

BEYOND CHARLIE WILSON: THE SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR

Colin Rhys Hill

Abstract

He's not like other insomniacs, who simply try to get back to sleep. He reads like a scholar steeped in his field but also like a man in search of something personal, poring through accounts of the struggles of the world and the men who counted—Roosevelt, Kennedy, and all the great generals.¹

George Crile on Congressman Charles Nesbitt Wilson

Based on the bestselling nonfiction novel of the same name, *Charlie Wilson's War* has grossed over \$110 million in theaters worldwide.² While *Charlie Wilson's War* is captivating, it exposes only one dimension of an amazingly rich and complex historical event. During the Cold War, it was impossible to produce a snapshot of how and why the Soviet Union lost the Soviet-Afghan War since only limited accounts of the war came out of Afghanistan and both superpowers kept their accounts classified. Since the end of the Cold War, information has become increasingly available. This essay is an attempt to analyze the Soviet-Afghan War from a perspective incorporating these various historical accounts, the economic and social histories of the region, Soviet and Mujahideen

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military vignettes, collections of primary sources, and various essays, biographies, and memoirs.

The Soviet-Afghan War was a remarkable event in history. Like their ancestors, the Afghans battled a hostile, invading force that attempted to dominate their homeland. But for the first time, Afghanistan would become the center of a modern pan-Arab Jihad (Holy War). Like their ancestors who fought in the Anglo-Afghan Wars, the modern Afghans fought a war of attrition. But the use of modern weaponry would beget casualties and emigration of greater proportions. Like their ancestors, the modern Afghans triumphed over their oppressors. But for the first time, they would triumph with the help of a large and complex global coalition of superpowers, middle powers, and regional powers.

This conflict triggered a chain of events which would plunge Afghanistan into almost three decades of brutal warfare. By the end of the war, the U.S.S.R. was on the verge of collapse; the Afghans and their allies appeared to have won a major victory. So what caused this unexpected upset? It appears that the Soviet Union lost the Soviet-Afghan War due to its own mistakes, the committed involvement of an international "Coalition" which supported the Mujahideen, and the contributions made by the Mujahideen and the Afghani people.

Introduction

The Afghan adventure was not the Soviets' only adventure, but it was their last.³

M. Hasson Kakar, former University of Kabul professor

On Christmas Day, 1979, the Soviet 40th Army crossed the U.S.S.R.'s border with Afghanistan at Kushka & Termez.⁴ The 40th Army had allegedly come to save Afghan President Hafizullah Amin's socialist revolution.⁵ The true intentions of the U.S.S.R. did not become apparent until two days later, when an explosion destroyed the main communications hub in Kabul's city center.⁶

At this signal, 5,000 Soviet troops left Kabul International Airport and stormed Amin's presidential palace. While the time and fashion of his death remain uncertain to this day, "President Amin's bullet-ridden body was displayed to the half-jubilant, half-petrified leaders of the new Soviet client state."⁷ Airborne divisions of the 40th Army seized both Kabul International Airport and Bagram Air Base within hours of Amin's death, forming an air bridge with the Soviet Union.⁸ In the early hours of December 28th, The Soviet Union installed Barbrak Karmal as the Prime Minister of the newly-formed "Democratic" Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), cementing Afghanistan's status as a client state.⁹ According to historian Mark Galeotti, "After years of detente, the U.S.S.R. was once again back on the offensive."¹⁰

Approximately nine years later on February 5th, 1989, Boris Gromov (the commander of the 40th Army and the last Soviet soldier in Afghanistan) would cross the Friendship Bridge at Termez into Uzbekistan. One of his sons was waiting for him at the other end with a bouquet of flowers.¹¹ In Islamabad, Pakistan, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Station Chief Milton Bearden sent a two-word cable to CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia: "WE WON."¹² Bearden's celebration was echoed in the headquarters of intelligence agencies from Singapore to France.¹³ The Soviet Army, which had not lost a war since the Soviet-Polish war of 1919-1921, had been brought to its knees by decentralized groups of Afghani guerrillas who collectively called themselves "The Mujahideen" (The Holy Warriors).

It had been a bloody decade. The official number of 40th Army troops killed in action (KIA) was 13,833; but revised casualty figures reveal that the actual number was "in the vicinity of 26,000 (KIA)."¹⁴ 49,985 Soviet troops were wounded in action (WIA).¹⁵ Conversely, over 1.3 million Mujahideen and Afghani civilians were killed by the 40th Army and DRA forces.¹⁶ The war forced 5.5 million Afghani civilians, almost a third of the pre-war population of Afghanistan, to flee the country as refugees.¹⁷ An additional two million Afghan civilians became internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁸ The textbook Soviet intervention that had crushed the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Czechoslovakia's "Prague

Spring” of 1968 failed miserably in Afghanistan. Soon, the once mighty Soviet Union itself would disintegrate.

Several historically relevant questions rise from the ashes of the U.S.S.R.’s defeat. How could the mighty Red Army be bested by a loose confederation of guerrilla fighters? What other factors contributed to this defeat? Would it have been possible for the U.S.S.R. to win the war? Finally, and most importantly, what conclusions can be drawn about the Soviet-Afghan War when it is studied from a 360-degree perspective? This essay will attempt to answer these questions by compartmentalizing and analyzing the roles that the U.S.S.R., the “Coalition,” and the Mujahideen played in the war. In each section, there will be an examination of the faction, its individual motivations, its actions, and its successes. Additionally, in Part I: The Soviet Union, there will also be a counterfactual examination of whether or not it was plausible that the Soviet Union could have won the war. The final section will attempt to draw contextualized conclusions about the various factions in the Soviet-Afghan War.

Part I: The Soviet Union

“We Failed. But Why?”¹⁹

A question posed by a 40th Army Major who served in Afghanistan.

The cover of the January 14, 1980 issue of *TIME Magazine* was inscribed with the words, “Moscow’s Bold Challenge.”²⁰ The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet 40th Army was not only bold, but also shocking: “To say that (U.S. President) Jimmy Carter was surprised by the Soviet’s Christmas invasion of Afghanistan would be a gross understatement.”²¹ Walter Mondale, Carter’s vice-president, put it a bit more bluntly: “What unnerved everyone was the suspicion that [Soviet President] Brezhnev’s inner circle might not be rational.”²²

Yet the Soviet Political Bureau's (Politburo's) decision to go to war was in concordance with both the Brezhnev Doctrine and Soviet expansionist goals. Ultimately, the Soviet misadventure would not be cemented by their decision to go to war, but by their failure in handling such a war. The Soviet leadership made four principal errors. First, they failed to understand Afghanistan and the Afghani people. Second, they failed to form an effective government. Third, they failed to win the logistics war. Fourth, and finally, they failed to combat the low morale which plagued the 40th Army, the DRA, and their own people.

Actors: The 40th Army

This essay will not delve into a detailed breakdown of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan nor will it comment on the political and military decision-making process due to its complexity and the lack of historical sources. However, it is important to note that approximately 525,000 Soviet soldiers served in the 40th Army from the invasion of Afghanistan to the withdrawal of all Soviet forces.²³ Among these 525,000 soldiers were airmen, tankers, infantry, mechanics, medics, officers, and many other specialists. At any one time during the course of the war, there were approximately 120,000 Soviet soldiers actively serving in the 40th Army.²⁴ The war was fought primarily by 18- to 20-year-old conscripted Soviet youths.²⁵ Only a quarter of a percent of the Soviet population "experienced" Afghanistan compared to the 1.7 percent of Americans who experienced Vietnam.²⁶ Eight generals commanded the 40th Army over the course of the war.²⁷ Why did the 40th Army soldiers fight and die on Afghan soil? According to the Soviet government, they were fulfilling their "internationalist duty" to the people of Afghanistan.²⁸ A political officer in the 40th Army provides a more realistic answer: "The government said go, so we went."²⁹

Motivation: Soviet Interventionism

Afghanistan had recently undergone a socialist revolution. The pro-Moscow People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), led by Nur Muhammad Taraki, had successfully orchestrated a coup d'état in September of 1978. However, President Taraki's reforms, including land redistribution and the advancement of women's rights, "were not supported by members of the government, the Army, or the people... and brutally repressed the intellectuals, tribal leaders, and Islam."³⁰ As a result, Taraki's Prime Minister, Hafizullah Amin, seized power on October 14, 1979. Instability rocked the country as it plunged into civil war. Despite requesting Soviet military advisors and troops to combat the insurgency, President Amin remained fiercely independent from Communist control. An American charge d'affaires recalls Amin stating, "If Brezhnev himself should ask him [Amin] to take any action against Afghan independence...he would not hesitate to sacrifice his life in opposition to such a request."³¹

The Brezhnev doctrine clearly stated, "When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries."³² The Soviet Politburo was concerned that Amin "may change the political orientation of the [Afghanistan's] regime."³³ Amin's contact with Western officials and his decision to remove "pro-Soviet officials from sensitive positions" embodied the Soviet Politburo's fears.³⁴ The Brezhnev doctrine, which had justified successful Soviet interventions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, was now being used to justify an intervention in Afghanistan. Additionally, the intervention was in line with Soviet expansionist policies.³⁵ Afghanistan was viewed as a "stepping stone" to the warm water ports of Pakistan and the oil fields of the Middle East.³⁶ The Soviet Politburo anticipated "a quick, neat show of military force, the installation of a docile new leadership and prompt withdrawal."³⁷

Actions

The first error the Soviets made was that they did not understand Afghanistan and its people. Geographically, Afghanistan's terrain is "varied and challenging."³⁸ Mountains, deserts, and lush forests are not ideal terrain for mechanized forces, especially when those forces are so dependent on heavy armor. As the Russian General Staff later admitted, "The nature of combat conducted by the Mujahideen, and Afghanistan's terrain, significantly limited the opportunity to use tanks in operations."³⁹ The 40th Army had been trained for a potential war in Western Europe, which would entail large scale operations against a NATO force. However, in Afghanistan, "there were no front lines."⁴⁰ The Mujahideen fought a guerrilla war from the outset of the conflict, rendering traditional Soviet military doctrine useless.⁴¹ Furthermore, when the 40th Army entered Afghanistan, "They did not have a single well-developed theoretical manual, regulation, or tactical guideline for fighting such a (guerrilla) war."⁴²

The Soviets also failed to grasp several key aspects of Afghanistan's history and culture. It is now apparent that the Afghans, who had struggled for centuries against aggressors, would not see the Soviet forces as anything more than armed invaders. The fact that the invaders were non-Muslim, not to mention "godless," would also prove troublesome. Astonishingly, "Briefings for political officers serving in the 40th Army contained literally nothing on Islam."⁴³ This glaring omission would become painfully obvious when the Afghani population "reminded" the 40th Army of its faith in Islam. In Kabul, about a month after the invasion, Soviet troops and advisers found themselves engulfed in a frightening demonstration of faith. Several mullahs and rebel leaders began to yell "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great) as dusk fell on the capital. Within minutes, "the air was thundering with the sound of hundreds of thousands of Muslim faithful chanting the cry of the Jihad: 'Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.'⁴⁴ These cries would continue throughout the night, increasing in volume and intensity.⁴⁵ There were several variations, including "Marg, Marg,

Marg bar Shurawi (death, death, death to the Soviets),” but the general message remained the same: “there was only one true superpower (Allah).”⁴⁶

In light of this, the battle for the “hearts and minds” of Afghanistan seems almost comically futile: the construction of housing and infrastructure could not bridge such a vast ideological chasm. Perhaps the Soviets had been lured into a false sense of security. The Islamic majority in the southern underbelly of the U.S.S.R. (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) was relatively docile. These countries and their populations had been successfully subjugated in the earlier Russian expansionist drives of the 1800s and early 1900s.

Jimmy Carter effectively summed up the sentiments of the Afghani people in his address to the U.S. public on Afghanistan in 1980: “It is a deliberate effort of a powerful, atheistic government to subjugate an independent Islamic people.”⁴⁷ From the outset of the conflict, Afghanistan’s general population was strongly opposed to the Soviet occupation. Moreover, the Afghans’ belief in the tenets of Islam would drive them to resist the occupation with unexpected ferocity. President Taraki had brought about civil war because his policies were viewed as anti-Islamic: the arrival of an atheistic foreign Army did not help dispel these anti-Islamic perceptions. The “quick neat show of force” and “prompt withdrawal” the Soviet Politburo so confidently expected would become one of the greatest ironies of the war.⁴⁸ In conclusion, by failing to understand their enemy and his homeland, the Russians were unable to prepare for what they encountered in Afghanistan.

The second error the Soviets made was that they failed to establish an effective puppet government. The DRA governments of President Babrak Karmal (1979-1986) and President Mohammed Najibullah (1986-1992) were marked by both cruelty and corruption. The *Khadamat-e Atela’at-e Dawlati* (KhAD, the Afghani secret police modeled after the Soviet KGB) abducted, tortured, interrogated, and executed Afghans who were classified as “counter-revolutionaries.”⁴⁹ Instead of cowering the population, these tactics often created more sympathy for the Mujahideen cause. Hassan

Kakar (a historian, author, and inmate himself) observed that even among KhAD detainees “the majority (of prisoners) stood up for themselves, demonstrating their honor by defying a tyrannical agency that they considered an instrument of an untenable puppet regime.”⁵⁰ The absence of traditional Islamic values in the secular DRA government would also alienate the DRA from “its” people.

The DRA Army was even more ineffective than the DRA government. Astonishingly, the DRA Army proved to be an asset to the Mujahideen. Soviet commanders often refused to plan operations with the DRA Army because it was infested with Mujahideen agents who leaked “detailed information about upcoming operations and combat to the opposition (the Mujahideen).”⁵¹ To make matters worse, individual soldiers, platoons, or even entire divisions of the DRA Army would defect to the Mujahideen, bringing their newly manufactured Soviet equipment with them. The Russian General Staff estimated that “every month, 1,500-2,000 men (DRA soldiers) deserted.”⁵² Mujahideen commanders even had to convince sympathizers within the Army that they would be more useful as double agents than as defected fighters. The DRA Army, initially 100,000 strong, would shrink to 30,000 by 1985 due to mass desertion.⁵⁴ DRA soldiers who were not defectors or double agents would often take advantage of a liberal Mujahideen surrender policy: any Afghan soldier who surrendered would be disarmed and set free upon surrender. Why were DRA soldiers so willing to fight for the “enemy”? The countrywide draft indiscriminately conscripted many Afghans whose beliefs were diametrically opposed to those of the Soviets and the DRA. Additionally, Mujahideen guerrilla tactics produced an atmosphere of fear. Thus, the DRA soldier had no incentive to fight for a cause he did not believe in and a regime he did not want. In conclusion, the ineffectiveness of the DRA government and its Army ensured that the burden of responsibility for fighting and governance lay upon the Soviet 40th Army, its advisors, and the Soviet Politburo.

The third error made by the 40th Army was that they failed to secure their lines of communications (LOCs, also known as

supply lines). Soviet LOCs consisted of either air bridges from Soviet territory (reliable but low volume) or convoys dependent upon the poor highway infrastructure of Afghanistan (high volume but unreliable). The Mujahideen exploited the latter LOC by ambushing convoys: they would attack a vulnerable “soft skin” (unarmored) convoy with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and automatic weapons, steal what they could, and then vanish into the mountains. These ambushes served a dual purpose: they would not only resupply the Mujahideen with equipment and sustenance but also deny the 40th Army their equipment and sustenance. The effectiveness of this tactic is made evident by its popularity: from 1985 to 1987, Mujahideen forces conducted over 10,000 ambushes.⁵⁵ The 40th Army also failed to block Mujahideen LOCs. In stark contrast to the 40th Army, the Mujahideen were relatively well supplied (this will be discussed further in Part III). They had an intricate network of LOCs that crisscrossed the mountains from Pakistan to deep within the heart of Afghanistan. This supply system had built-in redundancies: if one column of supplies was lost, Mujahideen forces could rely upon another major supply outpost (18 in total) or supply column for supplies.⁵⁶ Convoys also brought in freshly trained Mujahideen from Pakistan. The Russian General Staff notes, “All military attempts to prevent the arrival of fresh Mujahideen (and supplies) in Afghanistan were unsuccessful.”⁵⁷ Thus the Mujahideen were able to win the logistics war.

The fourth and final error that this paper will discuss was that the Soviet Politburo failed to combat war fatigue. War fatigue played a major role in ending U.S. involvement in Vietnam and also contributed to the Soviet Union’s decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. Perhaps the most striking substantiation was that the Soviet public adopted the “Black Tulip” as the *de facto* symbol of the Soviet-Afghan War: this type of aircraft was responsible for transporting 40th Army KIA in zinc coffins.⁵⁸ Yet the low morale stemmed from more than a symbol; it also stemmed from the utter hopelessness with which many Soviet citizens viewed the war. According to one Pravda poll conducted in December of 1989, 46 percent of the Soviet population believed that Afghanistan was “our national shame” and over 75 percent of the Soviet population

held a negative opinion of the war.⁵⁹ Russian journalist Artyom Borovik comments, “in Afghanistan we bombed not only detachments of rebels and their caravans, but our own ideals as well.”⁶⁰ The *casus belli* provided to the Soviet public, the idea that they were fulfilling their internationalist duty to the people of Afghanistan, was ultimately incompatible with and contradictory to the actions of the 40th Army and the reality of Afghanistan. It was clear from the imminent collapse of Amin’s government and the popular resistance to socialist rule that Afghanistan did not want to become a Communist country. Therefore, the question that plagued most mothers and family relations of 40th Army KIA was “What did he die for? Why him?”⁶¹ Similarly, 40th Army veterans would often greet newcomers to Afghanistan with the question, “Why are you here, then?”⁶² Thus, as the war wore on, “draft-age Soviet youth increasingly tried to avoid the draft and Afghanistan duty.”⁶³ Despite one veteran’s claim that “Here’s where we lost it, back home in our country,” morale issues were not limited to the Soviet public; they extended to the 40th Army itself.⁶⁴

Self-medication for trauma experienced in the Soviet-Afghan War was common among Soviet troops: “Many conscripts developed a narcotics habit in Afghanistan.”⁶⁵ Statistics on drug use vary: some Soviet defectors claim that anywhere between 50-80 percent of Soviet troops used narcotics while other Soviet surveys estimate a 20 percent usage rate.⁶⁶ Additionally, the “unfortunate decree” that everyone serving in Afghanistan would receive the same level of pay, with no extra compensation for taking on more hazardous or more mentally taxing duties, severely demoralized the soldiers.⁶⁷ Soldiers who managed to save their pay had to purchase items through the Post Exchange (PX) system, which “failed to adequately support the soldier’s needs.”⁶⁸ In fact, the PX system “created unhealthy relations within the military,” and “had a significant (negative) impact on the quality of combat missions.”⁶⁹ To make matters worse, military housing “lacked many of the amenities expected by Western Armies.”⁷⁰ The lack of air conditioning “in practically all quarters” was especially brutal: it forced soldiers to endure the oppressive heat of Afghanistan’s summers.⁷¹ The draft, the horrors of war, the insufficient pay, the

PX system, military housing, and self-medication chipped away at the morale of the 40th Army. Veterans also brought the war (and morale problems) back home with them. Once home, 40th Army soldiers had to readjust to life as civilians. Russian journalist Artyom Borovik commented, "If you're lucky, you learn to take it easy five or six months later."⁷²

Soviet Successes

The Soviet failures often seem to overshadow the successes of the 40th Army, but these successes provide strong examples of how the Soviets might have secured a victory in Afghanistan. The strongest of such examples is the use of helicopters, most notably the Hind-24. These vehicles were considered "essential to the 40th Army effort."⁷³ Helicopters navigated the treacherous Afghani terrain with ease, flying above mountains and valleys that were impassable to ground vehicles. Transport helicopters ferried both 40th Army troops to the battlefield and 40th Army wounded from the battlefield. Additionally, attack helicopters provided close air support to ambushed convoys and battalions, covered retreats, laid land mines, conducted reconnaissance, took out fortified positions, and carried out "a variety of special missions."⁷⁴ If it were not for the introduction of the Stinger missile in 1986, 40th Army helicopters would have continued to operate with impunity at an effective altitude of 1,640 to 2,297 ft. (500 to 700m).⁷⁵

Additionally, Soviet Special Forces (Spetsnaz) would prove to be highly effective against Mujahideen: their operations were considered far more successful than traditional 40th Army operations.⁷⁶ Modern Soviet tactical doctrine, developed for the European theater of war, called for massive operations. When the 40th Army tried to carry out these operations in Afghanistan, they failed miserably. Hindered by the surrounding terrain, traditional ground forces were unable to pursue Mujahideen who would simply withdraw when faced with overwhelming force. Spetsnaz forces, which were highly mobile and often relied on helicopters, did not share this encumbrance. Secondly, large operations almost

guaranteed that any degree of surprise would be instantly lost once divisions began to roll out of their bases. (Mujahideen intelligence was excellent: it relied upon a loyal local populace and double agents within the DRA army.) Contrarily, Spetsnaz forces would often slip out quietly into the night without drawing attention. As the Russian General Staff notes, “Spetsnaz forces had more flexibility in the conduct of their training—to better results.”⁷⁷

Perhaps the most ironic Soviet success lay in the survival of the DRA. Even though the DRA was ineffective and ephemeral (see “the second error”), it would survive the demise of its superpower benefactor. The Soviet Union’s “Iron Curtain” fell in October of 1991 and communist rule ended in December. The DRA would fall shortly thereafter, when President Najibullah “upset the plan (of a smooth transition of power from the DRA to the Mujahideen) by disappearing on April 15, 1992, justifiably fleeing for his life.”⁷⁸ Kabul was subsequently occupied by the victorious Mujahideen commanders.

A Counterfactual

Russian journalist Artyom Borovik stated, “in short, all kinds of things went wrong in Afghanistan.”⁷⁹ But could it have been different? For the sake of determining whether or not the Soviet Union could have won the war if they had rectified their mistakes, this essay will enter the realm of counterfactual history. The greatest opportunity for the Soviets to win the war presented itself in the early years of the intervention, from 1979-1982, when the Mujahideen were unorganized, weak, and poorly funded. Would this window of time, used wisely, have been decisive? Three factors discussed in this section of the essay pertain to this lost opportunity: the Soviet’s poor tactical and strategic planning of the war, the ineffective DRA government, and the logistics war. All three of these factors were apparent at the beginning of the conflict, and only the tactical and strategic planning would change for the better over the course of the war.

What if the Soviets had begun the Afghan war by employing tactics/strategies more appropriate to counterinsurgency and by attempting to win the hearts and minds of the people? By employing appropriate counterinsurgency tactics, the 40th Army would have been a more effective fighting force. First, they would not have wasted their energy and supplies on large scale operations. Secondly, they would have minimized collateral damage which would have ameliorated their relationship with Afghani civilians. Additionally, since Spetsnaz and Airborne forces “did the best in the counterinsurgency battle,” these forces might have been even more effective at the beginning of the conflict when the Mujahideen was poorly organized and poorly trained.⁸⁰ The easiest way to implement this stratagem would have been to train the 40th Army in counterinsurgency tactics, provide them with a counterinsurgency manual, and to replace 40th Army armored divisions with Spetsnaz and Airborne divisions from other Soviet armies. The Russian General Staff certainly had enough theoretical and practical data to provide the former two solutions while the U.S.S.R. definitely had the resources to reshuffle the latter.

The second stratagem would probably entail the inclusion of Islam in governance and a strict policy discouraging Soviet forces from attacking any Afghan civilians. Is the former realistic? It would certainly not be orthodox Communism to recognize a state religion, but it certainly would not be without precedent. Lenin’s “Living Church” (run by the Cheka), intermittent tolerance of religious belief, and the strong Muslim presence in the South of Russia are all evidence that the Soviet Union was willing to compromise on the issue of religion in Communism if it proves necessary as a control/appeasement mechanism. Is the latter realistic? Since most of the civilian casualties were caused by either Soviet strategies/tactics or preventable “revenge killings,” it would be realistic to assume that most of the civilian casualties were preventable (more on both of these in section IV).

The third stratagem would require the 40th Army to protect their LOCs and deny the Mujahideen their LOCs. The first step would have been a significant investment in Afghanistan’s highway

infrastructure. Both the poor quality and the small number of the roads forced Soviet convoys to travel predictable routes at a slow speed. By diversifying highway routes and allowing vehicles to travel at a faster pace, the 40th Army could have reduced the number of attacks upon their convoys. The second step would have been to increase the amount of armored transports and fighting vehicles within a convoy. Therefore, convoys would be less vulnerable to Mujahideen RPGs and more effective at repelling aggressors. Similarly, helicopter escorts before the introduction of the Stinger in 1986 would have acted as deterrents to Mujahideen attacks.

The denial of Mujahideen LOCs would have been easier than the protection of Soviet LOCs. Most Mujahideen arms and supplies went through Pakistan (see Part II); it was a wonder that the 40th Army did not perform many cross-border operations to deny the Mujahideen access to their “safe haven.” General Zia ul-Haq, the President of Pakistan during most of the war, would often use a saying to describe how much he would support the Mujahideen: “We must make the pot boil for the Russians but not so much that it boils over onto Pakistan.”⁸¹ Limited air/military strikes deep into Pakistani territory, perhaps targeting Zia himself, would have probably been enough to deter Zia from allowing the escalation of aid to the Mujahideen. It might have even convinced him to begin limiting supply and arms shipments to the Mujahideen. Early aggressive stances against Pakistan’s training and support of the Mujahideen, which indirectly killed Soviet soldiers, would likely have fundamentally changed the dynamic of the war. By refusing to choke off Mujahideen supplies, the 40th Army and Soviet leadership failed to show total commitment, ultimately allowing the Mujahideen to increase the number and variety of attacks against Soviet forces.

If these stratagems were pursued, the hypothetical effect would be threefold: (1) they would have eliminated the two strongest recruiting incentives of the Mujahideen: Islam and the shocking number of civilian deaths at the hands of the 40th Army; (2) they would have vastly improved the 40th Army’s strategic position in the war; and (3) they would have created an effective

DRA government. An Islamic, non-tyrannical (or non-genocidal) DRA would have garnered much more public support than the actual DRA ever did during the course of the war. An additional improvement might have been the inclusion of tribal leaders and pre-DRA politicians in the formation of a new government. This would have facilitated the establishment of legitimacy in the outlying rural areas, where tribal ties were considered far more important than the “government du jour” in Kabul.

Before proceeding further in this counterfactual, it is worthwhile to examine whether or not it is realistic that the changes described above could have occurred. The political scientist Joseph Nye, Jr. evaluates the validity of counterfactuals with four different tests: those of “plausibility, proximity, theory, and facts.”⁸² Does this counterfactual meet the plausibility test? Soviet planners had experience with both guerrilla warfare (in Vietnam) and setting up effective puppet governments (Eastern Europe, and most notably Czechoslovakia). Moreover, the Soviet Union had experience in the governance of predominantly Muslim regions (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan), where governance also included suppression of rebellions. Does this counterfactual meet the (chronological) proximity test? The events analyzed and the hypothetical outcomes are very close to each other chronologically, within several years of each other. Does this counterfactual meet the theory test? Strategy, tactics, and governance are widely considered to be major factors in the outcome of any conflict. Finally, does this counterfactual remain close to known facts? It does not stretch the imagination nor does it involve “piling one counterfactual on top of another.”⁸³

Would the cumulative effect of these changes have been significant enough to change the outcome of the conflict? For the most part, yes. While there is no such thing as absolute certainty in counterfactual history, this counterfactual seems to create the conditions necessary for victory: an early suppression (if not elimination) of a viable resistance. Furthermore, a potent DRA government would have been able to slowly but effectively take on the 40th Army’s role as the Soviets withdrew their forces from

Afghanistan. Thus victory might have been within Soviet grasp, if they had not made crucial errors at the beginning of the war.

However, despite several errors, Soviet defeat was far from assured. On the contrary, a shadowy collection of nations exploited Soviet mistakes by funding, arming, and training the Mujahideen. To describe these surreptitious backers of the Afghan resistance as “Pro-West” would be an oversimplification. When nations such as the U.S., Egypt, Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, China, U.K., France, Canada, Germany, Singapore, and Iran work concurrently to supply, arm, train, and co-ordinate a Muslim Jihad, there is an appropriate one-word description: Coalition.⁸⁴

Part II: The Coalition

“If it’s really true that you have nothing to do, why not come upstairs. We’re killing Russians.”⁸⁵

John McGaffin (CIA Operative) to Gust Avrakotos (Future Chief of the CIA’s South Asia Operations Group, responsible for the agency’s largest covert program in history: The Afghan Program).

The forces that fought the Soviet Union (the Mujahideen) were trained, supplied, and supported by major and minor powers that did not participate directly in the conflict. These powers participated through their covert programs, supplying the Mujahideen with massive amounts of arms, supplies, and money. They provided them with safe havens, radios, medical care, planning, and even satellite intelligence, transforming a bunch of ragtag rebels “into a force of late-20th century technoguerrillas.”⁸⁶ These powers invested a large sum of money into the Mujahideen cause by providing them with weapons, supplies, a high-tech, anti-air capability in the form of the Stinger missile, and training programs. In return, some countries made a profit; others were satisfied in knowing that they participated in “the biggest secret war in history;” and still others were content in causing severe or even fatal damage to the Soviet empire.⁸⁷ At the forefront of this Coalition were three nations: the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

Actors: The Big Three

The U.S. began sending aid to the Mujahideen in early March of 1979, when President Carter authorized a set of classified CIA proposals. This occurred a full six months before the Soviet invasion, while the Mujahideen were fighting the Communist government of President Amin.⁸⁸ The U. S. acted through a covert program that was run by the CIA and funded by Congress. In order to maintain plausible deniability, the CIA did not field operatives in Afghanistan or introduce any American-made weaponry to the conflict, although this policy would change seven years later with the introduction of the Stinger in 1986. Saudi Arabia, “convinced that the Soviets would come after them next if they were not stopped in Afghanistan,” also began sending aid in 1979.⁸⁹ They agreed to match the U.S. Congress’s aid dollar for dollar, which effectively doubled the spending power of the CIA program since the Saudi Arabians gave this money directly to the CIA.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Saudi Arabia would send their General Intelligence Department (GID) agents to Pakistan with additional cash for distribution amongst the Mujahideen.⁹¹ Finally, Pakistan transformed its border with Afghanistan into a safe haven for both the Mujahideen and the Afghani civilian refugees by setting up refugee camps and providing humanitarian aid. Upon the insistence of President Zia, the military dictator of Pakistan, the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence Directive (ISI) served as the main link between the Coalition and the Mujahideen forces.⁹²

Motivations: From Cash to the Cold War

Each of the countries involved had its own agenda. Western countries, such as the U.S., Great Britain, and France, were attempting to halt Soviet expansionism. Ties among the Western intelligence agencies were strong, allowing a good degree of coordination and cooperation. Additionally, the U.S. had recently lost the Vietnam War, defeated by the Soviet-backed Democratic

Republic of Vietnam. Thus, according to Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the U.S. wanted to "[give] the U.S.S.R. its Vietnam War."⁹³ Nations such as China, Egypt, and Israel were seeking arms manufacturing contracts, thus supporting their arms industries and strengthening ties with key allies, such as the U.S. Pakistan was building the "Islamic" bomb (the first Muslim atomic bomb) and needed American indifference, if not compliance, in exchange for support of the Mujahideen. In fact, President Zia had struck a deal with U.S. President Ronald Reagan:

Pakistan would work with the CIA against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and in return the U.S. would not only provide massive aid but would agree to look the other way on the question of the ("Islamic") bomb.⁹⁴

Perhaps the most interesting member of the Coalition was Israel: it is not common for a Jewish state to support an Islamic Jihad. Israel supported the Mujahideen for several reasons, but primarily because of Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson's lobbying. (Wilson had been a strong supporter of Israel and their hefty U.S. foreign aid package.) Congressman Wilson's involvement was shocking at best and a clear breach of the Logan Act (which prohibited Congressmen from conducting foreign policy) at worst.⁹⁵ A series of clandestine arms deals, with potential diplomatic benefits, was also an incentive. Notable among these were the Israeli Military Industries' (IMI's) custom-designed weapons for the Jihad and IMI's T-55 tank upgrade for the Pakistanis, which Israel hoped, "would serve as the beginning of a range of under-the-table understandings with Pakistan."⁹⁶

China's role as primary arms exporters is equally mystifying at first glance. Their involvement in the conflict is a tightly held secret; to this day China has not acknowledged that it provided such arms to the Mujahideen.⁹⁷ However, it is clear that China was strongly opposed to the Soviet intervention, claiming that the Soviet *cassus belli* "can fool no one."⁹⁸ Still, it would take more than this grievance to convince China to risk a potential confrontation with the Soviet Union. The CIA Beijing Station Chief Joe DiTrani finally managed to convince the Chinese government not

only that their weapons were going to kill Russians, but also that the Mujahideen were going to win.⁹⁹ Gust Avrakotos, the chief of the CIA's Afghan Program, notes the significance of the Chinese connection: "their equipment was good—top notch—and it was cheap."¹⁰⁰ Inexpensive Chinese equipment also brought the prices down for the CIA across the board: the black market and Egyptians slashed their prices in order to be competitive with the Chinese for arms contracts.

The Coalition was held together by a series of small diplomatic miracles orchestrated by Charlie Wilson and the CIA. When relations between Coalition countries came to an impasse, the CIA would distribute enough "baksheesh," a Persian term for small bribes, to smooth over any misunderstandings.¹⁰¹ Officially, Congressman Wilson was not allowed to conduct foreign policy. However, Wilson's positions on the Appropriations Committee, the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, and the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee granted him a great deal of power: these positions allowed him to influence (and vote on) how the U.S. spent over \$500 billion.¹⁰² Thus, when crucial financial aid packages for Coalition countries passed through Congress, Charlie Wilson could "influence" their passage. Additionally, the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA had to treat Wilson as a "patron" since he was one of 12 members who approved their entire budget. Unofficially, Wilson continued to develop strong and influential relationships with leaders of foreign countries.¹⁰³ Over the course of his travels, Wilson would encounter and negotiate with President Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan, Defense Minister Abu Ghazala of Egypt, Israeli diplomat and consultant Zvi Rafiah, and many other key political players in the Soviet-Afghan War.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of what held the Coalition together, who was in it, and why they fought, the Coalition's overall strategic goal was the same: arm, train, and support the Mujahideen and eventually dislodge the 40th Army from Afghanistan.

Actions

Despite their clarity of purpose and the multiplicity of participants, the Coalition would need to make a substantial investment to counteract Russia's military might. The CIA's Afghan program, funded by two members of the Big Three (the U.S. and Saudi Arabia), provided the bulk of that investment. By the time Boris Gromov crossed the Friendship Bridge, the CIA had spent over \$7.5 billion funding the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. This data is enumerated in the following table.

Table 1.1 Contributions to CIA Afghan Program by Year and Country, 1979-1989, Estimates¹⁰⁵

	U.S. (US\$)	Saudi (US\$) ¹⁰⁶	Total Funding (US\$)
1979	10,000,000 ¹⁰⁷	10,000,000	20,000,000
1980	10,000,000 ¹⁰⁸	10,000,000	20,000,000
1981	60,000,000 ¹⁰⁹	60,000,000	120,000,000
1982	60,000,000 ¹¹⁰	60,000,000	120,000,000
1983	60,000,000 ¹¹¹	60,000,000	120,000,000
1984	250,000,000 ¹¹²	250,000,000	500,000,000
1985	560,000,000 ¹¹³	560,000,000	1,120,000,000
1986	470,000,000 ¹¹⁴	470,000,000	940,000,000
1987	670,000,000 ¹¹⁵	670,000,000	1,340,000,000
1988	750,000,000 ¹¹⁶	750,000,000	1,500,000,000
1989	1,000,000,000 ¹¹⁷	1,000,000,000	2,100,000,000
Total	3,900,000,000	3,900,000,000	7,800,000,000

Additionally, the GID spent some of its own money, funding and/or supporting Arab fighters who fought in the war (most notably, future Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden).¹¹⁸ This additional funding from both the GID and Saudi charities was by no

means insignificant: “[The Saudi Intelligence Service and Saudi Charities] were becoming the ISI’s most generous patron, even more so than the CIA.”¹¹⁹ However, it is impossible to determine exactly how much money the GID and Saudi charities spent, due to the number of donations made and lack of reliable sources. While the U.S. and Saudi Arabia spent the most money, other Coalition members made equally significant contributions. For example, Great Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, colloquially known as Military Intelligence or MI6) was able to work around the Pakistani ISI restrictions and fund the very effective yet politically ostracized Afghan Mujahideen Commander Amhmed Shah Massoud with donated CIA funds.¹²⁰ Massoud, the aptly named “Lion of the Panjshir,” would later become an international symbol of the Afghan-Soviet War.¹²¹

What did the \$7.5 billion buy? Specifically, was there a single killer weapon that crippled the 40th Army? The answer is far less sensational than the one provided in the movie *Charlie Wilson’s War*: there was not a single killer weapon.¹²² According to Mike Vickers, an ex-Green Beret who served as a military advisor to Gust Avrakotos, there was no such thing as a silver bullet in the Soviet-Afghan War.¹²³ Instead, it was crucial for the Coalition to provide the Mujahideen with a varied mix of weapons and equipment.¹²⁴ Thus the CIA bought a variety of weapons, ammunition, and equipment including (but not limited to) the AK-47, RPG-7, vintage WWI Lee Enfield rifles, Dashika 12.7mm machine guns, KPV 14.5mm machine guns, SA7 anti-air missiles, the British “Blowpipe” anti-air missiles, mortars, mines, bicycle bombs, radios, and medical kits.¹²⁵ The CIA even supplied the Mujahideen with the infamous (and deafening) 122mm “Katyusha” rocket. Ironically, the Soviets had used this same rocket against the Wehrmacht in WWII. The Mujahideen Katyusha bombardments were “the perfect twist of a psychological dagger,” because the Soviet weapon which terrorized the Nazis during WWII was now being used against them.¹²⁶

This varied mix of weapons and equipment gave the Mujahideen three unique abilities. First, the Mujahideen could

plan and execute a wide array of missions without having to worry about access to the appropriate armaments. The wide range of weaponry allowed them to requisition and use the best weapon for each attack. Second, the variety and number of weapons helped the Mujahideen acquire firepower “parity” when in combat with an attacking Soviet force. Instead of being immediately outclassed and forced to flee, the Mujahideen could use heavier weapons to keep attacking forces at bay while others escaped. Third, the Mujahideen no longer had to depend upon capturing Soviet stockpiles of weaponry in order to replenish their supplies and acquire the weapons they needed. This gave the Mujahideen the ability to be more selective about the time and variety of their attacks, essentially eliminating recognizable patterns of attacks.

While the variety of weapons was, in essence, the “killer weapon,” there is one other weapon systems that deserves special mention. The “Stinger” or FIM 92A, “is an extremely effective weapon for shooting down aircraft,” with an effective range of 5 miles and a ceiling of 11,000 feet.¹²⁷ It is a “fire and forget” weapon system, composed of a single missile and a launch tube, which uses infrared tracking to lock onto the heat exhaust of the targeted aircraft.¹²⁸ Initially developed for American soldiers stationed in Western Europe, the Stinger cost about \$60,000 to \$70,000 to manufacture.¹²⁹ The Stinger was first used in Afghanistan on September 26 , 1986.¹³⁰ On that fateful day, a small detachment of Mujahideen used Stingers to destroy three Hind helicopters, inflicting \$60 million worth of damage.¹³¹ It was not a “silver bullet” and it certainly did not force the 40th Army from Afghanistan. However, it did completely change the tactical nature of the war.

The Russian General Staff observed that “the helicopter was essential to the 40th Army effort (in Afghanistan).”¹³² The most effective weapon against the Mujahideen, the Hind helicopter, would strafe Mujahideen with a dazzling assortment of weaponry including Gatling guns, napalm bombs, and 128 rockets.¹³³ What made the Hind so effective was that it was able to fly close to the ground with a large degree of impunity: Hind pilots would fly at a

working altitude of 1,640 to 2,297 ft. (500 to 700m).¹³⁴ Following the introduction of the Stinger, the Russian General Staff noted that “The Soviet command had to severely limit the employment of helicopters, especially during daylight.”¹³⁵ The implications of this tactical revision are astounding. The Soviet ground forces became disillusioned. They even nicknamed the once revered helicopter pilots “Cosmonauts” for their tendency to fly at extremely high altitudes, thus rendering any air support ineffective.¹³⁶ The introduction of the Stinger also held grave ramifications for 40th Army WIA. Dr. Misha Grigoriev, a member of the 40th Army medical battalion at Bagram Airbase, noted:

All of the wounded were evacuated by helicopter to the hospital in Kabul (before the introduction of the Stinger). I couldn't have been happier. But the arrival of Stinger missiles put an end to our massive use of choppers. So we're forced to cram the injured into armored carriers—15 in each one—and send them down the local roads to Kabul.¹³⁷

Conversely, the Mujahideen were granted greater mobility and received a huge boost in morale: the hunted had become the hunters. For the first time, the Mujahideen believed that “they could actually win the war, not simply outlast the invader.”¹³⁸

However, not all historians agree with such a positive assessment of the Stinger. In *Out of Afghanistan*, Harrison and Cordevez argue that the Stinger actually prolonged Soviet involvement in the war since it angered hawks in the military and the Politburo.¹³⁹ Additionally, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze comments, “The Stinger definitely prolonged our stay...it made our military men, our hawks, much more determined than ever not to withdraw.”¹⁴⁰ These comments, though highly contentious, do bring up a valid point: did the impact of the Stinger change the strategic nature of the war, thus influencing Soviet withdrawal policy? The Soviet Politburo meeting minutes of November 13, 1986 seem to suggest otherwise. Soviet Premier Gorbachev notes:

In October of last year [1985] in a Politburo meeting we determined upon a course of settling the Afghan question. The goal which we raised was to expedite the withdrawal of our forces from Afghanistan and simultaneously ensure a friendly Afghanistan...This should have

been realized through a combination of military and political measures. But there is no movement in either of these directions. The strengthening of the military position of the Afghan government has not taken place. National consolidation has not been ensured mainly because comr. (comrade) Karmal continued to hope to sit in Kabul under our assistance...The problem is not in the concept itself, but in its realization. We must operate more actively...First of all, in the course of two years effect the withdrawal of our troops from Afghanistan. In 1987 withdraw 50 percent of our troops, and in the following year—another 50 percent.¹⁴¹

Gorbachev's comments confirm that the Soviet decision to withdraw had been made before the general use of the Stinger missile. Furthermore, it appears that Gorbachev proposed a more expedited withdrawal due to systemic political and military frustrations rather than due to the introduction of the Stinger missile. Thus it can be concluded that while the Stinger had a significant tactical impact on the war, it lacked the strategic impact of a "silver bullet."

In order to win the war, the Coalition also had to train the Mujahideen. This job fell to Pakistan's ISI: "All training of Mujahedin would be carried out solely by ISI in camps along the Afghan frontiers."¹⁴² The training was diverse and offered a broad range of specialized programs. One 10-day course offered instruction in "basic assault rifle tactics, how to approach and withdraw, rocket propelled grenades, and a few mortar systems."¹⁴³ Still, other courses taught the Mujahideen, "To wage a war of urban terror, with instruction in car bombings, bicycle bombings, camel bombings, and assassination."¹⁴⁴ Though most Mujahideen action was limited to raids and ambushes, occasionally the Mujahideen factions would band together for operational-level engagements. A perfect example of this type of major operation is Operation Ghashey, which occurred in late October and early November of 1988.¹⁴⁵ On this occasion, a force of about 2,000 Mujahideen managed to block a 43.5 mile (70km) stretch of the Kabul-Jalalabad highway for a little over two weeks.¹⁴⁶ DRA and Soviet forces not only lost over 50 armored vehicles, 65 soft-skinned vehicles (most likely supply trucks), and a large amount of weapons and ammunition but also suffered 500 casualties and 223 soldiers captured.¹⁴⁷

The Mujahideen losses were comparatively small, only 18 KIA and 53 WIA.¹⁴⁸ While this degree of organization and scale of victory (though the Mujahideen were eventually forced to withdraw) was not typical for the entire war, it illustrates the culmination of ISI training.

Coalition Successes

Was the program cost effective? While most of the arms-dealing countries (such as Egypt, China, and Israel) benefited from the secret war regardless of its cost effectiveness, the financiers (such as the U.S. and Saudi Arabia) would only benefit if their money was being put to good use. These doubts would be dispelled by a 1983 cable from Howard Hart, the CIA's Pakistan Station Chief. The cable stated, "The money allocated secretly by Congress each year...was destroying Soviet equipment and personnel worth eight to ten times that amount or more."¹⁴⁹ For example, over the course of the war, the Soviet 40th Army lost the following ground vehicles: 147 tanks, 1,314 armored personnel carriers (APCs), 433 artillery pieces, and over 11,000 trucks.¹⁵⁰

As the war continued, the "profitability" would only increase. The introduction of the Stinger was exceptionally cost effective: a \$70,000 Stinger would knock out an airplane or helicopter worth at least \$20 million.¹⁵¹ The CIA estimated that "seven out of ten times a Mujahideen fired a Stinger a helicopter or airplane came down."¹⁵² Thus every dollar invested into the Stinger program would destroy \$200 worth of Soviet equipment.¹⁵³ The 40th Army alone would lose 118 jets and 333 helicopters over the course of the war.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps Reagan's strategy of forcing the Soviets to overspend and implode is best exemplified by the Soviet-Afghan War: CIA analysts believed that "every dollar that the U.S. slipped into the insurrection (the Afghan-Soviet War) cost the Soviets at least ten to counter."¹⁵⁵

Though the financial damage to the Soviet Union might have been enough to justify the existence (and investment) of

the Coalition, the scope of damage to the Soviets went far beyond the field of economics. Roughly 26,000 40th Army troops were KIA and about 50,000 were WIA during the course of the war.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Soviet citizens had also become disillusioned with the war. Thus Afghanistan was one of several political and economic pressures that led Gorbachev to implement *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* were policies of political openness and economic reform (respectively); they were essentially the antitheses of traditional Soviet government policies. Author Mark Galeotti comments, “Afghanistan not only stimulated *Glasnost*, it showed how little prepared Soviet journalists and public alike were for the end of their comforting consensual public myth.”¹⁵⁷ Russian journalist Artyom Borovik goes even further, suggesting, “it is hardly coincidental that the ideas of *Perestroika* took hold in 1985—the year the war reached its peak.”¹⁵⁸ The implications of such economic, psychological, and institutional damage are astounding. Of course, there were hidden costs to the Soviet-Afghan War, and it was the Afghani populace who paid this price.

Part III: The Mujahideen

Allahu-Akbar!

Known as the *Tokbir*, this Arabic phrase is translated as “God is Great” or “God is the Greatest” and is used during daily prayers, the call to prayer, and as an expression of approval, faith, joy, and praise. During the Soviet-Afghan War, *Allahu-Akbar* became the rallying cry of the Mujahideen.¹⁵⁹

Afghanistan has been a proving ground for empires ever since Alexander the Great: his inexorable army ground to a halt there for four years of intense fighting. The Soviets would find themselves battling the same tribesmen that Alexander had fought over two millennia ago. What is it about this proud, if not always united, nation that has defeated empires large and small since the dawn of the Greeks? What part did the Afghans play in a conflict where the mighty Soviet Union and the Coalition faced off in the

final battle of the Cold War? This section of the essay will explore Afghanistan's contribution to the outcome of this conflict. From the Mujahideen to the civilians to the 5.5 million refugees who fled to Pakistan during the course of the war, each Afghan group played a unique and direct role in the Soviet-Afghan War.¹⁶⁰ They fought using guerrilla warfare, showed an unparalleled force of national will, died in a Soviet-sponsored slaughter which swept the country, and committed hair-raising atrocities. They did extraordinary things, by any measure of good or evil: but one must know the Mujahideen and understand why they fought to comprehend their contribution to the war.

Actor(s): The Mujahideen

In the oft-misused comparison between the Soviet Union's experience in Afghanistan and the U.S. experience in Vietnam, it is taken for granted that the Mujahideen were a united opposition, not unlike the Vietcong. Nothing could be further from the truth: in reality, there was a myriad of Mujahideen factions, each with its own political and military agenda. The Mujahideen were by far the most fragmented of the three factions involved in the Soviet-Afghan War.

Seven Sunni groups were considered "mainstream" and received the majority of the funding from the Coalition; they were known collectively as the "Peshawar Seven."¹⁶¹ Three of these seven groups were considered "moderate" while the remaining four held more extremist beliefs.¹⁶² Core tenets ranged from "the fanatical desire to return the Practice of Islam to its form from the Middle Ages" to the establishment of "an Islamic society based on justice, equality, and support of individual and social freedom in accordance with the fundamentals of Islam."¹⁶³

Still other Mujahideen groups formed around ideological, ethnic, and religious ties. Shiite Islam, Pashtun pride, Hazara kinship, Tajik brotherhood, Iran, nationalism, Maoism, and tribal heritage each served as a nucleus for the formation of Mujahideen

groups, creating regional spheres of influence and dominance.¹⁶⁴ These smaller groups, such as the Mujahideen commanded by Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Sazman-e-Nasr-e-Islami (Organization of Islamic Victory), received financial aid from different sources (the U.K. and Iran, respectively).¹⁶⁵

The loose, decentralized organization affected the outcome of the conflict in several ways. A loose “cell” structure allowed individual commanders to operate independently of political or military micromanagement, encouraging flexibility and opportunism. This structure also promoted the unique Mujahideen LOC convoys by creating redundancy (i.e., since the system was so flexible, if one convoy was attacked and destroyed, another convoy would be able to resupply Mujahideen commanders). The loose structure also confused 40th Army officers and Soviet military planners: “The Soviets were looking for structure among the unstructured Mujahideen... (this) frustrated their intelligence effort in an already difficult theater.”¹⁶⁶

However, lack of strict command chains would also prove to be a weakness for the Mujahideen. Commanders were not inclined to coordinate with other Mujahideen on operational-level engagements until the end of the war, when these engagements (such as Operation Ghashey) became more common.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, ideological differences, ethnic background, competition for territory, and even nationality (since not all Mujahideen were Afghan) led some Mujahideen factions to compete, rather than collaborate, thus opening themselves to exploitation by the Soviets. These same ideological, ethnic, and national divides would also shape the motives of each faction.

Motivation: Repel the Invaders

Besides the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen (IUAM), which somewhat united the Peshawar Seven, the common cause that held the various Mujahideen factions together was the desire to dislodge the 40th Army from Afghanistan and overthrow the DRA

puppet government. Even within this seemingly clear goal, there were subtle (though important) differences. This can be traced back to three main causes: ethnicity, ideology, and nationality.

In the realm of ethnicity, various factions held various ethnic majorities. Ahmed Shah Massoud, perhaps the most well-known Afghan Mujahideen, was a Tajik (an ethnic minority) and his forces were predominantly Tajik: they fought for both ethnic equality with the majority Pashtun and the defeat of the 40th Army.¹⁶⁸ The Pashtun (Afghanistan's ethnic majority, about 53 percent of the total population) fought in Mujahideen factions whose beliefs ranged from a united Afghanistan to a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan.¹⁶⁹ This pattern continued with other minorities such as the Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Turkmen.

Ideology also separated Mujahideen factions. Islamic beliefs were liberal, moderate, or fundamentalist depending on a faction's religious dogma.¹⁷⁰ Political beliefs were as varied as religious beliefs: some factions preferred a totalitarian Sharia state, others looked to Iran, still others believed in democracy, and some even wanted a return to traditional tribal governance.

Nationality was a rarer, but still prevalent, source of motivation. At first, this appears to be an obvious observation. After all, most of the Mujahideen were Afghans who were fighting to regain control of their country. However, the most common foreign Jihadist, the Arab Mujahideen, had different motivations. Afghan Jihadists would complain that Arabs (such as Osama Bin Laden) were simply there for "Jihad credit" and were more interested in taking videos than actually fighting the 40th Army.¹⁷¹ Thus their Soviet-Afghan War was more of a rite of passage than a struggle for independence.

Actions

Afghan author/professor Hassan Kakar remarks that "The (Soviet) invasion turned the civil war into a war of liberation."¹⁷²

But did civilians participate in this “war of liberation” or was it fought solely by the Mujahideen?¹⁷³ Historical evidence seems to suggest that the Soviet-Afghan War was a countrywide struggle which pitted the majority of Afghans against the 40th Army and the DRA government. In the cities of Herat and Kandahar, citizens closed all non-essential shops as a form of protest within the first week of the invasion.¹⁷⁴ Kabul’s uprising, as mentioned in Part I of the essay, occurred shortly thereafter.¹⁷⁵ The resistance to Soviet occupation did not end within the first month. Civilians in cities continued to resist the Soviet occupation throughout the war in different ways. For example, the success of Mujahideen urban warfare campaigns “was due primarily to the support of the population.”¹⁷⁶ The ferocity of Afghan civilians was even immortalized in 40th Army rhyme: “Afghanistan/A wonderland/Just drop into a store/And you’ll be seen no more.”¹⁷⁷ In the countryside, the Soviets were not able to bring local villages under the control of the central government.¹⁷⁸ In fact, the Mujahideen were able to “prevent the Soviet Union...from gaining more than limited control inside the country (of Afghanistan).”¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the Soviets were only taking part in the historic struggle between the central government and the countryside, “a struggle which the countryside usually won.”¹⁸⁰

While civilians actively and passively resisted the Soviet occupation, Mujahideen commanders led the military insurrection. While each Mujahideen commander contributed to the defeat of the 40th Army, only one commander would become the international symbol of the Soviet-Afghan War: Ahmad Shah Massoud. However, the famed Massoud owes more of his success to geography, rather than to his tactical or strategic brilliance. His forces controlled the Panjshir Valley, where the sinuous Salang Pass Highway connected Kabul to vital Soviet supply lines.¹⁸¹ The advantages of such an arrangement are obvious: the Soviets were deeply threatened by this lone Tajik commander. It was no wonder that they launched a number of multi-divisional attacks on Massoud’s positions during the war; “the engagements were like scenes out of *Apocalypse Now*.”¹⁸² By the time he was 30, this “Alexander of Afghanistan” had survived six direct assaults by the

mighty Red Army.¹⁸³ While it is true Massoud cut several deals with the Soviets during the war, including “an unprecedented truce” in the Spring of 1983, his efforts against the 40th Army would prove to be far more important.¹⁸⁴ His continued survival was a symbol of the Afghani Mujahideen movement, an accessible justification for any nation funding the Mujahideen. His attacks on Soviet LOCs are some of the most famed in the war and also the most disquieting for Soviet soldiers: “Red Army soldiers were dying at the hands of Red Army weapons fired by Mujahideen clothed in Red Army uniforms.”¹⁸⁵

Massoud survived the Soviet-Afghan War, becoming part of the interim Mujahideen government before being ejected from Kabul by the Taliban. Afterwards, he returned to his former employment as a guerrilla warrior, and organized the “Northern Alliance” as a resistance force against the Taliban. Ironically, the man who had survived attempts on his life by the world’s largest army would eventually be killed by a pair of Taliban assassins on September 10, 2001.¹⁸⁶

While the international media focused on the tangible contributions of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the most valuable contribution that the Mujahideen and Afghani populace made was not tangible in the slightest. It was that rare, but vital, virtue that always seemed to be in short supply: national will. Lester W. Grau, who has written and edited several books on the Soviet-Afghan War, comments, “The Mujahideen understood that guerrilla warfare is a contest of endurance and national will.”¹⁸⁷ This understanding, whether innate, learned, or unconsciously acted upon, manifested itself in one particular way during the Soviet-Afghan War: the Afghan populace was willing to resist in the face of “genocide.”

Genocide is, by definition, “the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group.”¹⁸⁸ The word itself is emotionally charged, conjuring up images of the horrors at Auschwitz or the more recent massacres in Kosovo, Rwanda, and Darfur. Genocide in Afghanistan was far more complex but quite horrifying. More than 1.3 million civilians and Mujahideen died out of a pre-war population of some 17 million people.¹⁸⁹

This statistic cannot be broken down into combatant and non-combatant casualties. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to infer that a large proportion of these casualties were civilian.¹⁹⁰ On a proportional basis, the number of Afghan deaths can be roughly correlated to the loss of the entire population of Texas in relation to the population of the U.S.¹⁹¹ More than 5.5 million civilians fled the country as refugees, roughly equivalent to the entire population of the East Coast fleeing the U.S.¹⁹² The Soviet-Afghan War was one of the largest humanitarian crises in the second half of the 20th century.

The massacre of Afghani civilians took on several unique dimensions. While “retributive mass killings” were a common response to Mujahideen attacks, the Soviets varied the intensity and methods of their brutality in order to create desired results.¹⁹³ One notable atrocity was the employment of helicopter spread “butterfly” mines.¹⁹⁴ These mines were “particularly dangerous to children, who tended to think the mine was a toy.”¹⁹⁵ If young children maimed themselves, they would take up the resources of several adults, who might otherwise join the Mujahideen. 40th Army Aviation (mainly helicopters and bombers) also targeted crops and irrigation across the countryside, a devastating blow to civilians in a country where “over 85% of the population was involved in agriculture.”¹⁹⁶ The 40th Army even used Mycotoxins, a class of lethal (and illegal) chemical weapons, in their attempts to suppress the resistance.¹⁹⁷

Yet in spite of all this, the resistance continued. Perhaps the Afghans fought because they believed there was no alternative. Perhaps they believed the atrocities would continue as a form of retribution even if the resistance stopped. More likely, the same Afghan philosophy of “honour and revenge” that had repelled previous invaders was being used against Soviet forces. In any case, the Mujahideen and Afghan populace were willing to suffer terrible costs to continue fighting: this was the Afghani people’s national will at its most impressive.

The horrors of war were not only perpetrated by the 40th Army; the Mujahideen contributed their fair share of terrible acts.

Gust Avrakotos comments, “Nine out of ten (Russian) prisoners were dead within 24 hours and they were always turned into concubines by the Mujahideen. I felt so sorry for them I wanted to have them all shot.”¹⁹⁸ Surviving prisoners were often mentally traumatized and became alcoholics, pedophiles, or completely insane.¹⁹⁹ One 40th Army prisoner who was brought to American soil “ended up robbing a 7-Eleven in Vienna, Virginia.”²⁰⁰ Ultimately, only 18 prisoners of war ended up defecting to Western nations.²⁰¹

The effect of such horrors was threefold on 40th Army personnel. The first effect was a commonly-held perception that atrocities committed by the 40th army were necessary evils. According to one Soviet veteran, “We were no angels. But we were fighting devils.”²⁰² This perception helped 40th Army personnel “justify” atrocities, essentially “glossing over the Soviet and Kabul Regime’s use of torture and indiscriminate violence.”²⁰³ Secondly, the atrocities committed by the Mujahideen bonded Soviet soldiers together, not unlike the way that Soviet atrocities bonded the Mujahideen together. The third effect was perhaps the most predictable: the Soviets shared a universal fear of capture. Kipling’s prose, describing a British soldier’s “Afghan” experience in the 1800s, would ring true for the 40th Army infantryman:

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains,
 And the women come out to cut up what remains,
 Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains
 An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The Kremlin decision makers acted on the view that what counted was success and that before the God of success the scruples of human behavior did not count. The Soviets had built their empire with this precept in mind.²⁰⁵

M. Hasson Kakor on the Kremlin’s decision
 to go to war in Afghanistan

This was simply an issue of good and evil.²⁰⁶

Congressman Charlie Wilson on the Soviet-Afghan War

As a nation, we believed that history repeats itself. What happened in the 19th Century to the invading British would also be the fate of the Soviet invaders. Philosophically, the Soviets believed that history is unidirectional, progressive and does not repeat itself. History did repeat itself and we did prevail.²⁰⁷

Mujahideen General Abdul Rahim Wardak explains the Afghan perspective on why the Soviets lost the Soviet-Afghan War.

In the introduction, this paper proposed three research questions. First, why did the Soviet Union lose the Soviet-Afghan War? Soviet mistakes and lack of total commitment, the Coalition's significant financial, material, and instructional contribution to the Mujahideen, and the sacrifices made by the Mujahideen and Afghani populace ultimately brought about the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Soviet-Afghan War. Second, could the Soviet Union have won the war? The counterfactual in Part I suggests that victory was within the grasp of the Soviet Union, if the Soviet Union had not made crucial errors at the start of the war. However, this still leaves one research question unanswered: what conclusions can be drawn about the Soviet-Afghan War when it is studied from a 360-degree perspective?

In the final chapter of *Charlie Wilson's War*, Crile discusses the "Unintended Consequences" of the Soviet-Afghan War faced by the U.S. and the Western world.²⁰⁸ In fact, the Soviet Union and the Afghan people also suffered unintended consequences. In 1979, the Soviet Union did not intend to entrench itself in a quagmire that would eventually contribute to its own downfall. In 1979, the Mujahideen did not intend to plunge their country into three decades of constant warfare that would profoundly damage almost every aspect of the Afghan state. In 1979, the other sponsors of the Mujahideen (such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt and China) did not intend to spark the precarious flame of Islamic extremism. Thus, all three factions suffered from unintended consequences.

These consequences were directly caused by the actions of each of the three factions. Thus, by extension, the unintended consequences were caused by the motivations which led the various factions to act as they did in the Soviet-Afghan War.

What becomes apparent when the actions and failures of the factions are juxtaposed is that their behavior mimics the three predominant theories in International Relations: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. For the purpose of this essay, Realism is the belief that states must pursue economic and political security through force; Liberalism is the belief that the conduct of states should be guided by higher moral principles; Constructivism is the belief that International Relations is shaped primarily by ideas and culture. It appears that the U.S.S.R. approached the Soviet-Afghan War from a realist perspective, the Coalition conducted their war from a liberal perspective, and the Mujahideen approached the Soviet-Afghan War from a constructivist perspective.

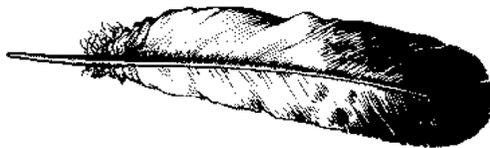
The Soviet Union viewed the conflict as simply another protection of their sphere of influence, not unlike the interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The U.S.S.R. believed that the Afghan people would be overwhelmed by the sheer power of the 40th Army. They were correct in one regard: 40th Army never suffered an outright military defeat at the hands of the Mujahideen. However, from a constructivist standpoint, they failed to take into account the cultural and ideological struggle which would fuel the Mujahideen and dishearten the Soviet public, its leadership, and the 40th Army. Total war requires total commitment, and the Mujahideen forced the Soviets into a total war situation where the majority of Afghans were willing to fight the U.S.S.R.'s occupation. From a liberal standpoint, the "might is right" argument fails to hold up completely. If the Soviets had pursued a more liberal path, the DRA government might have been independent enough (and Islamic enough) to draw public support away from the Mujahideen. But the Soviets approached the war from a purely realist perspective and thus failed to foresee that sheer military and economic might alone could not subjugate the Afghan nation. They also failed to foresee the amalagama-

tion of unlikely allies that would conspire against them and the determination with which they would pursue the covert war and support the Afghan Mujahideen.

While each Coalition nation acted based on a variety of ideological motivations, the foremost member of the Coalition (the U.S.) was driven to act based upon liberal principles. Although there were some realist considerations for America's involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War, such as forcing the Soviets to overspend, these realist considerations do not explain why the war was prosecuted. Even towards the end of the war, many CIA analysts believed that the Soviets would continue to escalate their involvement in the war rather than abandon Afghanistan. Additionally, the Democratic-controlled Congress was shutting down practically every other CIA covert operation at the time, including Nicaragua and its successor, the Iran-Contra affair. So why did funding for the war increase year after year despite these facts? To quote Charlie Wilson, "This was simply an issue of good vs. evil."²⁰⁹ Under this reasoning, the U.S. justified and prosecuted the single largest covert war in history. Afghans were viewed as the stereotypical noble people who were fighting the "evil empire" and it was our responsibility to the Afghan people to arm and train them in their Jihad. From a realist perspective, the aphorism "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" only holds true so long as you share a common enemy with this so called "friend." Thus, prepare for dealing with your "friend" once you defeat your common enemy. If the U.S. and other Coalition members had committed to the more realist Soviet post-war approach of containing and neutralizing the fundamentalist threat, the Taliban might not have risen to power and Al Qaeda might not have thrived in Afghanistan. From a constructivist perspective, the Coalition had no idea of the damage that they were causing to Afghanistan's cultural and social institutions. Thus the Coalition failed to do what would be ideologically imperative for any constructivist: rebuild Afghanistan. But the U.S. approached the war from a purely liberal perspective and failed to take into account that they were training and arming the very people who would turn against them in the next decade.

The Mujahideen understood the war from a constructivist perspective. Resisting foreign invasions was a bedrock of Afghanistan's culture. In fact, invasion was perhaps the sole event that could unite the various independent tribes and ethnicities of Afghanistan. Historically, it was the foreign invader who would retreat in defeat. The Mujahideen were accurate in this belief, but they failed fully to comprehend the costs. A realist might have understood that the terrible price exacted upon the Afghan people would lead to almost constant warfare over the next two decades. A liberal would have understood the need for cooperation amongst the Mujahideen after the war. Instead, the various factions fought for power in Kabul, and were ultimately overwhelmed by the foreign-led Taliban. Thus the Mujahideen won a tragic victory. Incorporating purer realist and purer liberal considerations might have led to a different outcome. But the Mujahideen approached the war from a constructivist perspective.

The Soviet-Afghan War is far more complex than it first appears, but it is amazing how little the various factions knew about each other. All sides had limited views of the conflict and blinded themselves by not accounting for other ideological beliefs. Each faction paid a price for this nearsightedness, this failure to view the complete picture. The Soviet-Afghan War is a cautionary tale for those countries and citizens who act behind ideological blinders and do not seek a full understanding of a conflict. Perhaps, it should be added that these citizens and countries should also seek a full understanding of their recent past. However, if they do not do so, they are forewarned: prepare for unintended consequences.



¹ George Crile, Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of How the Wildest Man in Congress and a Rogue CIA Agent Changed the History of our Times (New York, New York: Grove Press, 2003) p. 22

² The Numbers, "Charlie Wilson's War," Nash Information Services LLC, <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/2007/CWWAR.php> (accessed March 26, 2008)

³ Hassan Kakar, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and Afghan Response, 1979-1982 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995) p. 255

⁴ Russian General Staff, The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost trans. and ed. Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002) p. 16

⁵ Stephen Tanner, Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DA CAPO PRESS, 2002) p. 236

⁶ Kakar, p. 21

⁷ Michael Dobbs, "Secret Memos Trace Kremlin's March to War," Washington Post (November 15, 1992)

⁸ Russian General Staff, pp. 16-17

⁹ Ibid., p. 18

¹⁰ Mark Galeotti, Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1995) p. 1

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1

¹² Ibid., p. 1

¹³ Crile, p. 408

¹⁴ Russian General Staff, p. xix

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 309

¹⁶ Lester W. Grau and Ali Ahmad Jalali, Afghan Guerrilla Warfare: In the Words of the Mujahideen Fighters (St. Paul, Minnesota: MBI Publishing Company, 2001) p. xviii

¹⁷ Ibid., p. xviii

¹⁸ Ibid., p. xviii

¹⁹ Svetlana Alexievich, Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) p. 160

²⁰ Time Magazine, "Moscow's Bold Challenge," (January 14, 1980)

²¹ Crile, p. 14

²² Ibid., p. 14

²³ Lester W. Grau, ed., The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan (New York, New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998) p. xix

- ²⁴ Galeotti, p. 30
- ²⁵ Alexievich, p. xvi
- ²⁶ Galeotti, p. 30
- ²⁷ Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2004) p. 185
- ²⁸ Galeotti, p. 35
- ²⁹ Artyom Borovik, The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan (New York, New York: Grove Press, 1990) p. 236
- ³⁰ Russian General Staff, p. 8
- ³¹ Kakar, p. 42
- ³² Leonid Brezhnev, "Brezhnev Doctrine—Polish United Worker's Conference November 1968: Speech by Leonid Brezhnev," CNN Cold War, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/14/documents/doctrine/> (accessed March 26, 2008)
- ³³ Kakar, p. 44
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 44; Ibid., p. 42
- ³⁵ Galeotti, p. 11
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 11
- ³⁷ Ibid., pp. 12-13
- ³⁸ Grau and Jalali, p. xx
- ³⁹ Russian General Staff, p. 190
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 305
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 43
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 43
- ⁴³ Galeotti, p. 12
- ⁴⁴ Crile, p. 17
- ⁴⁵ Kakar, p. 114
- ⁴⁶ Crile, p. 17
- ⁴⁷ Time Magazine, "Moscow's Bold Challenge," (January 14, 1980) Cover Page
- ⁴⁸ Galeotti, pp. 12-13
- ⁴⁹ Kakar, pp. 158-164
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 167
- ⁵¹ Russian General Staff, p. 52
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 51
- ⁵³ Coll, p. 117
- ⁵⁴ Crile, p. 407
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 65
- ⁵⁶ Russian General Staff, p. 60

- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 25
- ⁵⁸ Galeotti, p. 84; Ibid., p. 148
- ⁵⁹ Komsomol'skaya Pravda, "Posle Afganistana," (December 21, 1989)
- ⁶⁰ Borovik, p. 14
- ⁶¹ Alexievich, p. 66
- ⁶² Ibid., p. 134
- ⁶³ Russian General Staff, p. 313
- ⁶⁴ Galeotti, p. 19
- ⁶⁵ Russian General Staff, p. 313
- ⁶⁶ Galeotti, p. 52
- ⁶⁷ Russian General Staff, p. 309
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 292
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 293
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 294
- ⁷¹ Ibid., p. 293
- ⁷² Borovik, p. 100
- ⁷³ Russian General Staff, p. 222
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 210
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 212-213
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 92
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 48
- ⁷⁸ Tanner, p. 276
- ⁷⁹ Borovik, p. 120
- ⁸⁰ Grau, p. 202
- ⁸¹ Crile, p. 128
- ⁸² Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History 4th ed. (New York, New York: Longman, 2003) p. 51
- ⁸³ Ibid., p. 52
- ⁸⁴ Crile, p. 268; Ibid., p. 408
- ⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 96
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 280; Ibid., p. 346
- ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. ix
- ⁸⁸ Robert M. Gates, From The Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War (New York, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2007) p. 146
- ⁸⁹ Crile, p. 165; Gates, p. 144; Coll, p. 89

While Gates mentions that the Saudis were willing to match U.S. covert aid, he does not explicitly state that this was the case. However, Coll asserts that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had spent the same amount of money by January 1984, which

confirms that the Saudis matched the U.S. contributions dollar for dollar from the start of the CIA's covert Afghan program.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Coll, p. 72

⁹² Crile, p. 102

⁹³ Le Nouvel Observateur (Paris), "Zbigniew Brzezinski: How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen," (January 15-21, 1998)

⁹⁴ Crile, p. 463

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 132

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 142

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 268

⁹⁸ Henry S. Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: New and Expanded Edition (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1985) p. 201

⁹⁹ Crile, p. 268

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 269

¹⁰¹ Crile, p. 353

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 77-78

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 146

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 113-114; Ibid., p. 143; Ibid., p. 33

This is just a sampling of a few of Wilson's encounters with these men. Furthermore, Wilson would contact, befriend, and negotiate with a whole host of other political, military, and covert figures who were involved in the Soviet-Afghan War.

¹⁰⁵ The data presented in the table is a compilation of various reliable primary and secondary sources. Since official U.S. Congressional appropriations for the program remain classified and certain sources disagree about U.S. expenditures, the author feels obliged to classify the presented expenditures as estimates.

¹⁰⁶ Gates, p. 144; Coll, p. 89

While Gates mentions that the Saudis were willing to match U.S. covert aid, he does not explicitly state that this was the case. However, Coll asserts that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had spent the same amount of money by January 1984. This confirms that the Saudis matched U.S. contributions dollar for dollar from the start of the CIA's covert Afghan program. All Saudi contributions mirror U.S. contributions.

¹⁰⁷ Coll, p. 89

U.S. Expenditure for 1979 was derived from subtracting U.S. Expenditure (1980-1984) from Coll's total U.S. Expenditure from 1979-1984.

¹⁰⁸ Crile, p. 20

¹⁰⁹ Gates, p. 251

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 251

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 251

¹¹² Crile, p. 305

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 339-340; Ibid., p. 391; Ibid., p. 413

¹¹⁴ Galeotti, p. 1

While it would appear that funding for the war was slashed in 1986, that is not the case. An additional \$300 million had been re-appropriated in the final days of the 1985 fiscal year from a military program that the Pentagon had decided to abandon. It was considered a one time “boost” to the program and not a permanent increase in funding. Thus (officially) only \$260 million had been directly appropriated in 1985. Therefore the \$470 million appropriated in 1986 was a \$210 million increase rather than a \$90 million decrease from fiscal years 1985-1986.

¹¹⁵ Tanner, p. 267

¹¹⁶ Author’s estimate. The author did not find any sources concerning U.S. expenditure in 1988. Considering that the program grew to one billion dollars in 1989, it is reasonable to assume that the expenditure reached \$750 million dollars in 1988 considering the steady growth in the funding of the project from 1986 onwards.

¹¹⁷ Universal Pictures, “The Real Charlie,” Universal Studios, <http://www.charliewilsonswar.net/cww-realcharlievid.html> (accessed March 26, 2008)

An interview with Charlie Wilson where he describes that the funding for the CIA’s Afghan program in 1989 was in excess of U.S. \$2 Billion. This suggests that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia each spent one billion dollars in funding the CIA program in the last year of the war.

¹¹⁸ Coll, p. 87

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 72

¹²⁰ Crile, p. 197; Ibid., p. 201

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 195

¹²² Charlie Wilson’s War, directed by Mike Nichols, Universal Pictures, 2007, Stinger Missile montage

¹²³ Crile, p. 304

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 299

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 342; Ibid., p. 318; Ibid., p. 161. Ibid., pp. 304-305. Ibid., pp. 300-301; Ibid., p. 158

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 319

- ¹²⁷ Marshall Brain, "How Stinger Missiles Work," HowStuffWorks Inc., <http://science.howstuffworks.com/Stinger.htm> (accessed January 6, 2008)
- ¹²⁸ Ibid.
- ¹²⁹ Crile, p. 404; Ibid., p. 437
- ¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 428
- ¹³¹ Ibid., p. 437
- ¹³² Russian General Staff, p. 222
- ¹³³ Crile, p. 405
- ¹³⁴ Russian General Staff, p. 212
- ¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 213
- ¹³⁶ Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," Political Science Quarterly 114 (Summer 1999): 248
- ¹³⁷ Borovik, p. 135
- ¹³⁸ Tanner, p. 267
- ¹³⁹ Kuperman, p. 250
- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 250
- ¹⁴¹ Mikhail S. Gorbachev, CPSU CC Politburo meeting minutes, 13 November 1986 (excerpt) in the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive, http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.home (accessed March 27, 2008)
- ¹⁴² Coll, pp. 63-64
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 103
- ¹⁴⁴ Crile, p. 335
- ¹⁴⁵ Grau and Jalali, p. 184
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 184
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 184
- ¹⁴⁹ Coll, p. 68
- ¹⁵⁰ Grau, p. xix
- ¹⁵¹ Crile, p. 437
- ¹⁵² Ibid., p. 437
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 437
- ¹⁵⁴ Grau, p. xix
- ¹⁵⁵ Crile, p. 219
- ¹⁵⁶ Russian General Staff, p. 44; Ibid., p. 309
- ¹⁵⁷ Galeotti, p. 91
- ¹⁵⁸ Borovik, p. 14
- ¹⁵⁹ Crile, p. 17
- ¹⁶⁰ Grau and Jalali, p. xviii

- ¹⁶¹ Russian General Staff, p. 53
¹⁶² Kakar, p. 91
¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 91
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 80-109
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 94
¹⁶⁶ Russian General Staff, pp. 232-233
¹⁶⁷ Grau and Jalali, p. 175
¹⁶⁸ Coll, p. xvi
¹⁶⁹ Russian General Staff, p. 5
¹⁷⁰ Kakar, p. 80
¹⁷¹ Grau and Jalali, p. 314
¹⁷² Kakar, p. 111
¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 111
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 113
¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 114
¹⁷⁶ Grau, p. 381
¹⁷⁷ Borovik, p. 76
¹⁷⁸ Galeotti, p. 70
¹⁷⁹ Bradsher, p. 3
¹⁸⁰ Galeotti, p. 3
¹⁸¹ Tanner, p. 257
¹⁸² Crile, p. 197
¹⁸³ Coll, p. 114
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 118
¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 116
¹⁸⁶ Coll, p. 575; Ibid., p. 582
¹⁸⁷ Grau, p. 399

¹⁸⁸ Merriam-Webster Online, "Genocide—Definition from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary," Merriam-Webster Inc., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Genocide> (accessed January 6, 2008)

¹⁸⁹ Russian General Staff, p. xxiv; Ibid., p. 5

¹⁹⁰ Kakar, p. 213

¹⁹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "United States by States; and Puerto Rico: GCT-T1-R. Population Estimates (Geographies Ranked by Estimate)," under "United States—Basic Counts—American FactFinder,"

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=010000US&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-T1-R&-ds_name=PEP_2006_EST&-format=US-95 (accessed January 6, 2008)

The number of Afghans killed in the war divided by the total population of pre-war Afghanistan is roughly equal (+/-

2%) to the number of people living in Texas (in 2006) divided by the total population of the U.S. (in 2006)

¹⁹² Ibid; Grau and Jalali, p. xviii

The number of Afghans who fled Afghanistan as refugees during the war divided by the total population of pre-war Afghanistan is roughly equal (+1-2%) to the number of people living on the East Coast (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine in 2006) divided by the total population of the U.S. (in 2006)

¹⁹³ Kakar, p. 216

¹⁹⁴ Crile, p. 147

¹⁹⁵ Norman Youngblood, The Development of Mine Warfare: A Most Murderous and Barbarous Conduct (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006) p. 164

¹⁹⁶ Kakar, p. 215; Russian General Staff, p. 5

¹⁹⁷ Kakar, p. 248

¹⁹⁸ Crile, p. 332

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 332

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 334

²⁰¹ Galeotti, p. 95

²⁰² Ibid., p. 49

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 49

²⁰⁴ Rudyard Kipling, Verses 1889-1896 vol. 11 of The Writings in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899) p. 39

²⁰⁵ Kakar, p. 50

²⁰⁶ Crile, p. 113

²⁰⁷ Grau and Jalali, p. 399

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 507

²⁰⁹ Crile, p. 113

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Selection Criteria: Works Cited three or more times in the endnotes.

Borovik, Artyom, The Hidden War: A Russian Journalist's Account of the Soviet War in Afghanistan New York, New York: Grove Press, 1990

Borovik's reflections are based on his personal experience as a Soviet journalist embedded with the 40th Army. The book describes the experiences of the Soviet veterans, from combat with the Mujahideen to outright desertion. Additionally, the book addresses the various Soviet opinions of the war as the author cycles through four predominant paradigms (increase troop levels, stay the course, "something's wrong here," withdraw).

Brain, Marshall, "How Stinger Missiles Work,"
HowStuffWorks Inc.

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/stinger.htm> (accessed January 6, 2008)

This article provided an excellent explanation of how the Stinger Missile System worked (and still works) while also covering the history and origins of the weapon. Though an online source, HowStuffWorks' reputation easily justifies the inclusion of this source in the paper.

Coll, Steve, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2004

Coll's Ghost Wars is a comprehensive work that examines the CIA's relationships with various Afghani factions from the Soviet-Afghan War to the days preceding 9/11. It provides excellent glimpses at the inner workings of the CIA's bureaucracy and the relationship between the CIA and Ahmed Shah Massoud.

Crile, George, Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of How the Wildest Man in Congress and a Rogue CIA Agent Changed the History of our Times New York, New York: Grove Press, 2003

The famous work of "pop-historian" George Crile chronicles the tale of Charlie Wilson (a U.S. Congressman) and Gust

Avrakotos (the CIA's South Asia Operations Group Chief) as they guide/hijack U.S. foreign policy towards the Mujahideen. The work's wealth of statistics and primary sources help demonstrate just how remarkable the Soviet-Afghan War was.

Galeotti, Mark, Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Lost War Portland, Oregon: FRANK CASS, 1995

Mark Goleotti's study of the Soviet-Afghan War focuses mainly on the Afgantsy (40th Army Veterans), their experiences, and the impact of the war on Soviet citizens. While the book does not focus on the military aspects of the Soviet-Afghan War, it provides an outstanding perspective on the public opinion of the war in the Soviet Union. It also provides many invaluable statistics concerning the war compiled during *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*.

Gates, Robert M., From The Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War New York, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2007

The former CIA director details the role that Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush, and the CIA played in bringing down the Soviet empire. It provides a good background on U.S. involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War and the effect of said involvement on the Soviet Union.

Grau, Lester W., ed., The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan New York, New York: FRANK CASS PUBLISHERS, 1998

This is a compilation of vignettes from 40th Army Commanders who describe how the 40th Army fought on tactical/operational levels. It demonstrates the wide variety and large degree of failures that the 40th army encountered while also showcasing the successes of Spetsnaz and some counter-guerrilla warfare tactics. The editorial commentary by Grau was extremely valuable.

Grau, Lester W., and Ali Ahmad Jalali, Afghan Guerrilla Warfare: In the Words of the Mujahideen Fighters St. Paul, Minnesota: MBI Publishing Company, 2001

This book compiles vignettes from Mujahideen commanders which describe tactical/operational level engagements with the 40th army. The vignettes are organized into sections based on the tactics being described (ambush,

counter-ambush, urban warfare, etc...) The author provides editorial commentary for each vignette. Although this is an excellent supply of primary sources and Mujahideen experiences, it fails to provide a comprehensive overview of the conflict.

Kakar, Hassan, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and Afghan Response, 1979-1982 Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995

Kakar's study provides a detailed overview of the first phase of the Soviet-Afghan War. It addresses the political, military, and social impact of the Soviet invasion. Most importantly, the book deftly explains the various Mujahideen factions and their ideological groundings.

Kuperman, Alan J., "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," Political Science Quarterly 114 (Summer 1999): 219-263

This paper dispels some of the myths surrounding the Stinger Missile's role in Afghanistan. It elaborates on how the decision to introduce the "Stinger" was made, and speculates on the impact of the "Stinger."

Nye, Joseph S., Jr., Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History 4th ed. New York, New York: Longman, 2003

This seminal work on international conflict provided the theoretical framework for the concluding counterfactual of the essay. This book was developed as a companion to an International Relations course professor Nye taught at Harvard and has been a popular text for students and historians alike.

Russian General Staff, The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost translated and edited by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002

This is an extremely complete Russian military account of the Soviet-Afghan War. The General Staff's extensive study covers issues such as Soviet strategic planning, tactical doctrine, the various branches of the 40th Army, and logistics analysis. It provides an excellent bastion of primary sources and statistics. The conclusions by the General Staff and Grau are invaluable.

Alexievich, Svetlana, Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992

This collection of interviews with 40th Army veterans is both historically relevant and deeply moving. A panoramic view of the Soviet experience in the war is provided.

Tanner, Stephen, Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2002

A wide-ranging military history of Afghanistan which puts the Soviet-Afghanistan War in context with the historical struggles of the Afghan people. A solid overview of the conflict is also provided.

U.S. Census Bureau, “United States by State; and Puerto Rico: GCT-TI-R. Population Estimates (Geographies Ranked by Estimate)”

http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-TI-R&-ds_name=PEP_2006_EST&-format=US-95 (accessed January 6, 2008)

Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau allowed the author to place the tragedy of the Afghan people on an easily accessible scale.