post 21's helicopter landing and radio-signal interceptor**

**The command point**



## Road and Convoy Security Posts





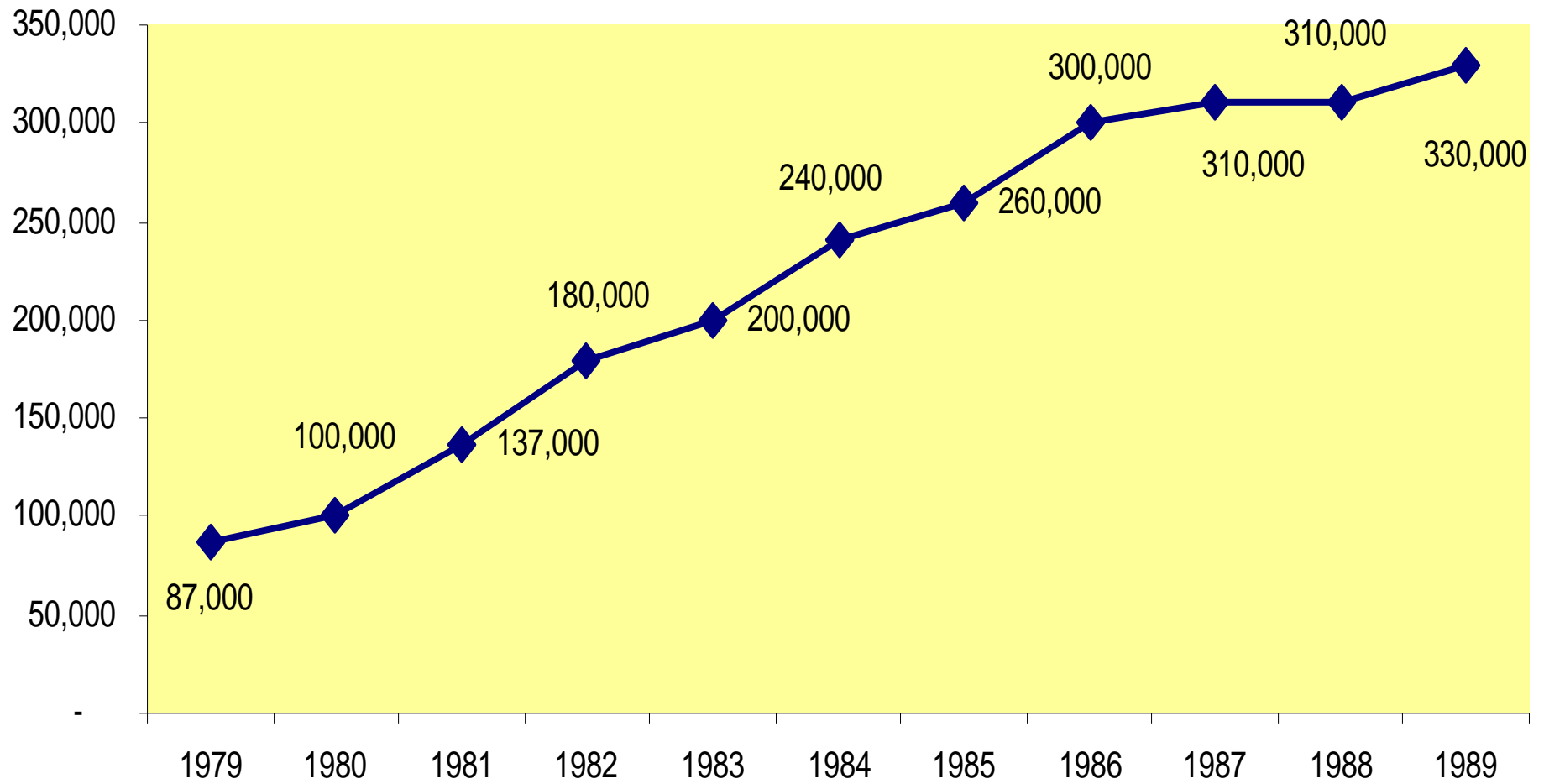
## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- **Building up the strength of DRA Forces**
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986



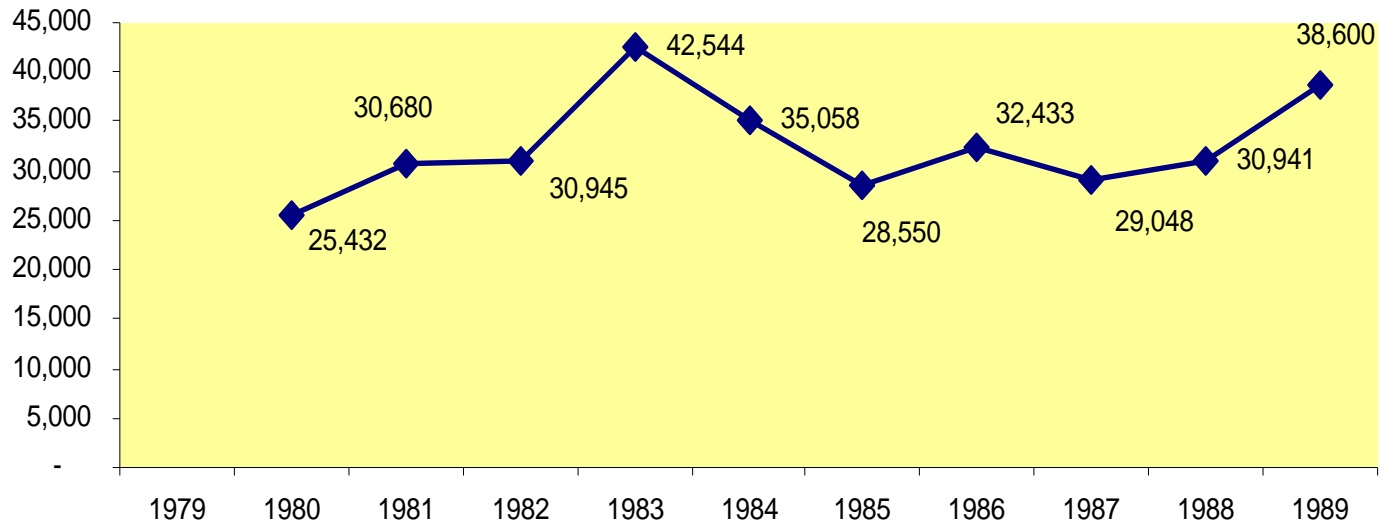


## Growth of DRA Forces

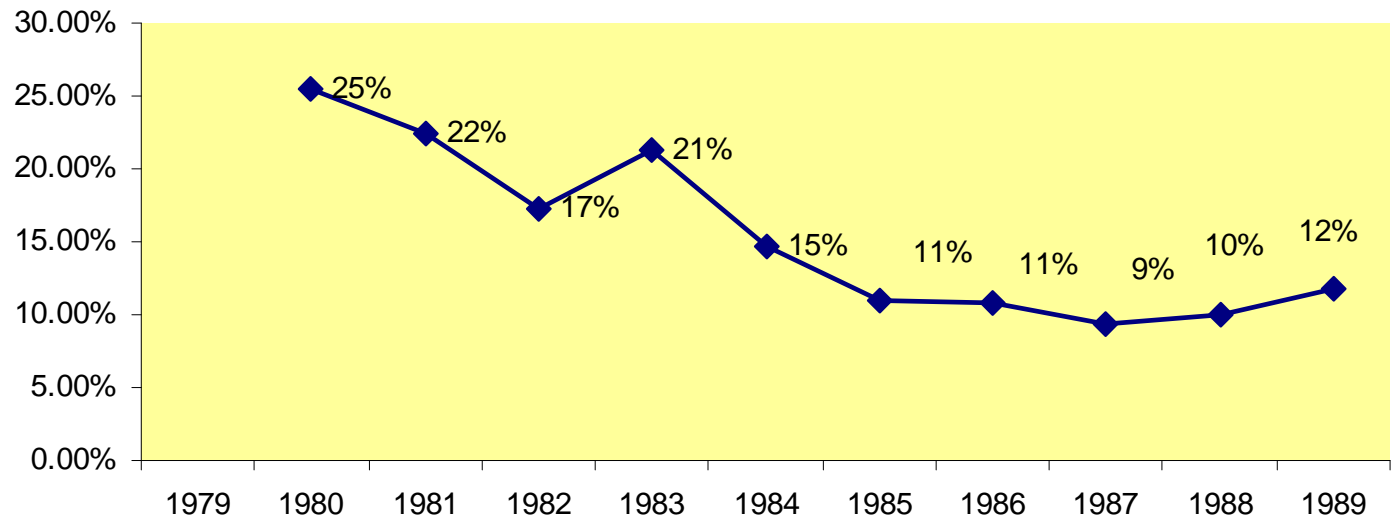


# Desertion Rates

## Number of Desertions per Year



## Percent Desertions per Year





## DRA Forces breakdown (1988)

- |                     |         |                                     |         |
|---------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| • Government Forces |         | • Militia on the side of government |         |
| – Army              | 90,000  | – Tribal                            | 62,000  |
| – Border Guards     | 42,000  | – GDR                               | 35,000  |
| – Gendarmerie       | 96,700  | – Self-defence                      | 53,000  |
| – KhaD              | 68,700  |                                     |         |
| – Special Guards    | 11,500  |                                     |         |
| • Total             | 308,900 | • Total                             | 150,000 |

**Grand Total 458,900**



## Force Level to Population Ratio Comparison

- Afghanistan (1988)
  - **26:1,000** (Soviet + DRA forces)
- Iraq (May 2008)
  - **22:1,000** (26:1,000 including Sons of Iraq).
- Afghanistan (2009)
  - **7.6:1,000**
- Required as per past COIN experience
  - **425,000 – 640,000**



# DRA Air Force





## Women in DRA Forces



Female village self-defence  
group



DRA Air Force woman officer at Lycee graduation  
ceremony in Baghram, Autumn, 1987.



## **Soviet soldiers with the local self-defence unit, Badahshan**





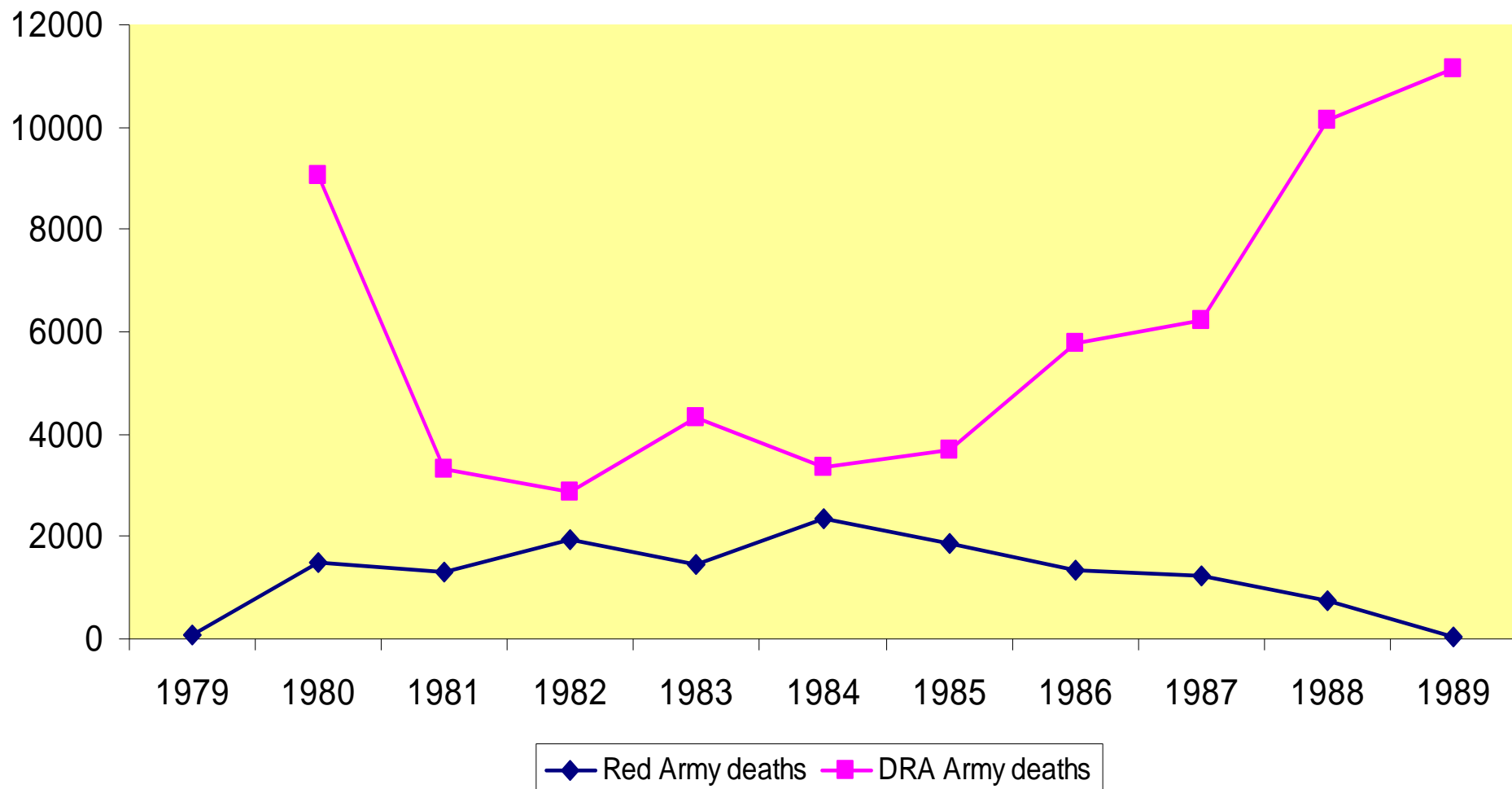
## Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986





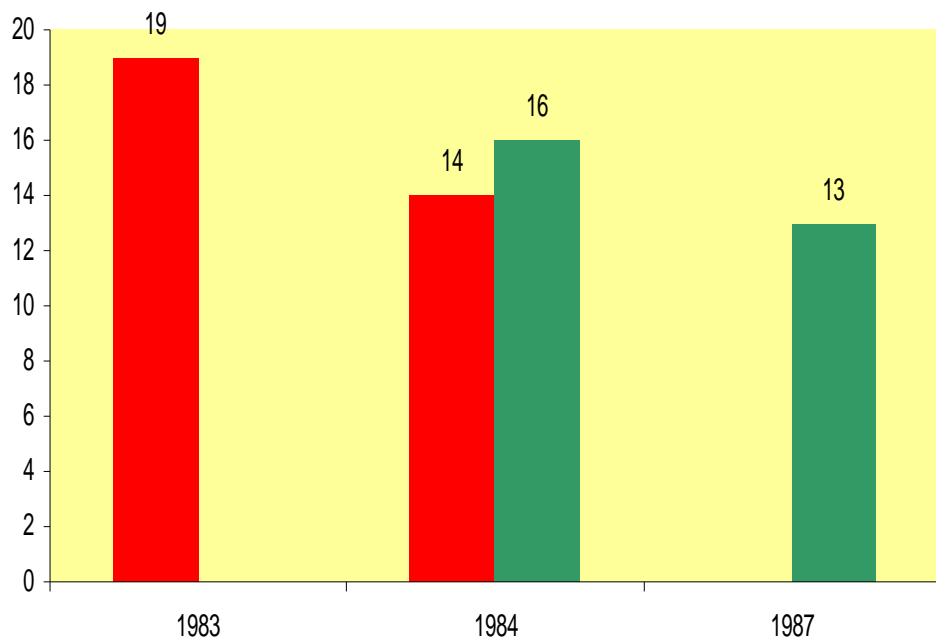
## Soviet and DRA Forces Deaths





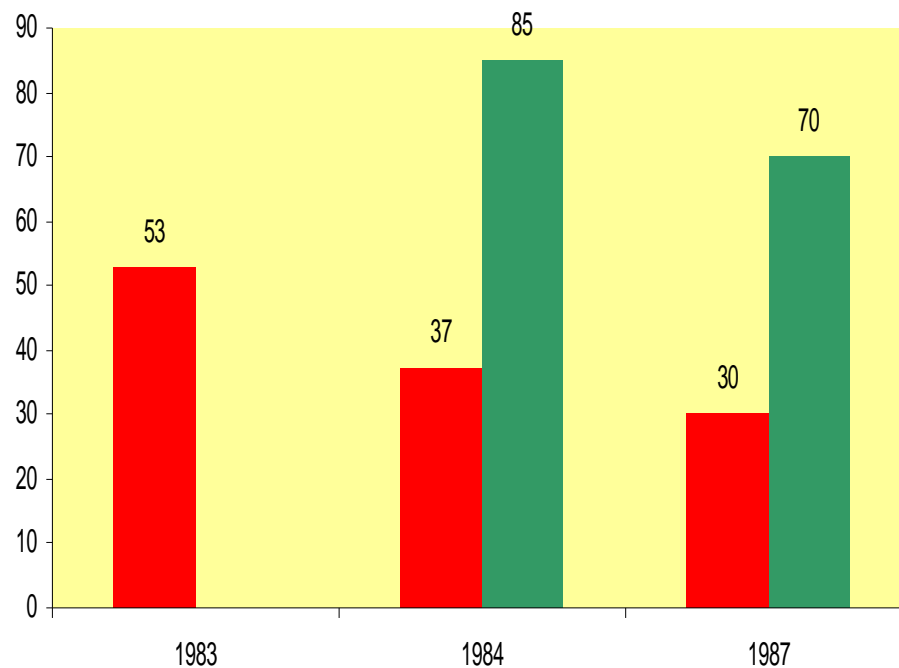
# Border Sealing Activities

## Ambushes (daily)



■ By Soviet  
■ By DRA

## Caravan Interceptions (monthly)





## Soviet – Afghan joint operation





## Handing Battalion's Position to the Afghan Army





Joint operation with KhaD captures a mujahidin leader



KhaD officers with captured mujahidins



Afghan and Soviet troops in ambush position



After successful operation, Parwan, April 1987



## Adjustments - Tactical

- Tactics devised to minimize losses
- Armed group concept
- Bounding overwatch
- Improvement of air assault and helicopter gunship tactics
- Enveloping detachments
- Use of special forces



**66 Reconnaissance company. Jalalabad**



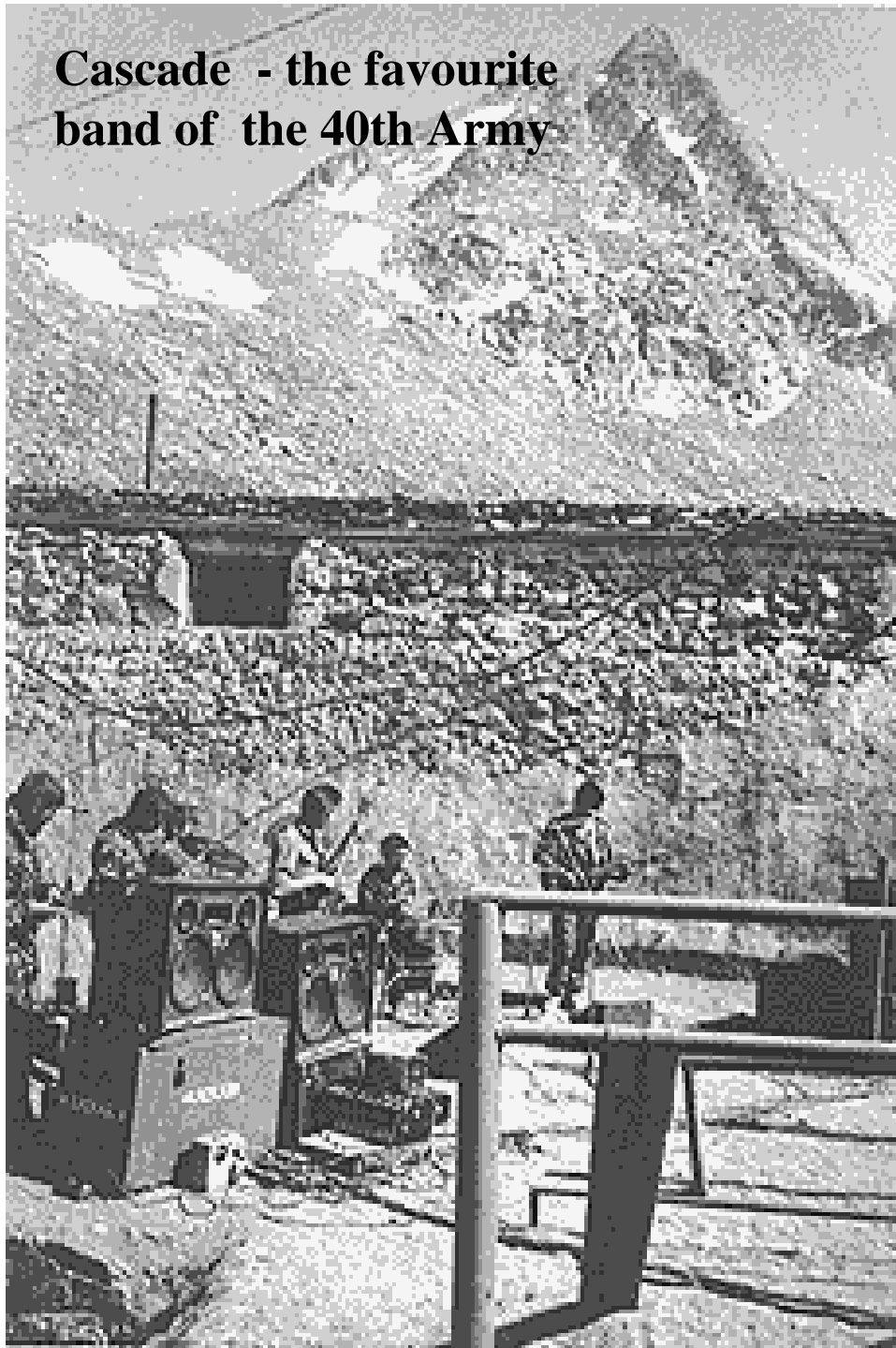




# Spteznaz in action: Destroying a supply caravan, 1987



**Cascade - the favourite  
band of the 40th Army**



**Galina Podzarev, an actor from Moscow**





## Adjustment - Force Structure

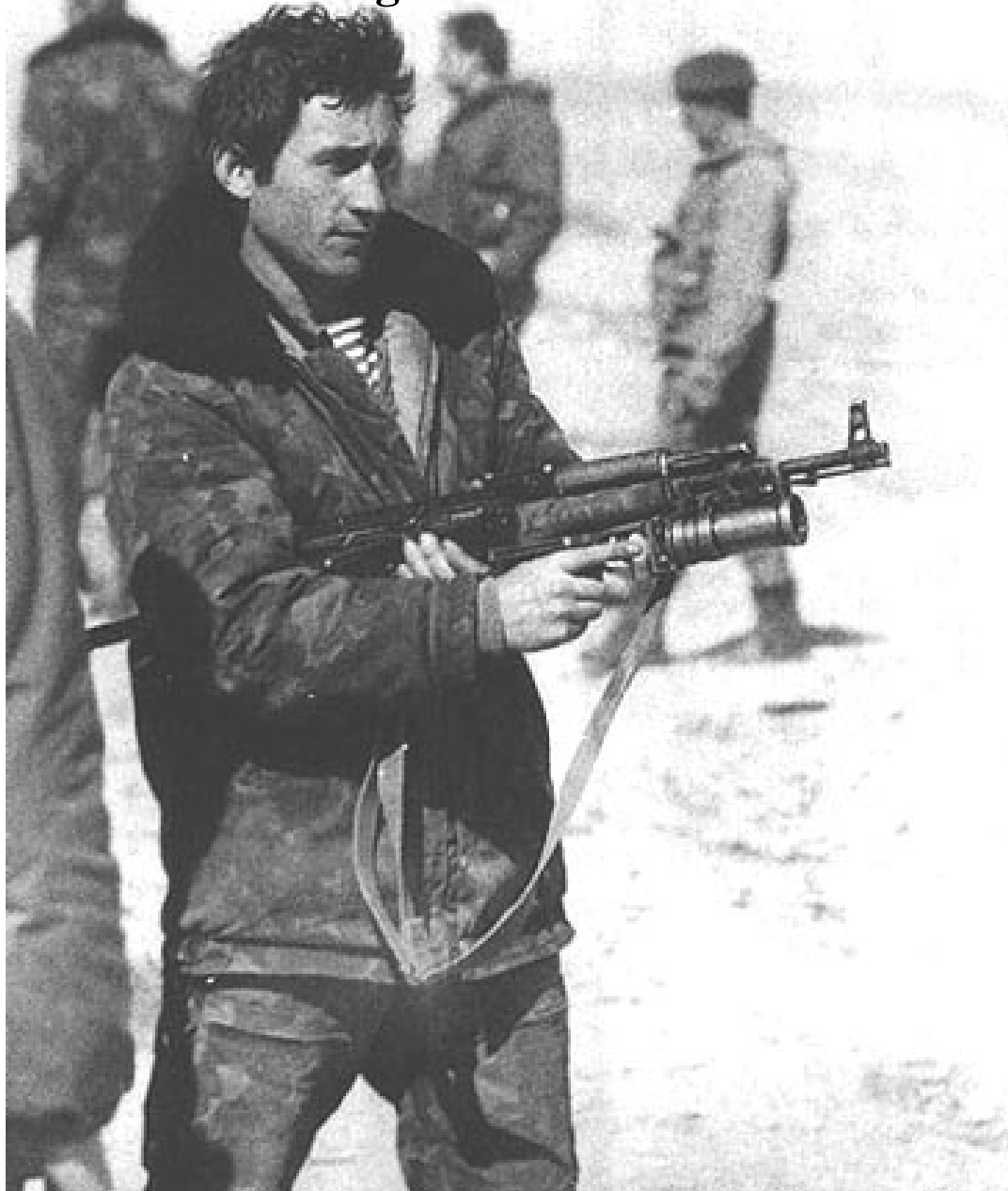
- Shift to smaller, independent units
  - 7 divisions  $\Rightarrow$  4 divisions + independent units
- Withdrawal of tank and anti-aircraft regiments
- Decentralization of fire support and assets
  - shifted from army and division level to battalion level
- Air power, air mobility used as a force multiplier
  - helicopters increased from 50 to 300
- Use of special forces
  - 20% of all Red Army special forces



## Adjustment - Equipment and Training

- New systems tested and introduced
  - personnel carriers, helicopters and helicopter gunships, but not tanks
- Improvements to infantry's personal gear and firepower
- Specialized mountain warfare training schools

**The GP-25 "Koster" ("Bonfire")  
under-barrel grenade launcher**



**The RPG-18 "Mukha" ("Fly")**





# **Social and State Development**

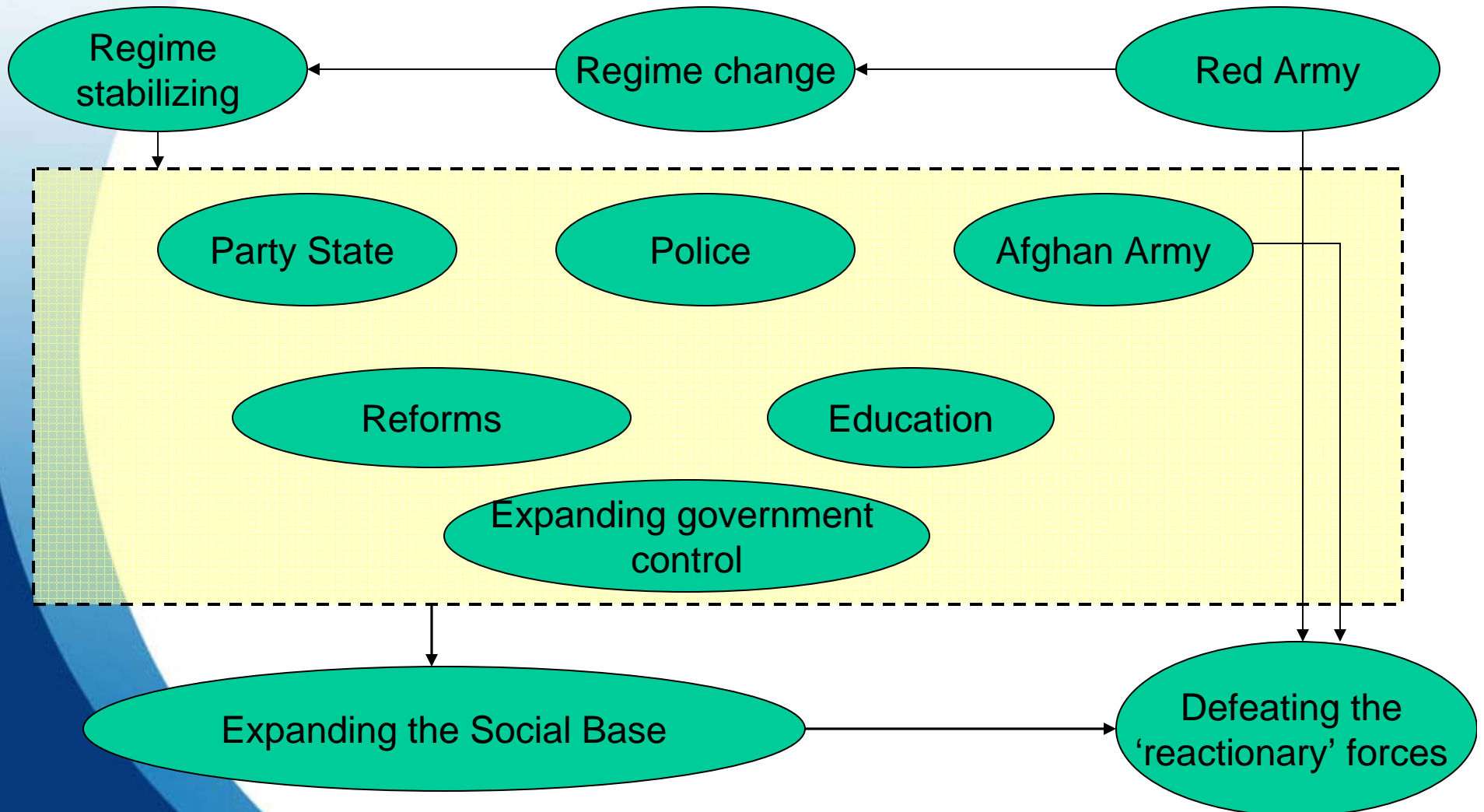


## Traditional Functions of State in Islam

- External security (against enemy forces)
- Justice
- Ensuring overall support for Muslim institutions and religion
- Policing, social justice, education, health
  - responsibility of individual communities and Islamic charities (waqf)



# Development: State Building Strategy

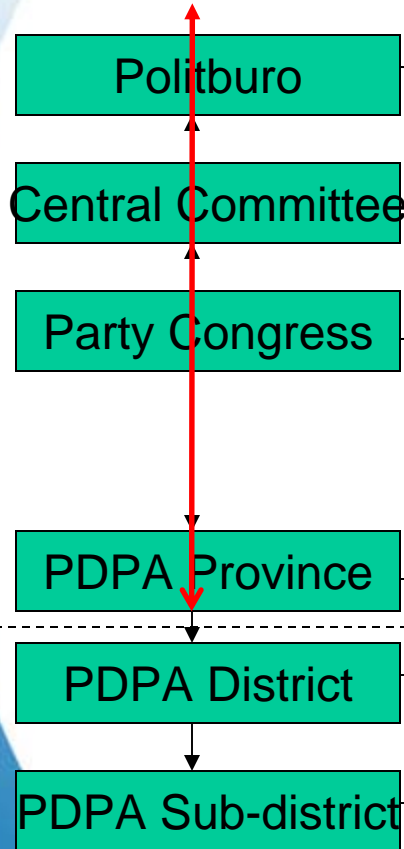




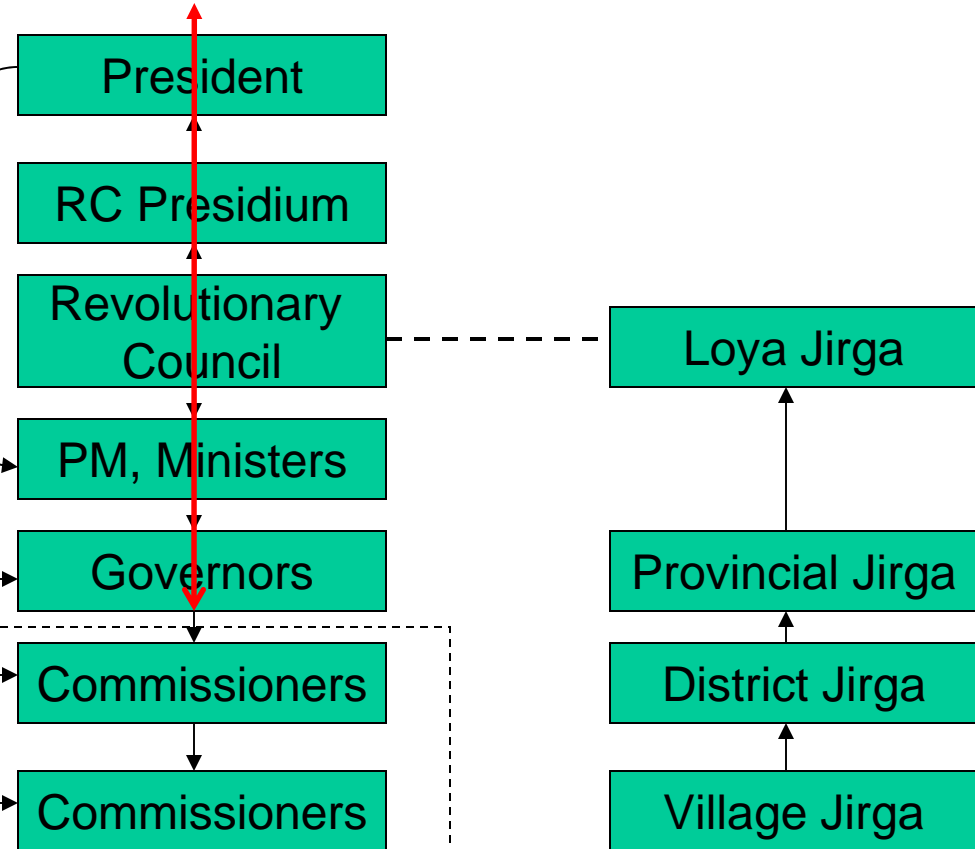


# The Afghan Party State

## PDPA Structure



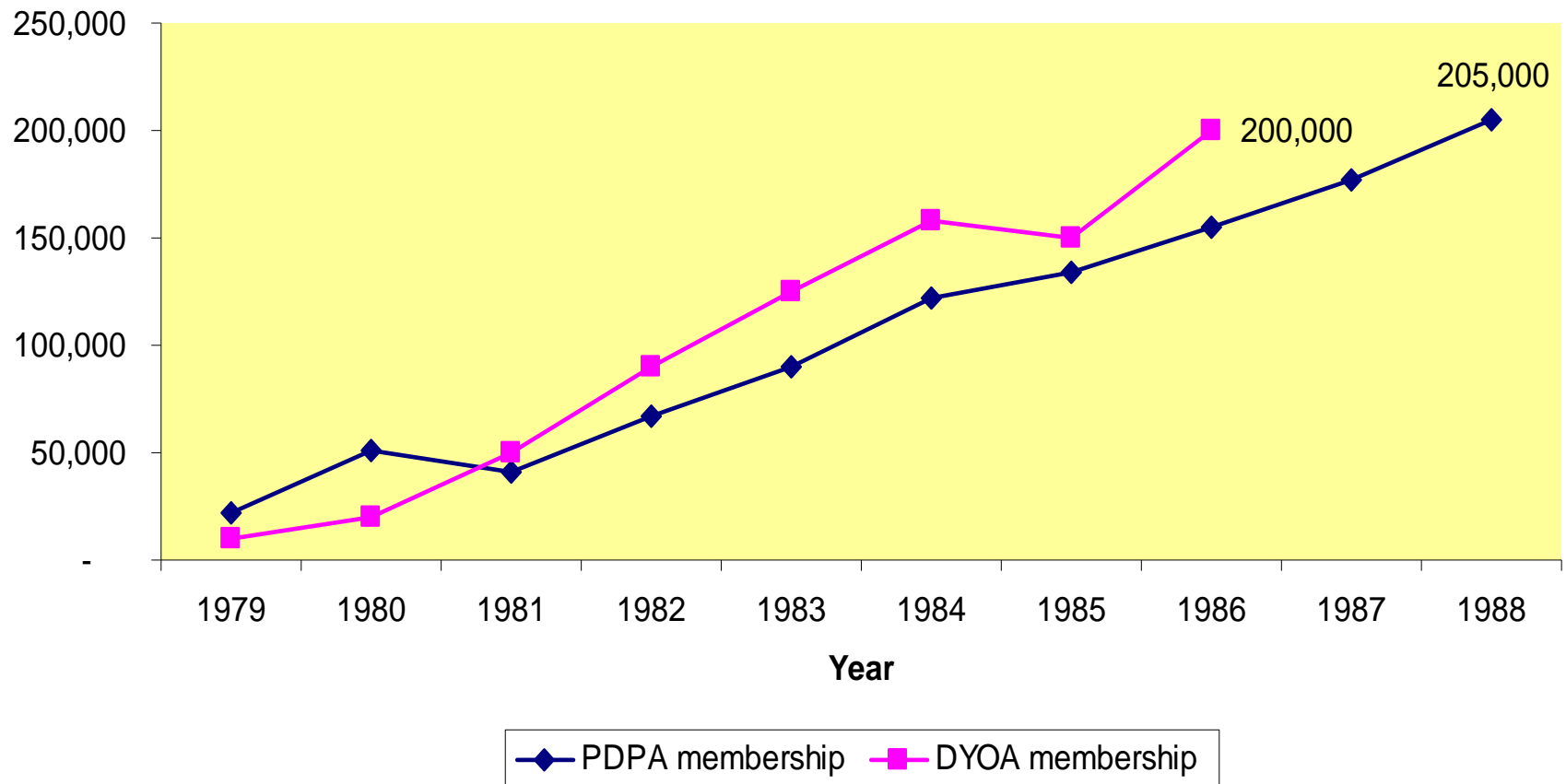
## State Institutions





# Growth of PDPA

## PDPA and DYOA Membership Growth





## Activists of the Afghan Women's Democratic Organization





## Secretary of the local Committee of the PDPA, Kalay-Dana, Parwan, 1986



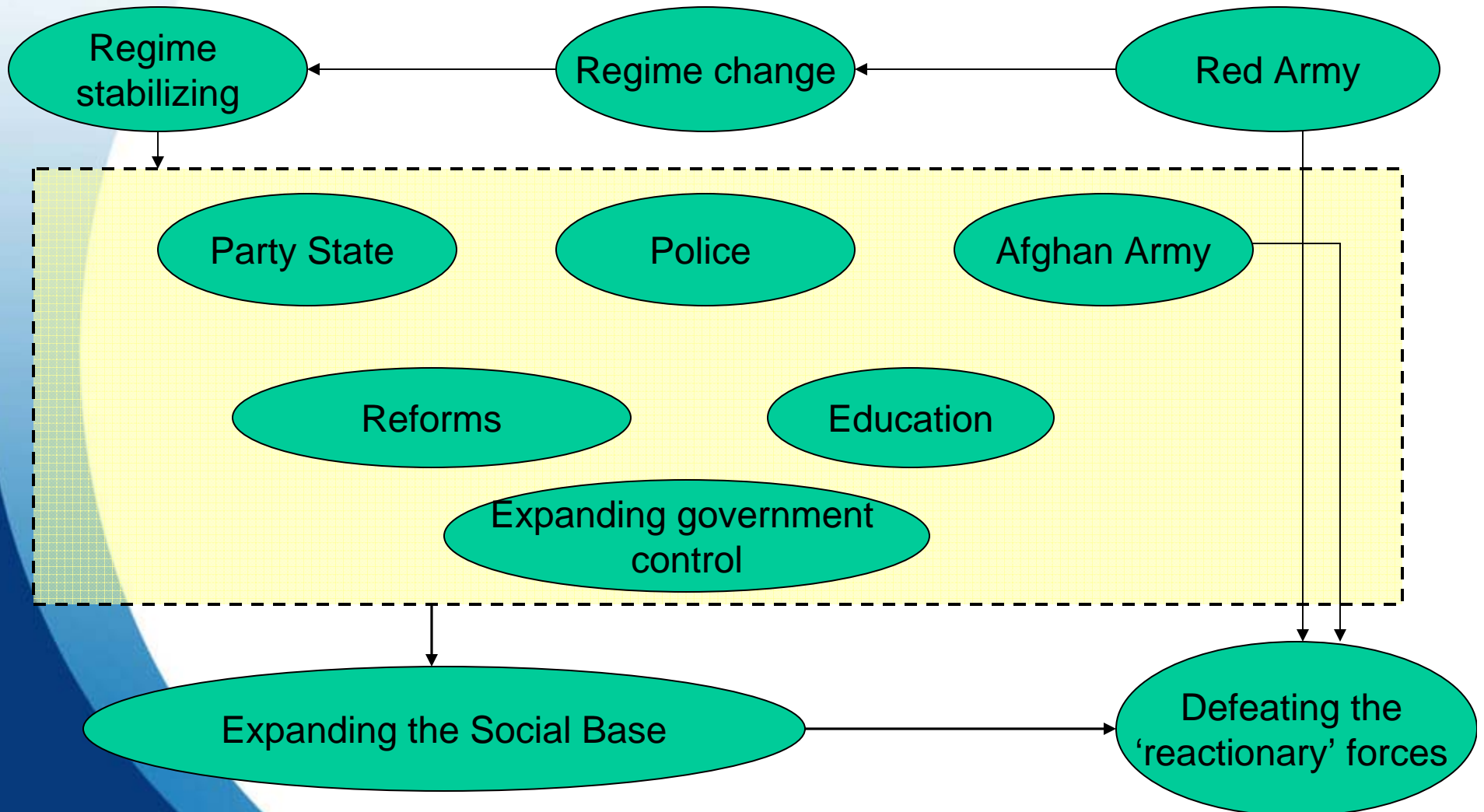


## “Delivery” of PDPA activists in Parwan, 1987





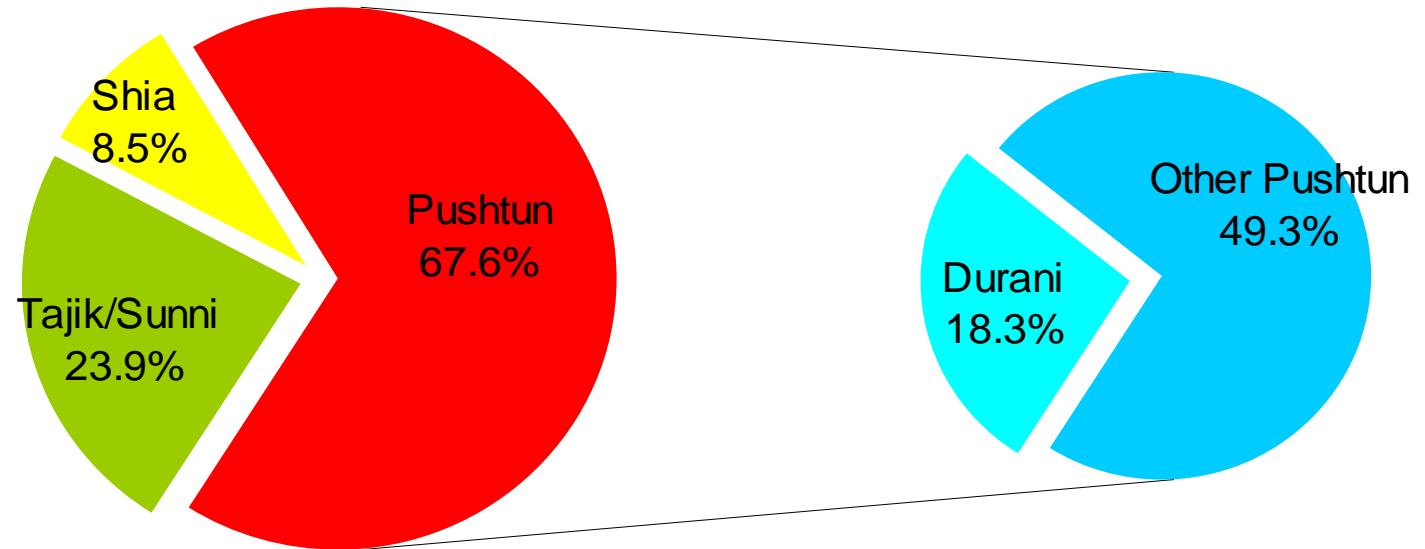
# Development: State Building Strategy





## Ethnic Politics

- Ethnic equality guaranteed in 1964
- Khalq and Parcham – ethnic composition

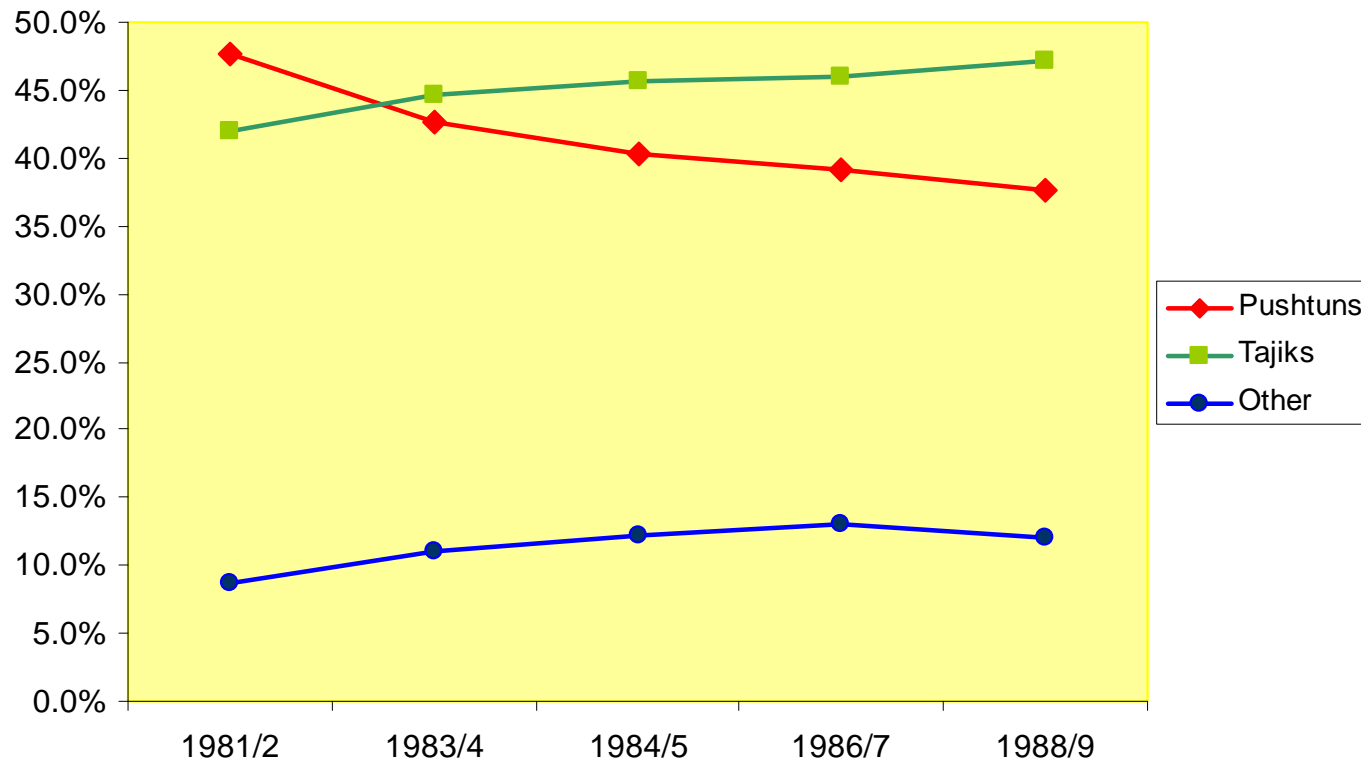


- Language reforms as ethnic politics



# Ethnic Policies and Counterinsurgency

- Ethnic Favourism



Ethnic Composition of PDPA



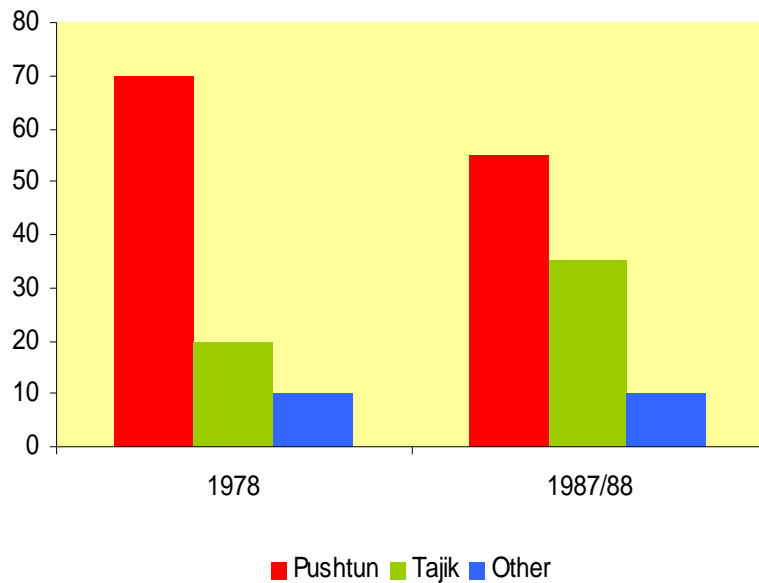


# From Ethnic Rivalry to Ethnic War

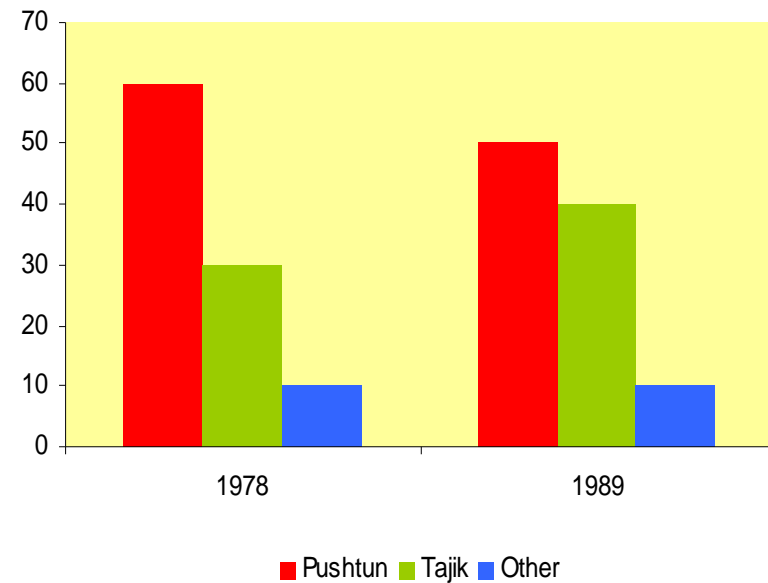
- Ethnic policies changed the balance of power

## Ethnic Composition of the DRA Army

Senior Officers

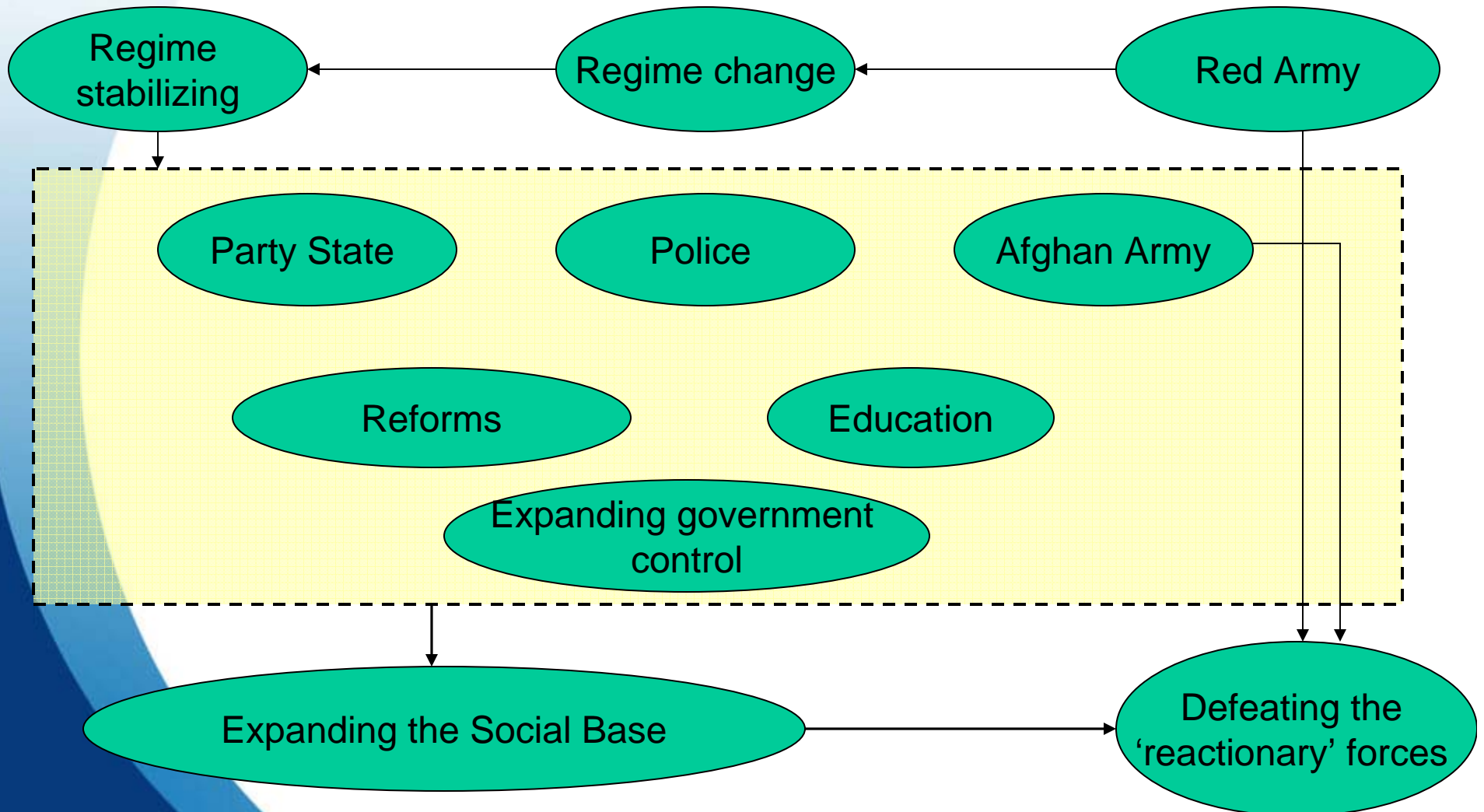


Troops



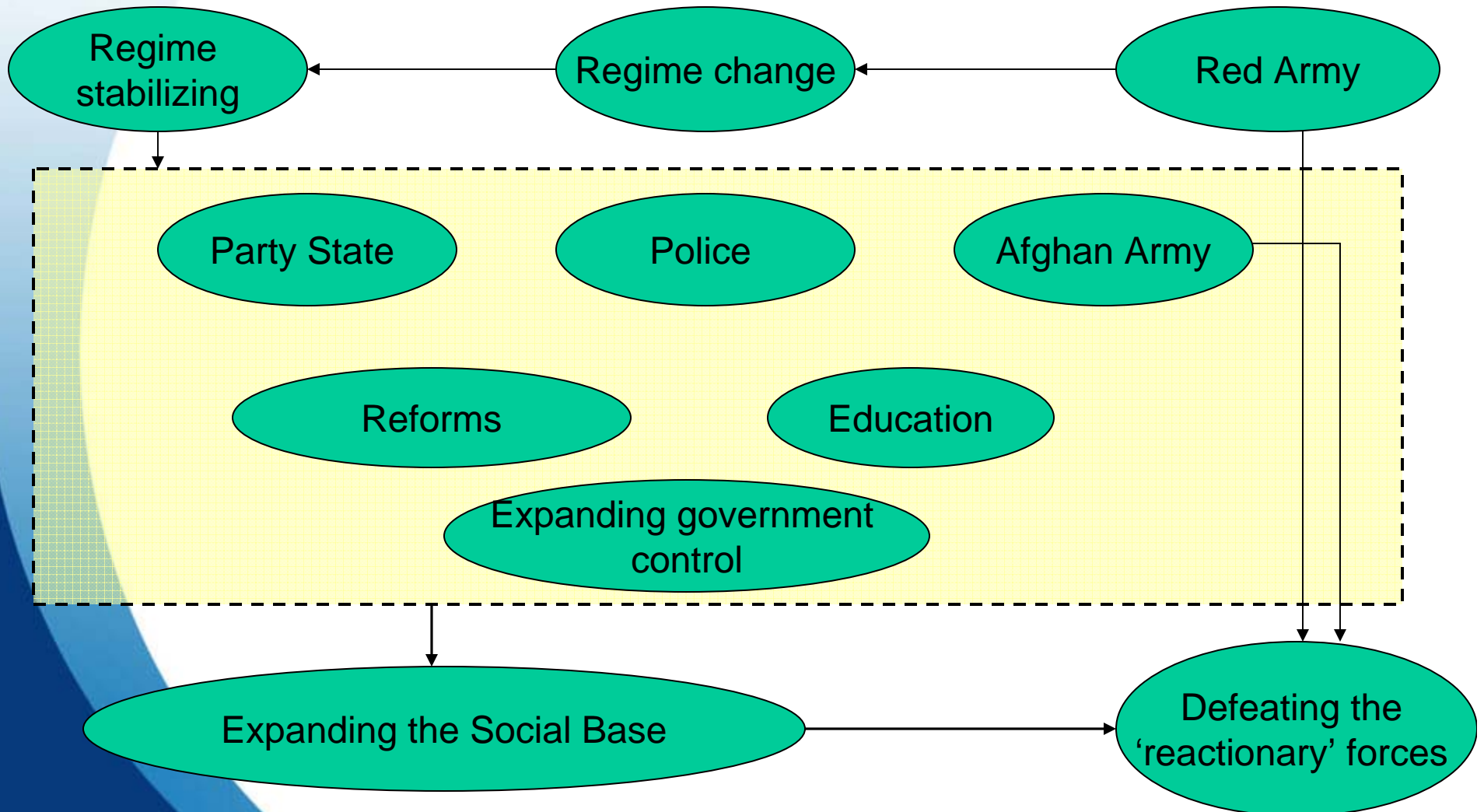


# Development: State Building Strategy



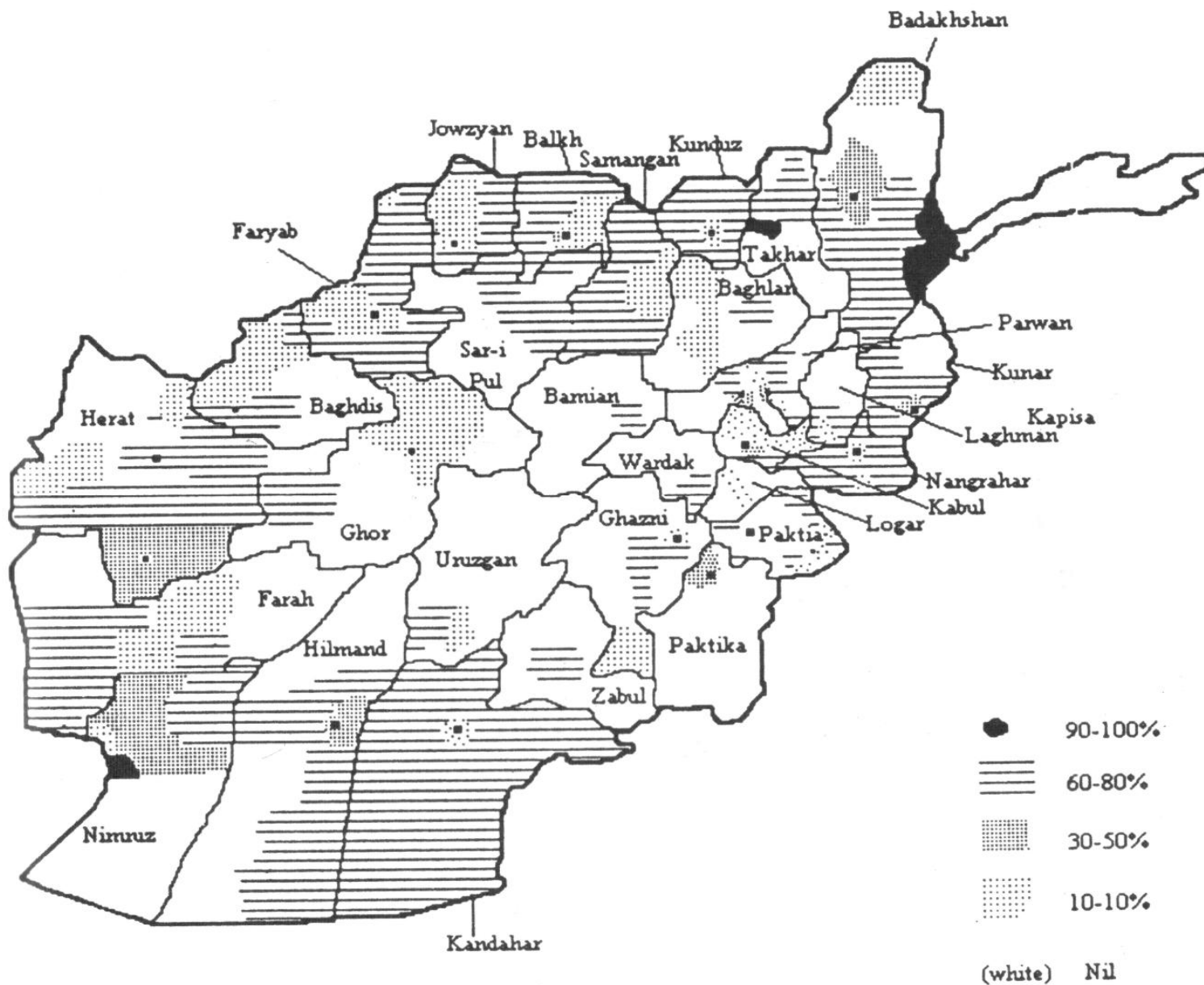


# Development: State Building Strategy



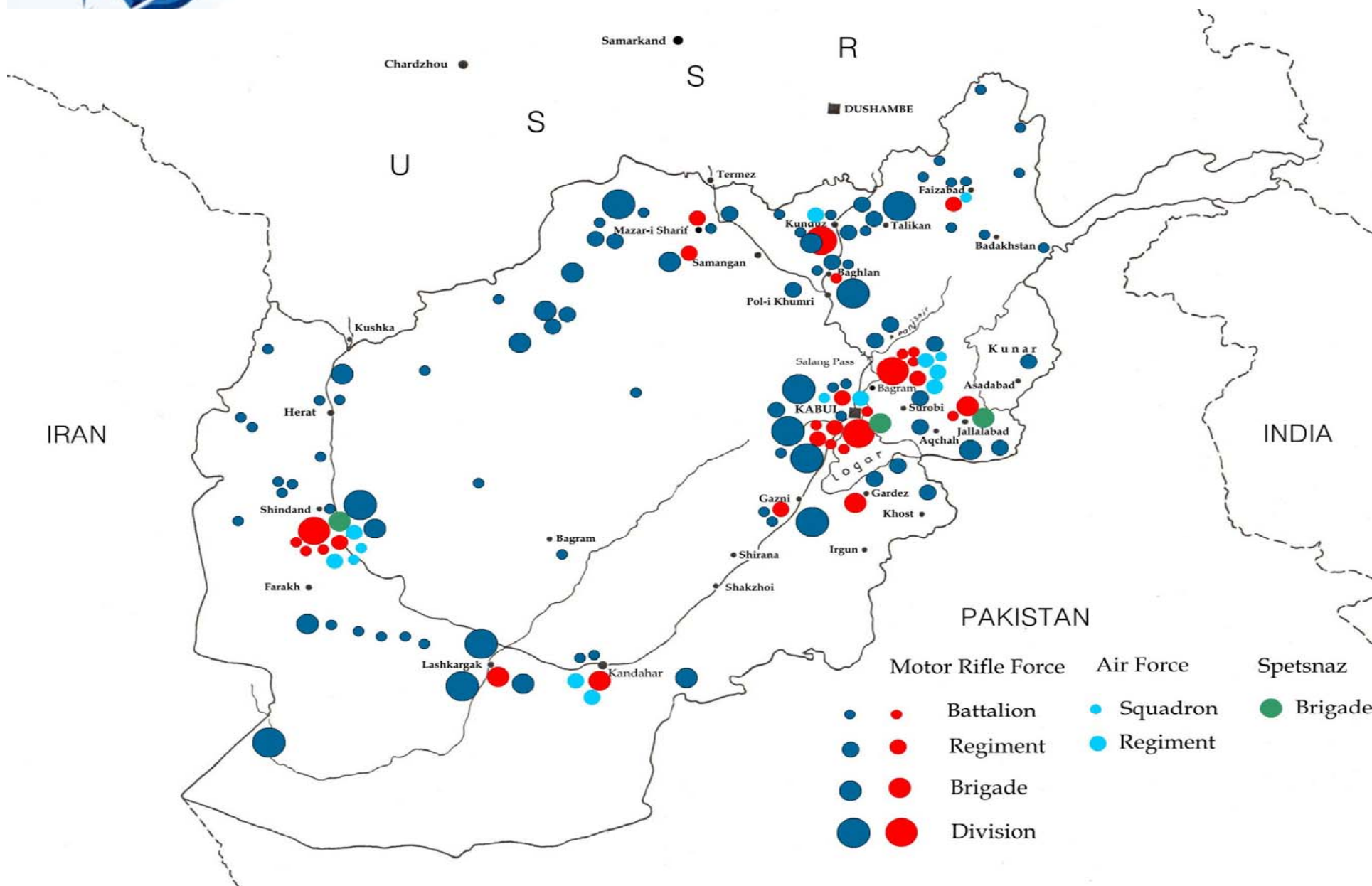


# Government Control, 1988



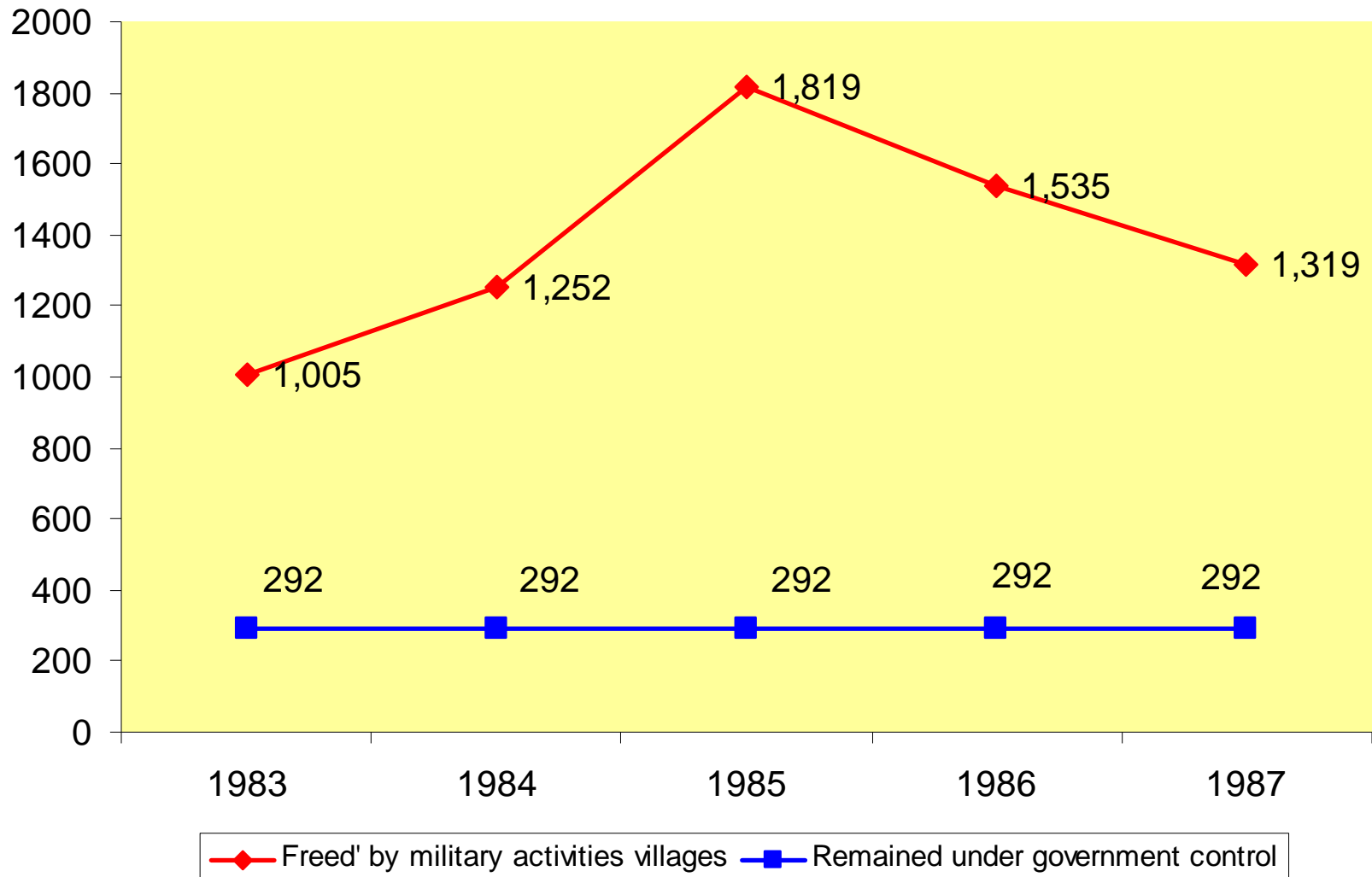


# Soviet and DRA Bases



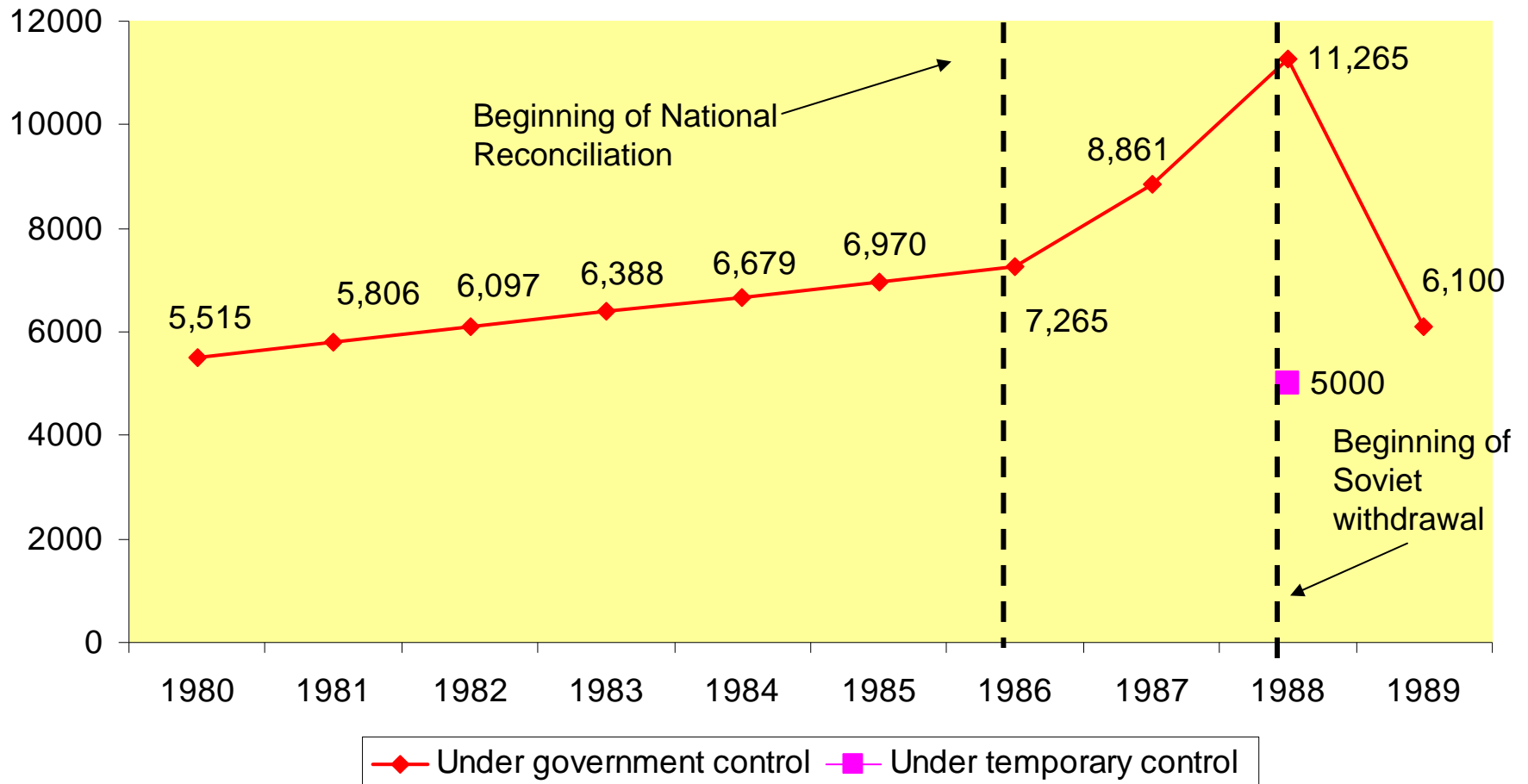


## Limits of Military ‘Pacification’





# Number of Villages under Government Control





## Diplomacy: Internal

- Unifying PDPA's factions
- Pacification Policy
  - agreements with local leaders and mujahidin
- Loya and local Jirgas (1985, 1988)
- Integrating the ulema (religious scholars) within state run religious system
- Agitprop (CIMIC)
- Promotion of national reconciliation and unity





## Agitprop

- Part of force structure
- Composition
  - Military staff
  - Medical personnel
  - Party representatives
  - Entertainers
- Function
  - Spread of information, distribution of fuel, food, medical help, reconnaissance, negotiations
- Initiative gradually “Afghanized”

**The Agitprop detachment, 1987. Parwan Province. Durani village.**





**Meeting devoted to the 68-th Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1986**



**Movie watching. 1986**



**Fuel distribution, 1986**



**Agitprop of the 108th MRD, 1985**



## **Change of Strategy: National Reconciliation**

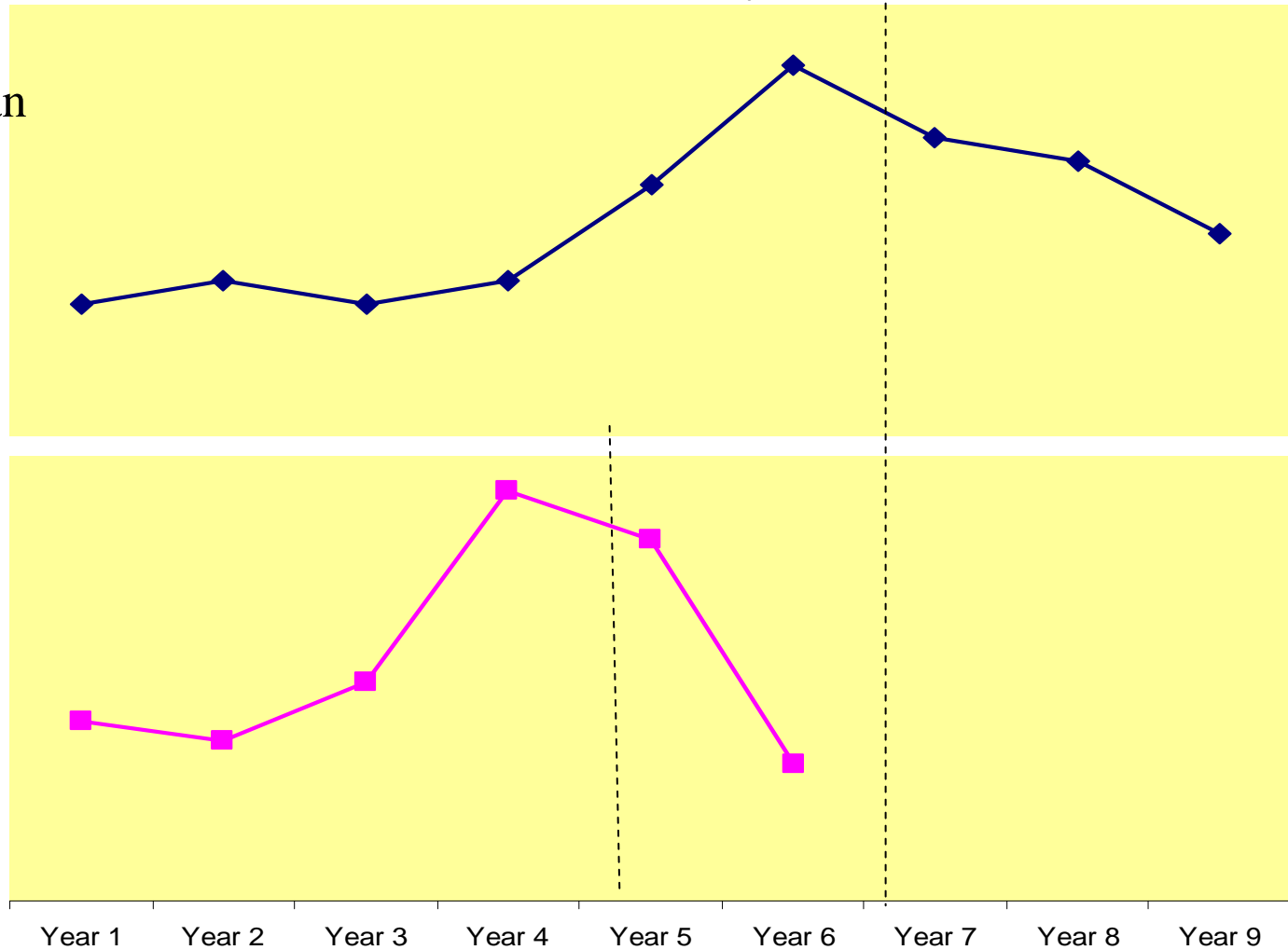
- Launched in 1986
- More inclusive government
- Reversal of controversial reforms
- Socialism replaced with nationalism
- Promoting Islamic character of the state
- Accommodating and buying off resistance commanders
  - ....but not challenging their authority



## Results - Civilian Casualties

- Civilian deaths decrease by 65-70% (1986-87)

Afghanistan





## Results - Reconciliation Process, 1986-89

- By 1990, 25% of all non-government armed units had signed “reconciliation” agreements and 40% ceasefire agreements





## Development: Economic

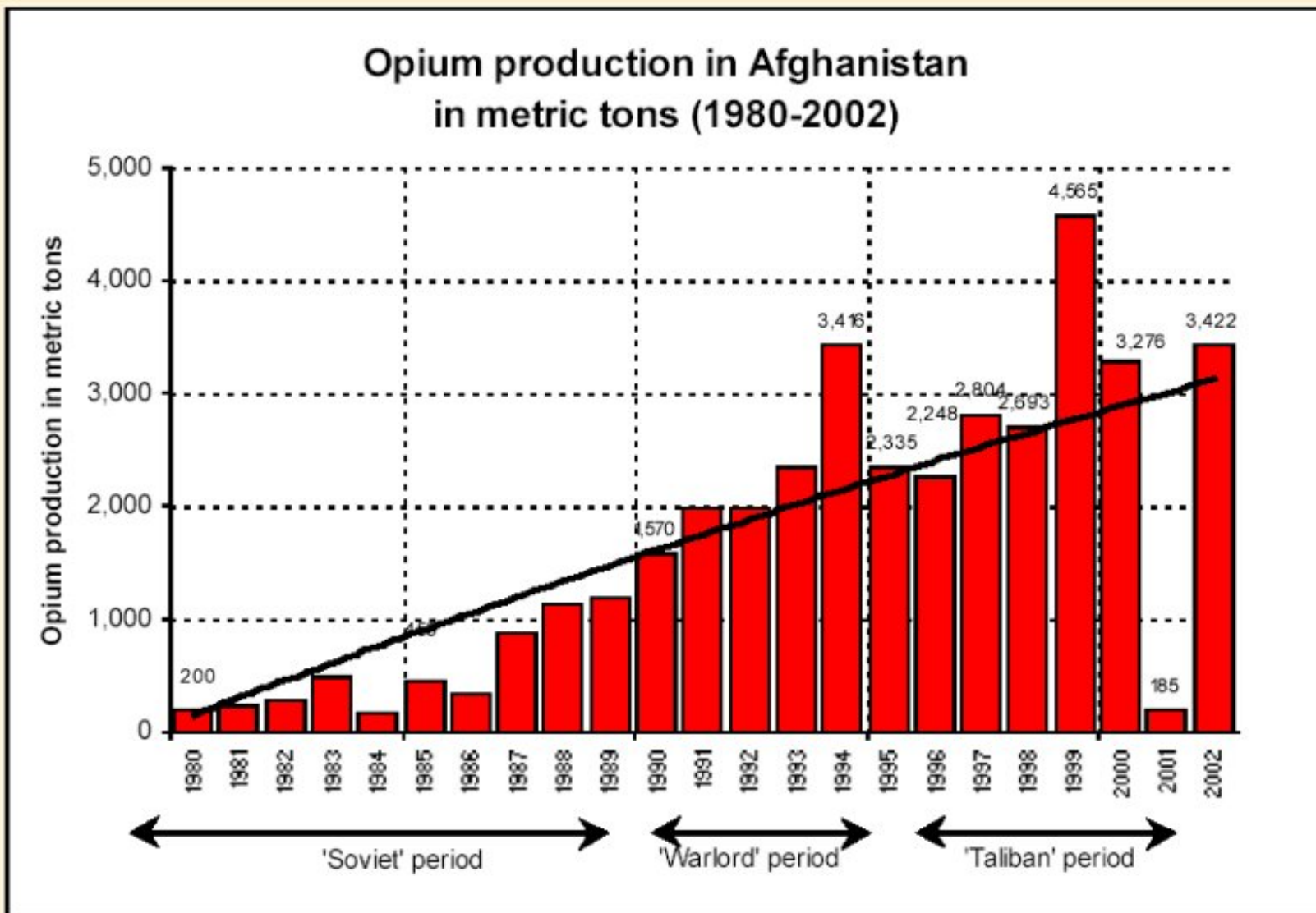
- Extensive prior Soviet economic investment
- Increasing the state share of national income
  - 1975 -10%; 1988 - 20% of GDP
  - in manufacturing - 80%
  - in the construction sector – 90%
  - in transportation – 60%
  - Oil and gas exploration – 100%
- Domestic revenue, excluding sales of natural gas
  - Growth of 142 % from 1977 to 1989 (13% per year)



## Development: Agriculture

- 60% of GDP, source of income for 80% of population
- Land reforms counterproductive
- Overemphasis on cooperatives, state farms
- Object of contention
  - cash crops vs. foodstuffs
- Target of the counterinsurgency strategy
  - 20% of villages destroyed
- Ultimate result – destruction, import of foodstuffs
- Opium production





**Figure 1**

Source: UNDCP, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2001 and 2002* and UNDCP/ICMP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002*.

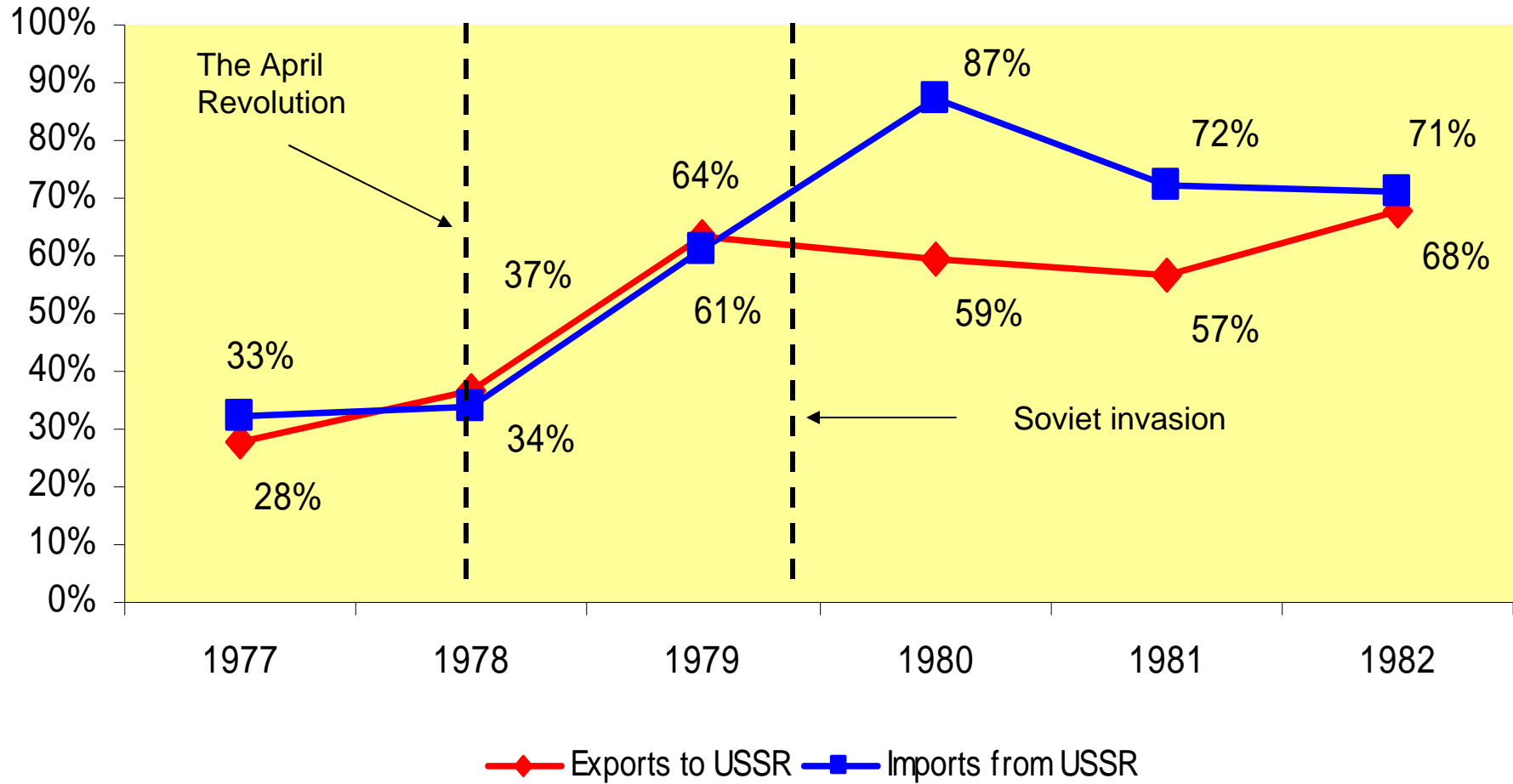


## Development: Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
- Gas exports, mining
  - Exports at below market prices to USSR
  - Soviet technicians
- Manufacturing not encouraged
- Economic integration
- Economy survives on foreign aid
- Corruption



# Trade



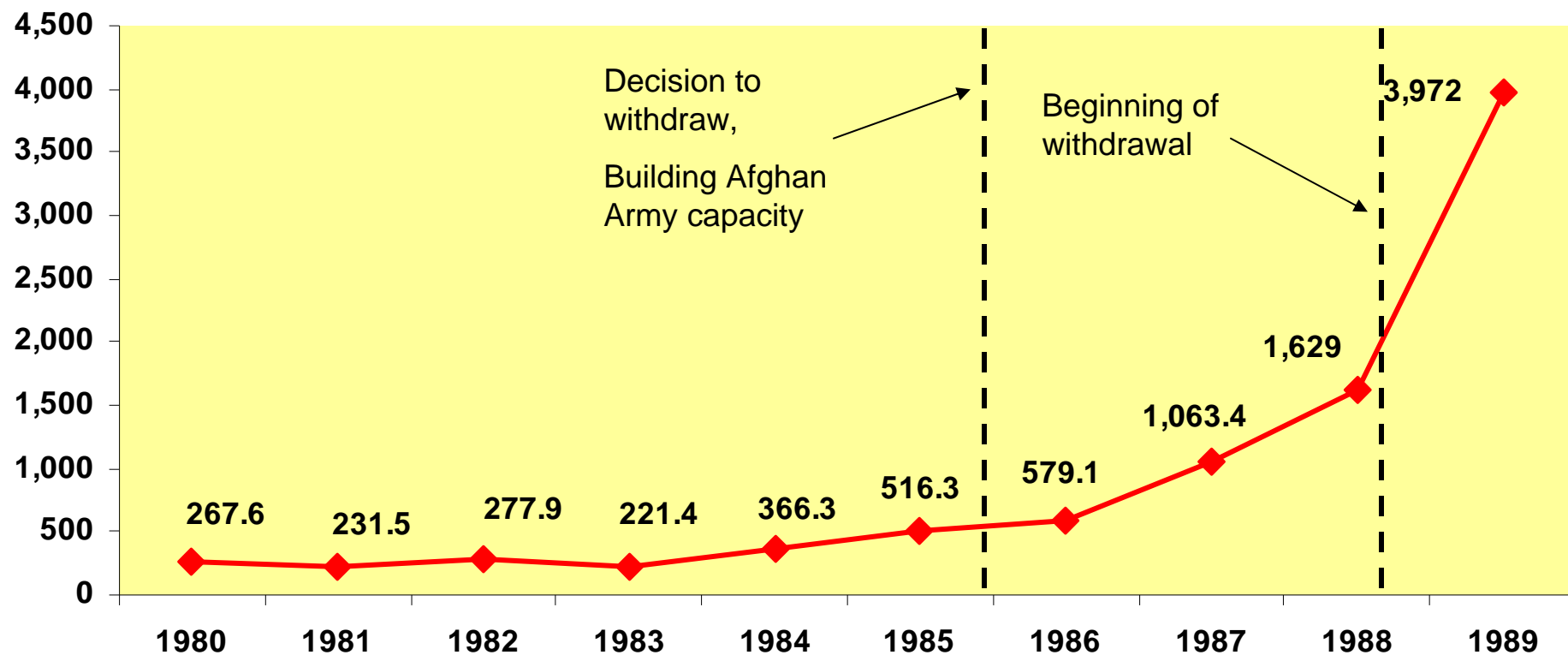


## Development: Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
- Gas exports, mining
  - Exports at below market prices to USSR
  - Soviet technicians
- Manufacturing not encouraged
- Economic integration
- Economy survives on foreign aid
- Corruption

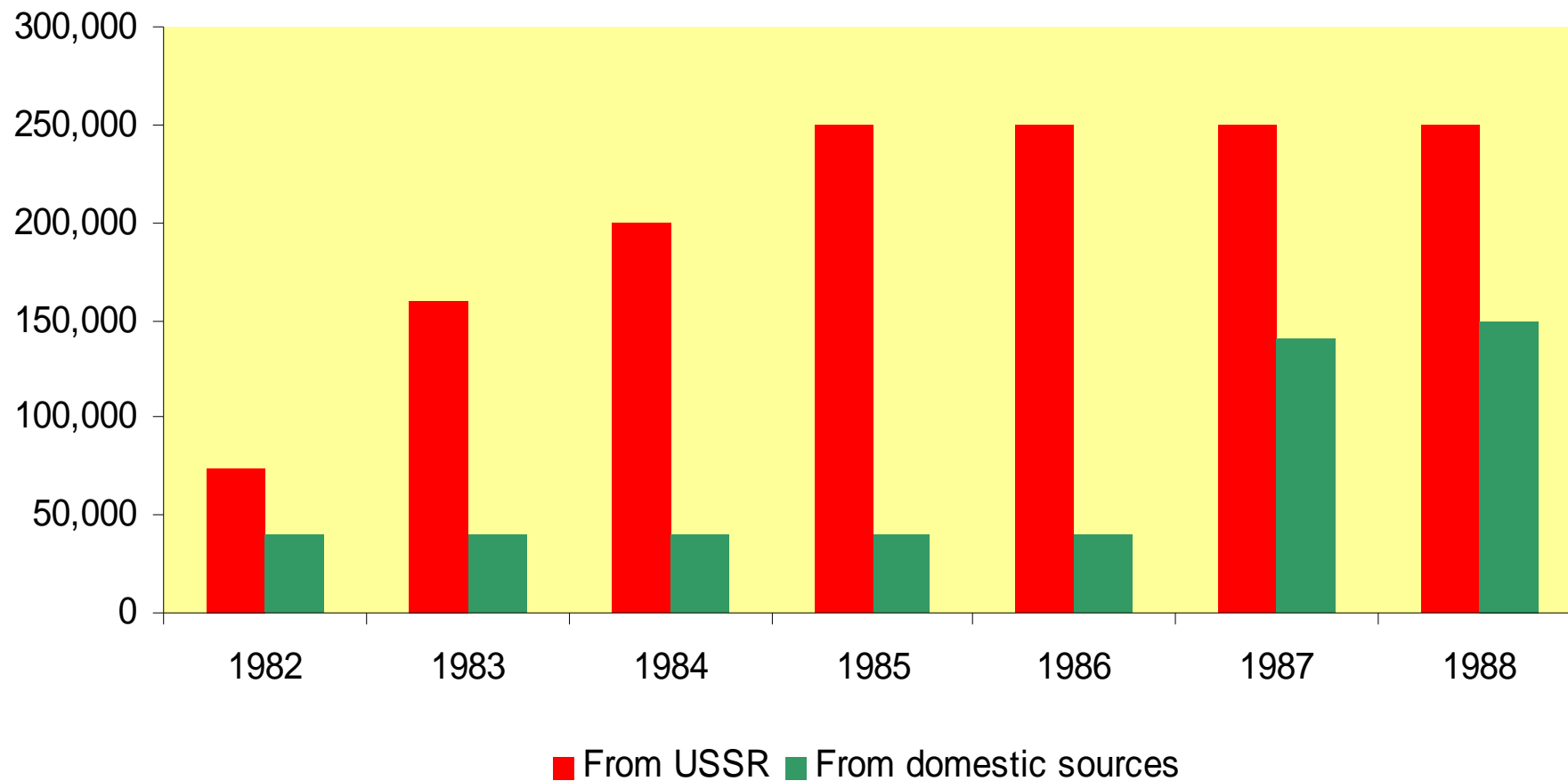


## Soviet Military Aid (in Millions of Rubles)



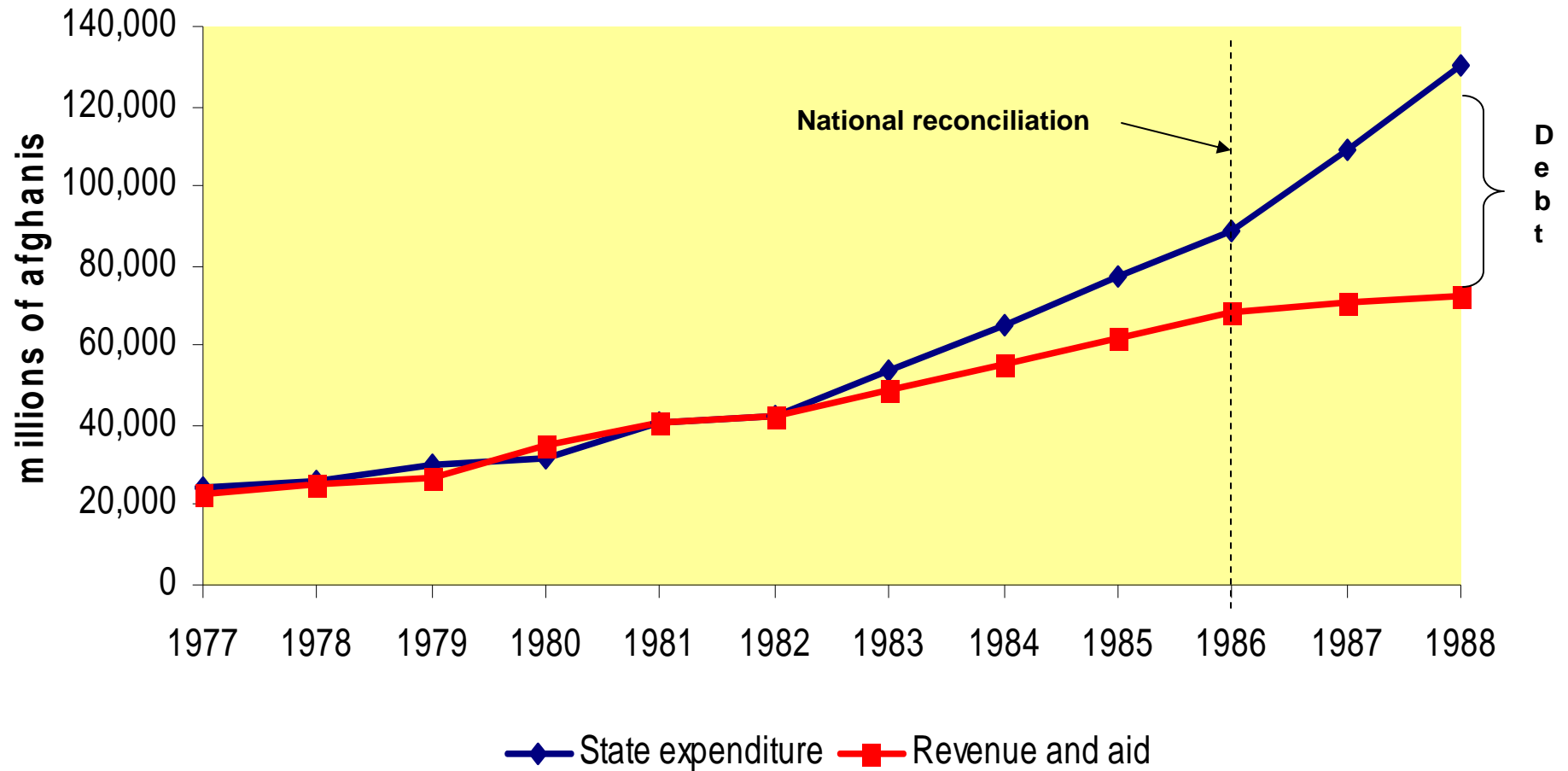


## Wheat Supply (in tons)





# Expenditures and Revenue

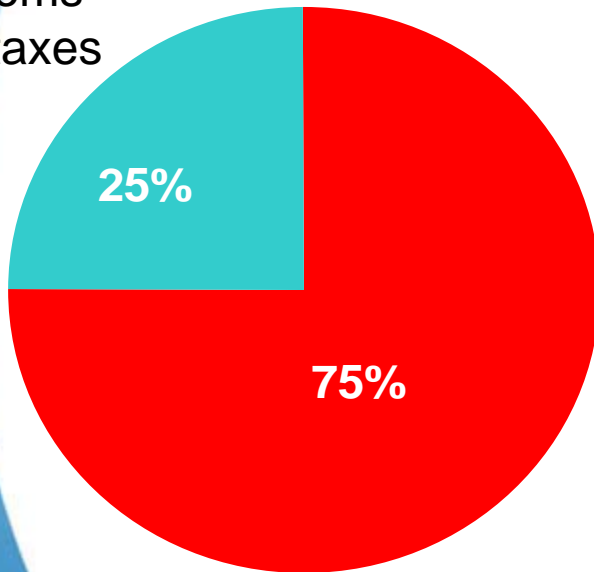




# Sources of State Revenue

## State Income, 1988

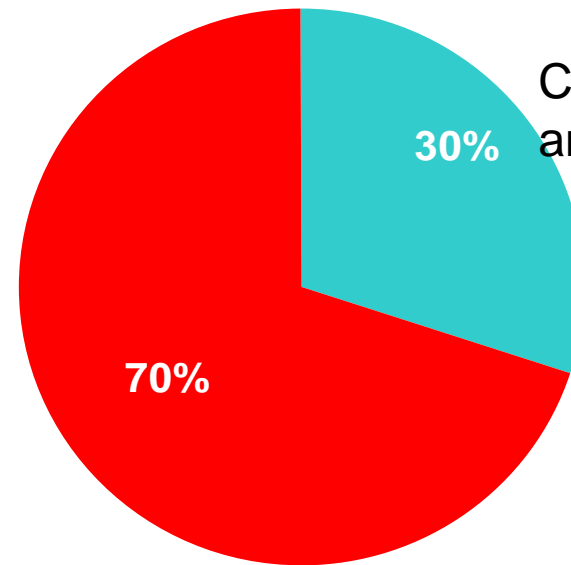
Customs  
and taxes



Natural Gas  
sales, financial  
aid

## State Income, 1991

Customs  
and taxes



Soviet  
Financial Aid





## Economic Aid Comparison

- Afghanistan (1980-1989)
  - Soviet aid (converted in 2007 dollars) - \$29.7 billion, **\$1,980** per capita
- Afghanistan (2002-2009)
  - Disbursed US and international aid - \$44.4 billion, **\$1,346** per capita
- Iraq (2003-2008)
  - Combined international aid to Iraq - \$73.4 billion, **\$2,622** per capita



## Defeat or Strategic Withdrawal?

- Decision for withdrawal made in 1985
  - Based on shift of Party's global strategy
- DRA army demonstrates increasing capacity
- National Reconciliation progressing
- Effects of Red Army withdrawal are positive
- The Regime survives
  - ... but depends on foreign aid
  - ... and is weakened by ethnic conflict



## Lessons (to be) learned

- Denying sanctuary in Pakistan impossible with a “limited contingent”
- Red Army’s battlefield victories could not be translated into strategic success
- Level of political commitment is more important
- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement
  - .... but runs the risk of perpetuating local power centers that challenge central authority
- Secular values conflict with Afghan traditional values
- Is strong, centralized, democratic Afghanistan feasible?



## Lessons (to be) learned – Exit strategy

- Red Army withdrawal removed a principal cause of war for the insurgents
- The policy of “National Reconciliation” was more successful than military operations
- Building Afghan security forces was a viable exit strategy
- Focus on long term economic sustainability is most important
- Keep supporting a friendly regime in Kabul at all costs





## References

- “Report to the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the Situation in Afghanistan.” October, 1979
- CPSU CC Politburo Transcript, 13 November 1986.
- M. F. Slinkin,. *Afganistan. Stranici istorii (80-90-e gg. XX v.)* [Afghanistan. Pages from History (80s—90s of the 20th century)]. Simferopol 2003.
- G.F. Krivosheev,. *Rossiya i SSSR v voinakh XX veka: Poteri vooruzhennykh syl, Statisticheskoe issledovanie* [Russia and USSR in the Wars of the 20th century: Losses of the Armed Forces, Statistical Review. Moscow, 2001.
- M.A. Gareev,. *Afganskaya strada* [The Difficult Battle for Afghanistan]. Moscow 1999.
- A.A. Lyakhovskii,. *Tragedia i doblest Afghana* [The Tragedy and Glory of the Afghans]. Moscow 1994
- V.I. Varennikov, Interview. February, 2007..



## References

- Grant Farr, Azam Gul, 1984. “Afghan Agricultural Production, 1978-1982,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 8, 1: 65-79.
- Antonio Giustozzi, 2000. *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan 1978-1992*. Washington
- The Russian General Staff,. *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*. translators & editors Lester W. Grau & Michael A. Gress, Lawrence, Kansas 2002
- Scott R. McMichael, 1991. *Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan*. London
- M.S. Noorzoy, 1985. “Long-term Economic Relations between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: An Interpretive Study,” *IJMES*, 17: 151-173
- Milan Hauner, Robert L. Canfield, ed., *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: Collision and Transformation*. Boulder, San Francisco, London: 48-58
- Barnett R. Rubin, 1995. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*. New Haven, London
- Marek Sliwinski, 1989. “Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People,” *Orbis*, Winter: 39-56
- Mark Urban, 1990. *War in Afghanistan*. London