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**WITHDRAWAL FROM CONFLICT:
HISTORICAL LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE**

by

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Biography

COL Mark E. Calvert entered active duty in March 1984 after graduating from the University of Georgia ROTC program. He served as a Cavalry Platoon Leader with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, Cavalry Troop Commander with the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, the Commander of 1st Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment (L), and the Commander of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (Blackhorse). His combat assignments include Operation Desert Storm 1990-1991 and Operation Iraqi Freedom 2003-2004. He also served in a variety of staff assignments from battalion through the brigade level, instructor/doctrine writer in the Cavalry Branch of the United States Army Armor School, and as an observer controller at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. Additionally, he served on the Joint Staff in the J3, Current Operations for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Introduction

“For years to come, we will deal with a new, far more malignant form of global terrorism rooted in extremist and violent jihadism, new manifestations of ethnic, tribal, and sectarian conflict, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed and failing states, states enriched with oil profits and discontented with their place in the international system, authoritarian regimes facing increasingly restive populations that seek political freedom as well as a better standard of living, and, finally, we see both emergent and resurgent great powers whose future paths remain unclear.”

*Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
26 January 2008¹*

In his remarks to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in January 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates outlined the contemporary operating environment that our nation and its military is facing now and into the future. His remarks characterize our nation as in an era of persistent conflict where state and non-state actors will compete for power and control of resources along the fault lines of major power states spheres of influence. In this environment, the United States military will be used as an instrument of power to protect and secure our national interests and promote democratic ideals. Its efforts will help bring stability to a world that seeks to maintain equilibrium as it undergoes the changes associated with globalization, economic growth and the redistribution of power.

In this complex and changing strategic environment, the United States will find itself involved in limited wars where our political objective is to establish order through the use of military force and then transition control of order to a host nation government and its security forces. Withdrawal from ongoing conflict is a policy decision and is executed once the desired policy objective is met. Declaring victory in this environment will not be clear cut. As political

¹ Robert M. Gates (Secretary of Defense), Speech delivered to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, given in Washington DC, Saturday, 26 January 2008

and military objectives are met, and we prepare to transition control and withdraw our forces, it is likely that withdrawal of forces will come prior to actual conflict termination.

Withdrawal from ongoing conflict is perhaps one of the most difficult military operations to plan and execute. Conditions for withdrawal must be identified, strategic and military ends must be clearly communicated, and procedures must be put in place to ensure that the withdrawal is covered by a credible and capable force. Given that we are operating in an era of persistent conflict, we can expect that antagonists will conduct violence against the United States and host nation forces even as we conduct a transition of the conflict to host nation control. History provides us with numerous examples of forces being withdrawn from ongoing conflict. The understanding of history within the context of the period can help military commanders and planners in their development of an operational plan once Strategic leadership determines that an acceptable end state has been met.

My thesis is that given the nature of the threat and strategic environment in Iraq and Afghanistan, we will likely meet our political objective prior to the termination of conflict; history may provide us with some valuable lessons to consider as we develop and implement a plan for withdrawing forces in the midst of ongoing conflict. The purpose of this paper is to explore a historical case study where military forces were withdrawn in the midst of conflict, and look at possible lessons that might be applied to strategic and operational planning in the future. Understanding and applying these could allow the successful transfer of operations to the host nation without losing ground on our political objective.

First, I will examine withdrawal from conflict at the strategic and operational level as it relates to our doctrine. Second, I will look at a historical case study where withdrawal from

ongoing conflict was executed in the past. The case study I will look at is the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988-1989. In this study, I will examine the National Policy changes that precipitated the withdrawal, the withdrawal plan and withdrawal execution. Third I will analyze the case study in the context of the elements of strategy and operational art. Finally, I will discuss some recommendations that might be used in the development of a future strategy that that might involve the withdrawal of forces prior to actual conflict termination.

Operational Design and Military Withdrawal from Conflict

“To bring a war, or one of its campaigns, to a successful close requires a thorough grasp of national policy. On that level strategy and policy coalesce: the commander in chief is simultaneously a statesman.”

Carl Von Clausewitz²

In the context of our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan the United States will likely be withdrawing from ongoing conflicts. Efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan are about building capability of those nations to govern, and the capacity to secure themselves from internal and external threats. Once the capacity and capability for governance and security is reached, it is likely that the large majority of United States forces will be withdrawn from those nations prior to actual conflict termination. When the conditions for transfer of control are met, the difficult task of turning over full governance and security responsibilities and withdrawing our forces will begin in the midst of ongoing conflict. This section of the paper will look at our doctrine as it relates to operational art and design and planning for withdrawal from conflict.

Operational Art, as defined by Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, is “the application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs – supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience – to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces.”³ Operational Art integrates ends, ways and means and feeds the process of operational design.⁴ Operational design is defined by JP 3-0 as “the conception and construction of the framework that underpins a campaign or major operation plan and its subsequent execution.”⁵ While doctrine at the strategic and operational level does not specifically address withdrawal of forces from ongoing conflict, JP 3-0 and 5-0, along with Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0 does address

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press) P 111.

³ CJCS, JP 3-0, Joint Operations, 17 Sep 2006 and incorporating change 1 dated 13 Feb 2008, p IV-2

⁴ Ibid, p IV-3

⁵ Ibid, p IV-3

conflict termination in the context of operational art and its application in operational design. As discussed in the previous paragraph, withdrawal from ongoing conflict is a function of political objective and will govern the development of strategic ends, ways, and means for the operational design of the campaign.

The transition of control and withdrawal of United States forces at the national level is expressed in terms of a strategic end state. According to The Department of the Army Field Manual 3-0, at the national level, the end state would be expressed in broad terms or conditions. The strategic end state would not be expressed in purely military terms, but through an integrated collection of activities for all instruments of national power.⁶ JP 3-0 highlights the following: “once the termination criteria are established, operational design continues with the development of military strategic objectives, which comprise the military end state conditions. This end state normally will represent a point in time or circumstance beyond which the President does not require the military instrument of national power to achieve remaining objectives of the national strategic end state.”⁷

According to JP 5-0 operational design is based on strategic guidance or direction that is initiated with the President through the SECDEF, CJCS and the Combatant Commander. This guidance defines success (ends) and “allocates adequate forces and resources (means) to achieve strategic objectives.”⁸ In the application of operational art, the Joint Force Commander considers the conditions required to achieve the objectives (ends) established by the National Command Authority (NCA), the sequence of actions most likely to create those conditions (ways), the

⁶ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Operations FM 3-0, 27 Feb 2008, p 6-7

⁷ JP 3-0, p IV-8

⁸ CJCS, Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning, 24 Aug 2006, p IV-5

resources required to accomplish that sequence of actions (means), and finally the likely risk associated with the plan.⁹

The Joint Force Commander has the responsibility of understanding the ends, and utilizing the means, develop the way he will employ military capabilities integrated with other instruments of national power within the operational environment. Army FM 3-0 refers to this process as “battle command” and defines it as “the art and science of understanding, visualizing, describing, directing, leading and assessing forces to impose the commander’s will on a hostile, thinking, and adaptive enemy. Battle command “applies leadership to translate decisions into actions – by synchronizing forces and warfighting functions in time, space and purpose – to accomplish missions.”¹⁰ The Joint Force Commander exercises battle command in an operational environment that is made up of all aspects of political, military, economic, social, information infrastructure, physical environment and time (PMESII-PT).¹¹ Understanding how all of these factors interrelate is essential to the formulation of operational design for the campaign and visualizing the conditions that would precipitate the transition of authority to the host nation, and subsequent withdrawal of military forces from the conflict.

Army doctrine identifies 12 elements of operational design that go into the development of a campaign plan: End State, Conditions, Centers of Gravity, Operational Approach, Decisive Points, Lines of Operations/Effort, Operational Reach, Tempo, Simultaneity and Depth, Phasing and Transitions, Culmination, Risk.¹² It is important to consider is that each of these elements must be continually assessed as the campaign progresses, particularly as the commanders and

⁹ JP 3-0, p IV-3

¹⁰ Army FM 3-0, p 5-2

¹¹ JP 3-0, p IV-4

¹² FM 3-0, p 6-7. JP 3-0 identifies 17 elements of operational design while FM 3-0 identifies 12. Forces and Functions, Leverage, Balance, Anticipation and Termination are the additional elements not covered in FM 3-0.

staff evaluate the effectiveness in which the joint task force is meeting its campaign objectives and the conditions necessary to execute transition of authority and subsequent withdrawal of military forces. (See Figure 1.)

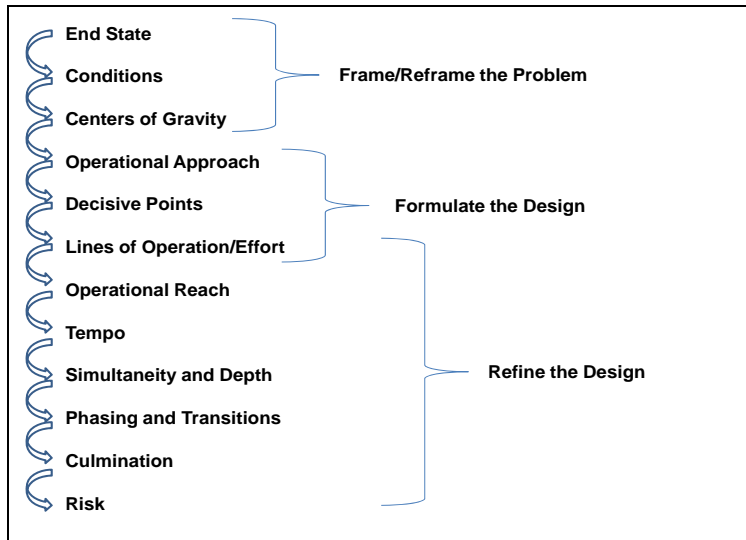


Figure 1. Linking the Elements of Operational Design¹³

In summary, our doctrine provides a road map to planning for withdrawal from on-going conflict. The National Command Authority defines the end state and expresses that end state in broad terms or conditions. These terms or conditions are not expressed in purely military terms, but should address the political and economic environment as well. With an understanding of these terms or conditions along with the operational environment (PMESII-PT) and the threat, military commanders and their staffs exercise battle command and apply operational art to visualize the end state, nature and design of the operation; describe in terms of time, space, resources, purpose and action; and finally direct the operation in the form of a campaign plan.

¹³ Ibid, p 6-7

The campaign plan for transition of authority and eventual withdrawal of forces commanders must take into consideration and perhaps address other factors such as the role of international organizations, the influence of regional neighbors and the relationship between military forces and the host nation. Other questions to be considered might be: 1) is there a residual force capability that must be maintained for a period of time to enable the host nation security forces? 2) Has the host nation requested this support, and if there are combat enablers that will be left behind, what will be the constraints and restrictions placed on their use? At the strategic level, the NCA must consider what is politically acceptable to the people. Do they have the will to continue with some level of military support to the host country until actual conflict termination? What resources must be secured through appropriations to ensure success? Considering these questions, along with an understanding of the application of operational art and design we will look at a historical case study where a nation and its military withdrew from conflict prior to termination.

Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan: A Historical Look

The ten year period, 1979 to 1989, of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan will serve as the case study for this paper. As stated earlier, withdrawal from ongoing conflict is perhaps one of the most difficult military operations to plan and execute and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was no exception. The Soviet Union began the physical withdrawal of its forces on 15 May 1988 when a Soviet column of about 3000 vehicles and around 12,000 troops departed Jalalabad, Afghanistan.¹⁴ After 10 years, the Soviet Union was leaving Afghanistan at a human cost of over 13,000 Soviet military personnel killed, 35,000 wounded and over 300 missing in action.¹⁵ The withdrawal was preceded by years of negotiation that culminated in the signing of the Geneva accords in April 1988 by the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, the Government of Pakistan, and jointly guaranteed by the Soviet Union and the United States.¹⁶ This chapter will discuss the background of the invasion and subsequent occupation, the strategic level decision to withdrawal Soviet military forces, the operational planning and execution of the withdrawal in the midst of an ongoing conflict with insurgent groups in the country.

Background: The Decision to Invade and Initial Occupation

Contrary to popular thought at the time, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was not the first step in an eventual push to expand Soviet influence over the oil rich region of the Persian Gulf.¹⁷ Soviet objectives in Afghanistan were limited.¹⁸ Soviet insertion of military

¹⁴ Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars, 1839-1992: What Britain Gave Up and the Soviet Union Lost*, (New York, NY: Barsey's Press, 1993) p 183.

¹⁵ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, *The Afghan Syndrome: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*, (Novato CA: Presidio Press, 1993) p 146

¹⁶ Amin Saikal and William Maley, *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p2.

¹⁷ Diego Cordovez and Selig S. Harrison, *Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press 1995) p 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 4

forces was a last attempt to establish some form of security and stability along its southern border after years of political turmoil in Afghanistan.¹⁹ The Kremlin sought an Afghan government that was capable of uniting the various factions of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (PDPA) and serve as a reliable socialist partner to the Soviet Union.²⁰ They also sought to assert some control over what the Soviet's referred to as "the arc of influence", Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.²¹

Direct and overt Soviet military intervention was initiated in December 1979 following multiple, often bloody, exchanges of power that began with the ousting of King Zahir Shah in July 1973, and culminating in the overthrow of President Mohammad Tariki by the deputy prime minister Hafizullah Amin in the fall of 1979.²² The political morass combined with a growing insurgency movement of several Islamic resistance groups based in Pakistan left no other option in the mind of the Kremlin except for military intervention to bring stability and prevent the conflict from disrupting the Southern Soviet Republics. The Soviet Army entered Afghanistan in late December 1979 with about 50,000 combat troops. They did not enter with the intent of conducting a long term military occupation. The Soviet Army units were not organized, trained or equipped to face the insurgency that followed their invasion.²³ The belief within the Kremlin, and the Soviet Army, was that the invasion and subsequent occupation would meet little resistance and would only be necessary until such time as the Afghan Government was stable enough to operate semi-autonomously under a leader that was in line with Soviet interests.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 4

²⁰ O'Ballance, p 92.

²¹ Ibid, p 92.

²² Ibid, pp78-86. Under King Zahir Shah Afghanistan functioned as a constitutional monarchy from 1964 until a nearly bloodless coup by Mohammed Daoud, the King's cousin, who declared Afghanistan a republic and himself as president. President Daoud was overthrown by Mohammed Tariki, leader of a socialist faction inside the PDPA. Tariki proclaimed himself president and was overthrown by Hafizullah Amin, prime minister, in September 1978.

²³ Kenneth L. Davidson, *Geopolitics of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, Strategic Review, Winter Edition , p 40.

During the occupation, the Soviets sought to utilize their economic and military power to build Afghan capacity to govern in a Soviet style system and grow capability within the Afghan Army to secure the government. The Soviet operational concept was to occupy the main air bases, Afghan garrisons and key government centers and use their air and ground mobility to control key lines of communication and urban areas.²⁴ Soviet Army Divisions were dispersed by regiments, battalions and companies in urban areas and along key routes.²⁵ Advisor teams were placed at all levels of the government and within the Afghans military to train and coach.²⁶

Within a short time after the invasion, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet 40th Army saw the growth of a variety of insurgent groups who were in opposition to the Soviet backed government and foreign occupation. This caused the Soviets to enhance their advisor teams to allow for timely coordination and control of combat multipliers such as TACAIR, artillery, mobility and heavy armor. Soviet tactical operations to combat the insurgents consisted primarily of air assault operations in concert with mounted ground assault convoys to mass on opposition forces in or around the key urban centers or interdicting lines of communication.²⁷

At the time of the invasion, there were numerous threat groups that opposed both the Afghan Government and the Soviet Occupation. These groups are commonly referred to as the mujahidin. According to most analysts, the mujahidin could be classified as fundamentalists or traditionalists. Whether fundamentalists or traditionalists, the mujahidin comprised a great diversity of groups and was highly segmented along tribal, ethnic/linguistic, sectarian, ideological and personal loyalty lines (See Figure 2 for a breakdown of the various mujahidin

²⁴ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, p 104

²⁵ Ibid, p 104

²⁶ O'Ballance, pp97-98.

²⁷ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, pp 116-121

groups).²⁸ They operated in areas where they enjoyed popular support and generally followed the following principles in the execution of their guerrilla operations: 1) avoid direct combat with regular forces when they are numerically stronger, 2) avoid combat actions that would result in position warfare – give up terrain to preserve the force, 3) emphasis surprise offensive actions – particularly at night, 4) use terror and ideological influence over the Afghan Army and local population not supportive of the mujahidin.²⁹

Figure 2				
Alliance (Seven Party)	SECT	IDEOLOGY	ETHNIC BASE	GEOGRAPHIC BASE
Jamiat-i-Islami	Sunni	Moderate/Fundamentalist	Tajik	North-northeast
Hezb-e-Islami (K)	Sunni	Fundamentalist	Pushtun	Kabul / Southeast
Hezb-e-Islami (G)	Sunni	Radical Fundamentalist	Pushtun	North and Southeast
Islamic Union	Sunni	Ultra Orthodox Fundamentalist	Pushtun	Southeast
Harakat	Sunni	Traditionalist	Pushtun	Southern Tribal
National Islamic Front for Afghanistan	Sunni	Traditionalist/Royalist	Pushtun	Southern Tribal
Afghan National Liberation Front	Sunni	Traditionalist	Pushtun	Southern Tribal
Shia Parties				
Shura	Shia	Traditionalist	Hazara	Central Hazarajat
Nasr	Shia	Radical Pro-Iranian	Hazara	Central Hazarajat
Harakat	Shia	Moderate Fundamentalist	Various	Urban Areas
Pasdaran	Shia	Radical Pro-Iranian	Hazara	West and Central

In the 1989 Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, it states that over the period of the occupation, financial and military aid to the mujahidin was funneled through guerilla bases in Pakistan.³⁰ It goes on to state that this support was provided by the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia along with several other gulf states. Additionally, the United States and Pakistan provided military intelligence, logistical support and weapons to Afghan

²⁸ R. P. Cronin, *Afghanistan After the Soviet Withdrawal - Contenders for Power*. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service Report to Congress, 1989) pp8-9.

²⁹ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, pp 94-95

³⁰ John Felton, *The Contemporary Middle East: A Documented History*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2008), p 581).

resistance fighters.³¹ Iran had limited involvement with the Sunni Muslim Groups among the Mujahideen, and only maintained sentimental / political attachment to the Shia groups inside Afghanistan.³²

The Strategic Decision to Withdraw

Gorbachev announced his intent to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan to the 27th Communist Party Congress on 26 Feb 1986.³³ Over the next two years, under the diplomatic lead of Diego Cordovez, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, the Republic of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Soviet Union and the United States worked through the complex diplomatic issues surrounding a Soviet military withdrawal in the midst of an ongoing insurgency. The 14 April 1988 signing of the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan marked the official declaration by the Soviet Union to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan. Two important caveats were attached to the accords. First, Pakistan and the United States insisted that the signing of the accords did not signify recognition of the Afghan Government. Second, the United States would reserve the right to supply the mujahidin as long as the Soviet Union was doing the same to the Afghan Government.

The terms of the accords set the strategic level guidance for the operational execution of the withdrawal. The accords called for a Soviet withdrawal over a 9 month period. The withdrawal was set to begin on 15 May 1988. Redeployment of forces would be front loaded, with half of the Soviet forces redeploying in the first three months, and the remainder over the following six months. An international team under the United Nations was to observe and report

³¹ R. P. Cronin, pp17-18.

³² Ibid, p19.

³³ Lester W. Grau, *Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan*, The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, 20:2, p238.

on the withdrawal.³⁴ In anticipation of a formal change in policy, by January 1987 the Soviets began to curtail military action to lessen casualties.³⁵ The Soviet forces in Afghanistan responded to mujahidin attacks and supported Afghan operations to combat the insurgency. On 7 April 1988, one week before the signing of the Geneva Accords, the Soviet Ministry of Defense (MoD) issued the withdrawal order to the 40th Soviet Army.³⁶ The MoD's General Staff, the Operational Group of the Ministry deployed forward in Afghanistan, the staff of the Turkmenistan Military District and the 40th Army Staff conducted planning in parallel for several months prior to the release of the MoD's release of the order.³⁷ According to Marshal Akhromeyev, Chief of the General Staff of Soviet Armed Forces, on 15 April 1988 Soviet military strength in Afghanistan was 103,300 personnel.³⁸ The Soviets had nine months to withdraw these forces while maintaining the capacity for the Afghan Government and military to function in the midst of an ongoing insurgency.

The Withdrawal Plan

At the strategic level the Soviet Union planned to maintain its support for the Afghan government under President Najibullah by providing an estimated \$300 million in economic aid and military equipment a month after Soviet troops were withdrawn.³⁹ They also planned to leave some military advisors assigned to the government to continue in its assistance to the Afghan military. The plan for withdrawing Soviet military personnel was two phased, and tied to the Geneva accords calling for half of the troops to be withdrawn in the first three months and

³⁴ According to Edgar O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, the UN mission tasked to observe the withdrawal (50 personnel from 10 countries, commanded by a Finnish General). One detachment was positioned in Afghanistan and the other in Pakistan. Both detachments reported violations of the Geneva Accords by both sides. p180.

³⁵ Grau, p246.

³⁶ Ibid, p 246.

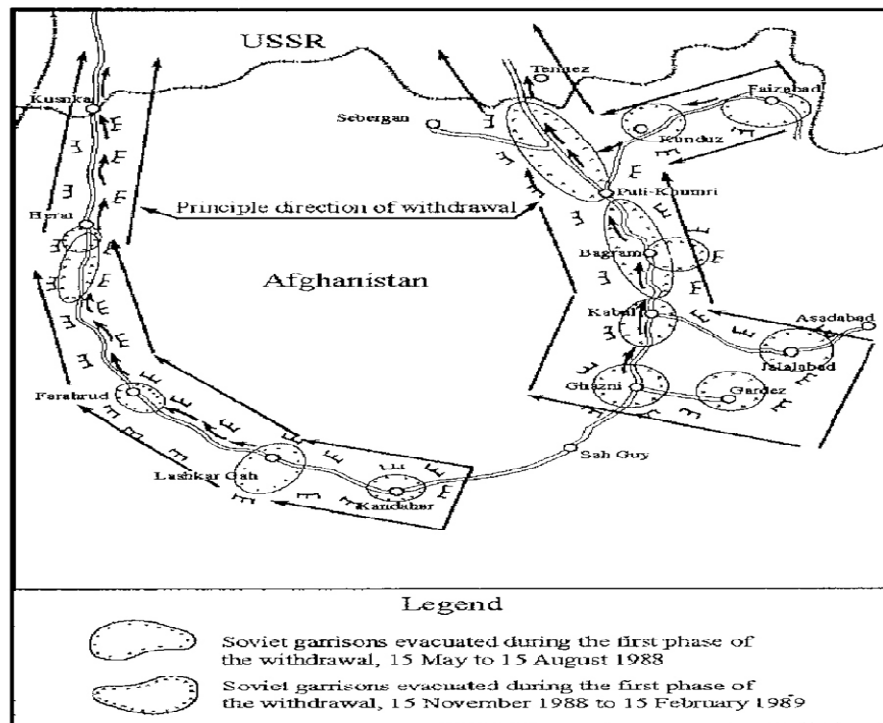
³⁷ Ibid, p 246.

³⁸ O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, p 183.

³⁹ Mendelson, p 26.

the remaining half is the later six of the nine month withdrawal period. The withdrawal would take place over two primary routes; the western route exiting Afghanistan into the USSR at Kusnka, and the eastern route through Termez (See Figure 3).⁴⁰

Figure 3 – Withdrawal Concept Sketch⁴¹



40th Army planners designated forces in both phases to secure the routes and the force assembly areas; task organizing additional artillery, fixed and rotary wing attack aircraft to

⁴⁰ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, p 125.

⁴¹ Grau, p 249

ensure they had the resources necessary for the mission.⁴² Soviet forces were not evenly distributed through the country, but were deployed along main lines of communication, major cities and airfields. The plan prioritized the withdrawal of forces from the Army's western garrisons but was later modified to delay evacuation or handover of Shindand and Heart until phase II.⁴³ The planners also gave unprecedented access to the press. They organized press coverage and accredited over 212 journalists from the Soviet block and other countries; this access also included embedded journalists who would redeploy with Soviet Troops.⁴⁴

Phase I of the plan was scheduled to begin on 15 May 1988 and be complete by the middle of August in compliance with the Geneva Accords. Phase II was scheduled to begin in November of 1988 and continue until the middle of February. During both phases, the plan called for garrisons to be closed and collapsed into their parent organization at larger garrison locations (company folded into battalion – battalions into regiments), or handed over to the Afghan Army. Garrisons handed over to the Afghan Army were to be complete with 90 days of supply, to include fuel, ammunition and food. Additionally, 40th Army units would hand over various armored vehicles, artillery, mortars, MRLs, ADA systems and small arms.⁴⁵ Throughout, about 1/3 of the available force would be available for counter-insurgency operations in conjunction with Afghan forces. The remaining forces would be focused on maintaining security around garrisons, bivouac areas and redeployment routes. Afghan forces continued to focus its forces in major urban areas and resupply routes between the garrisons.

⁴² Ibid, pp 251 - 255. 26 combat battalions (~14k troops) provided route security in the east and another ~7K were assigned to secure various airfields and log bases that were supporting the withdrawal. In the west where the terrain is more open, 3 combat battalions were assigned the route security mission.

⁴³ Ibid, p247.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p250.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 252. According to Grau, the 40th transferred 990 armored vehicles, 3000 trucks, 142 artillery pieces, 82 mortars, 43 MRLs, 231 ADA systems, 14,443 individual weapons and 1706 rocket launchers.

Execution of the Withdrawal

When phase I of the withdrawal began, the Soviets had about 100,300 personnel on the ground in Afghanistan (see Figure 4). Phase I execution went generally according to plan. The intensity of the insurgency varied throughout the country. The mujahidin controlled almost 85% of the land in Afghanistan while Afghan and Soviet Forces controlled major urban centers and key routes.⁴⁶ The general consensus among the majority of mujahidin leaders favored allowing the Soviets an unhindered withdrawal.⁴⁷ This facilitated their desire and ability to take the fight to the Afghan government forces once the Soviets were out of the picture.⁴⁸

However, there were some differences of opinion among the mujahidin leaders, and reaction to the withdrawal differed from based on group. Some leaders did not want to risk inviting aerial and artillery retaliation that would attrite their forces for the fight to come against the Afghan Government.⁴⁹ Other leaders sought to make local cease fire arrangements with Soviet units to allow them safe and speedy passage home. Still others viewed attacks on Soviet convoys as their source of supply for arms and ammunition and took resupply opportunities as they presented themselves.⁵⁰ Despite these differences, the vast majority of the mujahidin saw the defeat of the sitting Afghan Government as their ultimate goal and their first step to legitimacy was defeat of a major Afghan Army garrison and control of a major urban center.

The Soviet garrison at Jalalabad was the first garrison signed over to the Afghan Army. As the garrison was handed over to the Afghan Army groups of mujahidin began to encircle

⁴⁶ Ibid, p247.

⁴⁷ O'Ballance, p 183.

⁴⁸ Grau, p 244.

⁴⁹ O'Ballance, p 183.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p183.

Jalalabad but did not initiate an attack.⁵¹ Again mujahidin leaders were not united or in sufficient enough agreement to pull together a plan to overtake the garrison. Had the mujahidin leaders only known what was happening inside the Jalalabad garrison after the Soviet's departure, they might have been more motivated to develop a plan to overrun it.

There were issues that arose after the 66th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade evacuated.⁵² Despite a detailed plan and subsequent execution of the handover under the eyes of Afghan inspectors, within hours of the brigades departure there was significant looting of everything from window frames to the 90 days of supply that was left behind.⁵³ The 40th Army quickly learned their lesson and applied modifications to its garrison handover procedures: 1) All property would be signed for by an Afghan MOD official, 2) all handovers, to include the inspection and transfer, would be video taped.⁵⁴

As Phase I drew to a close in August of 1988 the 40th Army had redeployed 50,200 troops back to the USSR. Soviet forces remained in seven Afghan provinces conducting combined operations with the Afghan Army, securing key administrative centers and airbases.⁵⁵ Armed opposition throughout the phase was focused against the Afghan government and army. The mujahidin did undertake attempts to seize power in Kunar, Nangarhar, Pakta, Logar Wardak and Kandahar provinces, even seizing control temporarily of the garrison at Kunduz (Kunduz

⁵¹ O'Ballance, p 183.

⁵² Grau, p251.

⁵³ Ibid, p 251. Grau details that 90 Day stockpiles of CLS I, III and V were in place. Barracks, mess halls, steam baths, hospital, weapons and equipment was repaired and operational. The Soviet Troops even made the bunks in the barracks and slept outside the night before transfer to keep the barracks spotless. On 1 May 1988 the Afghan 1st Corps Commander signed for the garrison and the 66th left by convoy headed for Kabul. Within hours of the Afghans taking over, the garrison it was stripped bare and items such as TVs, radios, bedding and AC had found its way to the local market. Several days later, the 1st Corps Commander requested an urgent resupply, stating that 90 days of supplies had not been left, even though he had personally signed for the supply.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p 251.

⁵⁵ Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvoretzky, p 126.

Province) on 12 August.⁵⁶ All these attempts were thwarted by combined operations by Soviet/Afghan forces. In the case of Kunduz, the city and garrison was retaken on 15 August.

FIGURE 4. Soviet 40th Army prior to the start of withdrawal⁵⁷

	Total	Western Corridor	Eastern Corridor
Personnel (thousand)	100.3	42.8	57.5
HQs Personnel	3.6	0.8	2.8
Combat Personnel	70.7	36.4	34.3
Service Support Personnel	14.3	2.4	11.9
Total Combat Battalions	93.0	21	72
Battalions securing DRA cities & facilities	40	7	33
Battalions securing LOCs	15	4	11
Battalions reinforcing LOC & DRA facilities	9	2	7
Battalions on convoy escort	3	1	2
Battalions securing factories & plants	5	0	5
Battalions available for offensive operations	30	8	22

Phase II of the withdrawal was scheduled to begin in November 1988. Insurgents continued to focus efforts on undermining the moral of the Afghan Army and the government by continuing its attacks against key urban areas and garrisons held by the Afghans.⁵⁸ Weather, combined with the efforts of the insurgency caused the Afghan government to request that the Soviets delay further withdrawals until the Afghan Army could stabilize security around its urban centers.⁵⁹ About 30,000 mujahidin were postured around Kabul and another 15,000

⁵⁶ Ibid, p 126.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p 250. Grau's source was the legend from the official map of the Operational Group of the Ministry of Defense provided to the author by Aleksandr Lyakhovskiy. Also included in that legend is the composition of the Soviet 40th Army just prior to the beginning of the withdrawal: 108th and 201st Motorized Rifle Divisions; 103rd Abn Division; 66th and 70th Motorized Rifle Brigades; 191st and 860th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiments; 345th Separate Abn Regiment; 56th Air Assault Regiment; 15th and 22nd Spetsnaz Brigades; one aviation regiment; one fighter regiment; one independent ground attack regiment; one separate composite aviation regiment; three separate helicopter regiments.

⁵⁸ O'Ballance, p 189.

⁵⁹ Grau, p 254.

around Jalalabad; rocket attacks were hitting Kabul and other cities and there were enough stingers in the hands of the insurgents to keep Soviet aircraft on their toes.⁶⁰

The Soviets agreed to the delay, and undertook diplomatic efforts to put pressure on the Pakistani government to withhold aid to the mujahidin.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Soviets brought in MIG-27s and SCUD-Bs for additional strike capability.⁶² During the pause in their redeployment the Soviets continued efforts to improve the capability of the Afghan Army by supplying new equipment such as BTR-70s fitted with 30mm cannons and BM-27 MRLS.⁶³

FIGURE 5. Soviet Forces at the start of Phase II⁶⁴			
	Total	Western Corridor	Eastern Corridor
Personnel (thousand)	50.1	10.1	40
HQs Personnel	2.4	0.4	2
Combat Personnel	29.2	6.7	22.5
Service Support Personnel	18.5	3	15.5
Total Combat Battalions	56	10	46
Battalions securing DRA cities & facilities	29	6	23
Battalions securing LOCs	15	3	12
Battalions on convoy escort	2	0	2
Battalions securing factories & plants	5	0	5
Battalions available for offensive operations	5	1	4
ARMY AVIATION			
Transport Aircraft	21	0	21
Jet Aircraft	97	27	70
Helicopters	81	17	64

⁶⁰ O'Ballance, p 191.

⁶¹ Grau, p 253.

⁶² O'Ballance, p 189.

⁶³ Ibid, p 193.

⁶⁴ Grau, p254. 40th Army on 15 OCT 88: 5th, 108th and 201st Motorized Rifle Divisions; 103rd Abn Division; 345th Separate Abn Regiment; 378th Separate Composite Aviation Regiment, 263rd Separate Aerial Reconnaissance Squadron; 254th, 262nd, 302nd Separate Helicopter Squadrons.

Phase II withdrawal resumed in early January 1989. Soviet military remaining in Afghanistan was a little less than half of their starting force of 100,300 in May 1988 (See Table X). Soviet concerns during this phase were repatriation of Soviet POWs and security of the Soviet force yet to withdraw.⁶⁵ To secure safe passage of convoys, Soviet forces worked to arrange (often making payments) local cease fires with mujahidin groups and even hired local tribal militia forces as security. On 14 Feb 1989 the last Soviet Column crossed the freedom bridge and left Afghanistan.⁶⁶ Many of the mujahidin went home after the Soviet withdrawal, and President Najibullah worked to hire them for security of key facilities as well as integrate them into the government.⁶⁷

The Soviets continued their economic (about \$3 billion annually) and some military support through a small contingent of military advisors to assist with logistics and air support.⁶⁸ The absence of Soviet Troops did facilitate escalations of violence by the mujahidin and even a coup attempt by the Afghan Minister of Defense. The Afghan army and government met the challenge and defeated efforts by insurgents and the Minister of Defense.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p 255. According to Lester Grau's research there were 315 Soviet service members who were unaccounted for. 15 of the 300 were eventually repatriated through ransom and, or negotiation.

⁶⁶ O'Ballance, p 196.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp 258-259.

⁶⁸ Grau, p 258.

Analysis of the Withdrawal in the Midst of Conflict

“Many sons of Russia have fallen on Afghan Soil in recent years. So, why is it that at home the obelisks are silent about our boys who have died fighting for our friends?”

- Gennady Kostyuk, *Soviet Army Surgeon*⁶⁹

This chapter will analyze the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by first addressing the change in national level strategy that precipitated the withdrawal. Second, it will examine the operational level challenges in the context of operational art and design that the Soviet Army addressed and failed to address in their planning and execution. Finally, it will discuss three lessons learned for application in future conflict.

A Change in Strategy

The goal of any national policy is to achieve a strategic ends that promotes a nation’s interests. National level leaders and statesmen have a responsibility to craft a policy and strategy that is in the interests of the nation with respect to national will and what is an acceptable and supportable concerning the commitment of military forces as a means. The Soviet strategic end state for Afghanistan in 1979, and in 1989, was a stable socialist government within what the Soviet’s considered their sphere of influence. The strategic decision to withdraw was not a change in the envisioned end state for Afghanistan, but a change in how the Soviets viewed the use of national power to achieve that end state. The military instrument of national power was no longer the preferred way to achieve the ends.

Internal changes within the Soviet Union brought about by *Glasnost*, combined with Gorbachev’s political and economic reforms – *Perestroika*, caused the Soviet Union to re-evaluate its national interest and allocation of national power with respect to Afghanistan.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁹ Cordovez, p335.

⁷⁰ Amin Saikal and William Maley, p15

occupation and counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan never enjoyed popular support. The increased openness in the media brought the war in Afghanistan to light for the average Soviet citizen.⁷¹ This new openness, combined with Gorbachev's view that there was no military solution to the problems in Afghanistan, and his strong desire to improve relations with the United States, changed the policy and strategy implementation in Afghanistan.⁷²

While Gorbachev maintained that he wanted to leave Afghanistan with a strong stable government that served as a socialist partner to the Soviet Union, he did not view the military as the principle means of achieving that political end state. Political change inside the Soviet Union and pressure from the greater global community would not allow the Soviets to use the military instrument of national power to achieve that ends. Political/diplomatic support to the DRA government, along with \$3 billion in annual economic aid would become the principle means and way for achieving the desired ends for Afghanistan. Fighting a counter-insurgency in Afghanistan, which Gorbachev referred to as a "bleeding wound," could no longer be tolerated as a way to the strategic end.⁷³

Ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet Regime and the rise of the Russian Federation brought about a policy change that cut diplomatic/political and economic support to the DRA. Without the economic and political support of its Soviet ally, the Afghan government was not able to stand. By December 1991, the pressure of the traditional and fundamental Islamist groups that were supported by Pakistan and to some extent the United States, brought down the government and plunged the country into civil war.

⁷¹ Ibid, p15.

⁷² Ibid, p97

⁷³ O'Ballance, p 177. By 1988 Gorbachev was calling Afghanistan a "bleeding wound" for the Soviet Union.

Operational Challenges: A disconnect with strategic end state

If there is a shift in national strategic guidance, it becomes necessary to revisit step 1 of the operational design process (Figure 1). You must “Reframe the Problem” in the context of the new guidance. Revisiting step 1 is crucial because it establishes the operational end state based on the revised strategic guidance, lays out the conditions that allow that end state to be achieved, and finally, establishes centers of gravity that focus the campaign objectives. The change in Soviet national strategy with respect to Afghanistan dictated a return to step one.

At the operational level, the Soviet military did revisit step 1 of the operational design process. Their reframing of the problem identified the following operational end state: All military forces less a small advisory force out of the country by 15 Feb 1989 and Afghan Army and Air Forces capable of independent operations. By all accounts the Soviet operational plan for withdrawing forces in the midst of an insurgency was generally very successful in getting its forces out of Afghanistan. The Soviet force allocation was balanced to provide for force protection during the withdrawal, combat forces and enablers sufficient to support the Afghan Army in its security of lines of communication and urban areas, and finally, sustaining the equipping mission necessary in an attempt to continue building capacity in the Afghan military. Execution of the withdrawal took nine months, and at the end of that period the DRA under President Najibullah remained in control and retained significant political and economic support from the Soviet Union for his government.

However, despite the orderly withdrawal and the fact that Najibullah remained in control, it is important to note that the resistance remained in full control of almost 85% of Afghanistan at the time of the Soviet withdrawal and the Afghan Army that was in little more than a defensive

against a determined but somewhat fractured insurgency. In analyzing the Soviet operational planning and execution of the withdrawal it is evident that at the operational level the Soviets did not clearly articulate an operational end state relative to the threat. Two operational themes develop relative to the insurgency created some operational challenges for the Soviet Army inside Afghanistan. First, time lines may suite the political and broader foreign policy goals, but they create seams for the threat forces to exploit. Second, agreements with antagonists to the legitimate government work to undermine the desired strategic end state.

The Geneva Accords on Afghanistan forced a nine month withdrawal timeline on the Soviets. The public declaration of a time line was essentially externally under the auspices of the United Nations, pressure from the United States and Pakistan, and to some extent Soviet popular opinion. The Soviets did make DRA stability a condition for withdrawal, however, the signed Geneva Accords said otherwise.⁷⁴

The establishment of a hard timeline for withdrawal allowed the enemy to hold its offensive operations until Soviet Troops were withdrawn. Throughout the withdrawal period the mujahidin sought to exploit opportunities and place pressure on the DRA and the Afghan Army after the transfer of authority of a garrison and area of operation took place. While the Soviets were able to respond effectively with TACAIR to support the Afghan Army, or directly participate with ground combat forces in a counter-attack to retake an overrun garrison, these mujahidin efforts had a weakening effect on the DRA and forced the Soviets to take a pause in their withdrawal plans. The strategic decision to accept a time line eliminated a true conditions based option for the Soviet withdrawal. The focus of the operational planning and execution was

⁷⁴ Grau, p 239.

getting military forces out of the country rather than ensuring the Afghans were ready to go it alone against the mujahidin.

The second key theme in the operational planning and execution is that the Soviet military conducted negotiations and brokered separate agreements with the enemies of the Afghan Government to facilitate their withdrawal. This action undermined the legitimate government and did not support the overall strategic end state espoused by the Kremlin.

As an example, early in the withdrawal the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nigrahar and Pakta were designated as a DMZ; this designation eventually spread to include Ghazni, Zabul and Kandahar provinces.⁷⁵ This declaration expanded the amount of ungoverned space to the mujahidin, allowing insurgent leaders like Ahmad Shah Masoud to move in quickly and reoccupy the Panjshir Valley as the Soviet troops withdrew.⁷⁶ Masoud went on to make a separate ceasefire agreement with the Soviets in June allowing freedom of movement of Soviet forces out of Afghanistan to Soviet territory.⁷⁷ Additionally, the Soviets went on to cut deals with mujahidin leaders in the Shindand and Heart provinces to guaranty safe movement.⁷⁸

The effort at the tactical and operational level to secure free movement of forces out of the country undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan Government. At the completion of the Soviet withdrawal the Afghan government was left with the choice of working to include these groups into the government or fighting them. There was no surge effort on the part of the 40th Soviet Army to assist the government in gaining control of the ungoverned spaces and or even aggressively continuing counter-insurgency operations against those mujahidin groups that

⁷⁵ Sarin, p184

⁷⁶ Ibid, p 184

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 185

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 186

would oppose the government upon Soviet withdrawal. The sole focus of the 40th Soviet Army, post Geneva, was to get out of Afghanistan.

At the operational level, when the strategic guidance changed, reframing the problem might have facilitated a withdrawal campaign plan that sought to encourage and enable an aggressive counter-insurgency effort by the Afghan Army. Because the Soviets became so focused on getting themselves out of Afghanistan the Afghan Government became tentative, if not reluctant, to continue to wage war on the insurgents. As a result, upon departure by the Soviets in February 1989 the Afghan Army and the Government were in no more than a defensive posture in centered around key urban areas while the vast majority of Afghanistan remained ungoverned and under the control of mujahidin groups.

In summary, there was a disconnect in the articulated strategic end state desired by Gorbachev and the Kremlin, and what was executed in the withdrawal. Even after the signing of the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan, Gorbachev's envisioned end state was a stable socialist government that aligned itself within the Soviet sphere of influence. The operational design of the withdrawal was almost exclusively focused on getting Soviet troops out of Afghanistan according to the timeline dictated by the Accords. The operational execution did take a temporary pause from November 1988 to January 1989, but the pause was due to the weather and in some part by the pleading of the Afghan President for a delay due to recent gains by the Mujahidin in the eastern regions of the country. The establishing of a timeline combined with tactical and operational level negotiations with the insurgents by Soviet forces disadvantaged the legitimate government and worked against the strategic political end state with regards to the Afghan State.

Lessons for the Future

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is a case where the change in strategic means and ways did not achieve the stable end state envisioned in 1979. Internal political and economic changes within the Soviet Union drove a change in strategy for Afghanistan resulting in a withdrawal of military forces prior to conflict termination. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 the Soviet state dissolved. The rise of the Russian Federation brought an end to economic and diplomatic support to the Afghan government, plunging Afghanistan into a bloody civil war that cost thousands of Afghan lives.

Soviet involvement in Afghanistan had its own set of strategic circumstances associated with the invasion and the withdrawal of military forces. Soviet involvement must be looked at in historical context; therefore it does not provide a set of undisputable principles to serve as the framework for future strategic and operational decision making. It does serve, as is the case with all history, a way to examine some lessons for the future.

The breakup of the Soviet Union, the rise of trans-national terrorism, the threat of WMD proliferation, and the effects of globalization resulted in new types of threats and complexities that impact our security strategy. Holding with the analytical view by many that in the future our national decision making will take place in a multi-polar world that is in a state of persistent conflict, there are three lessons that we may take from the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and apply to the future application of force:

1. Before committing to the application of the military instrument of power as a means to a strategic ends, strategic leaders must have an understanding of what is acceptable concerning the utilization of military force to achieve strategic ends. The assessment should be made with a clear understanding of the red lines for the use of force, and the level of sacrifice the

nation is willing to accept to achieve our aim - to do otherwise might cause a collapse of will and jeopardize strategic success. Nation building, stability and support or counter-insurgency demand a high level of sacrifice for a nation and are resource intensive in terms of personnel, time and money. The commitment of the nation's government is essential if strategic ends are to be achieved.

2. The strategic decision to withdraw military forces prior to conflict termination must be nested with the operational plan and conditions based. It should be based on the capability of the supported nation's security forces and its government to see the conflict through termination. If the conditions for withdrawal are met, there should be a strategy implemented using other means of national power to see the conflict through termination.

3. At the operational level, reframe the problem when there are changes in the strategic guidance. Reframing the problem, the first step in operational design, prompts commanders and staff to assess the end state, conditions and centers of gravity that allow strategic success. The military end state must support the overall strategic ends.

Conclusion

“Victory is the main objective in war. If this is long delayed weapons are blunted and morale depressed.”

- Sun Tzu
The Art of War

Our National Security Strategy states that “it is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁷⁹ The execution of this policy will drive us toward conflicts where we will be building democracy or bringing stability where democracy is threatened.

According to our doctrine, the National leadership must develop an over arching strategy that carefully looks at the application of the military instrument of power as we implement the policy outlined in our National Security Strategy. The National Command Authority defines the end state, and expresses that end state in broad terms or conditions. These terms or conditions are not expressed in purely military terms, but address the political and economic environment as well. With an understanding of these terms or conditions, along with the operational environment and the threat, military commanders and their staffs exercise battle command and apply operational art to visualize the end state, nature and design of the operation; describe it in terms of time, space, resources, purpose and action; and finally direct the operation in the form of a campaign plan.

The analysis of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan reveals that there was a disconnect in the strategic end state desired by the Kremlin, and what was executed in the

⁷⁹ *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, March 2006, p1.

operational withdrawal plan. The operational design of the withdrawal was almost exclusively focused on getting Soviet troops out of Afghanistan according to the timeline dictated by the Accords. Establishing a timeline, combined with tactical and operational level negotiations with the insurgents by Soviet forces disadvantaged the legitimate government and worked against the strategic political end state for the Afghan State.

Given the nature of the threat and strategic environment in Iraq and Afghanistan, we will likely meet our political objective prior to the termination of conflict. History and our doctrine provide us with three valuable lessons to consider as we face future conflicts where our strategy may dictate that we withdraw our military forces prior to conflict termination. First, strategic leaders must know the red lines – what is acceptable - for the utilization of military forces to achieve strategic ends. Second, the strategic decision to withdraw military forces prior to conflict termination must be nested with the operational plan and conditions based. Finally, at the operational level, reframe the problem when there are changes in the strategic guidance.

In conclusion, this paper examined withdrawal from conflict at the strategic and operational level in relation to our doctrine and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Finally, it outlined three lessons learned that might be applied to future military force application. The thesis put forward was that history may provide us some lessons that may be applied future conflicts where withdrawal of military forces prior to conflict termination is necessary. Through the course of my research and analysis I've outlined those lessons, and assert that history does provide lessons that can be applied within the construct of our current doctrine.

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