

3-D Soviet Style: Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

Anton Minkov, Ph.D.
Gregory Smolynech, Ph.D.

Centre for Operational Research and Analysis
Ottawa, Canada.
e-mails: minkov.aa@forces.gc.ca
smolynech.g@forces.gc.ca

*Dr. Gregory Smolynech and Dr. Anton Minkov are Defence Scientists / Strategic Analysts with the Centre for Operational Research and Analysis (CORA), part of Defence Research & Development Canada (DRDC). Currently, Anton is assigned to the Directorate of Strategic Analysis and Gregory is with the Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence. Anton has a PhD in Islamic History (McGill University) and is also a lecturer in medieval and modern Middle Eastern history at Carleton University. His book *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans* was published in 2004 by Brill Academic Publishers (Leiden). Gregory Smolynech has a PhD in History (Duke University) and a Master of Arts in Russian and East European Studies (Carleton University). His doctoral dissertation is titled *Multicultural Cold War: Liberal Anti-Totalitarianism and National Identity in the United States and Canada*.*

ABSTRACT

3-D Soviet Style examines the evolution of Soviet strategy in Afghanistan from the initial invasion to the withdrawal of Soviet combat forces in 1989. The paper analyzes Soviet efforts in building Afghan security forces. It includes information on Soviet counter-insurgency practices in Afghanistan and on the adjustments the Soviets made to their force structure and equipment in response to the exigencies of the operational situations they faced. It examines the Soviet approach to civil affairs in their Afghan operations, and outlines the state-building efforts the Soviets undertook in Afghanistan as well as their social and economic policies. The paper also examines the policy of “National Reconciliation” adopted by the pro-Soviet government of Afghanistan to stabilize the country. Among other lessons from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan that can be applied in the current situation, the paper stresses that engaging and enfranchising local populations and power centres is of critical importance; that the economic stability and independence of Afghanistan is a key element in successful state-building; that successive battlefield victories do not guarantee strategic success and that building Afghan security forces is vital. The movement of insurgents and materiel across the Afghan - Pakistan border is a paramount strategic problem.

INTRODUCTION

After an unexpected pro-communist coup took place in April 1978, it looked like the new government of Afghanistan was poised to bring the country into the Soviet bloc. By the end

of 1979, however, a popular uprising against the regime and its policies threatened to reverse the “revolution”. Even worse, from the Soviet point of view, an internal coup brought the US educated Hafizullah Amin to the Afghan presidency. Fearing a shift in Afghanistan’s foreign policy, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979 to effect a regime change and set the conditions for the continued implementation of the April revolution’s principles (Andropov et al, 1). Within two weeks, government institutions, critical infrastructure and the larger Afghan cities were under the control of the Red Army and the new regime. Traditional divisions between countryside and urban centers, state institutions and tribal society, however, ensured that the insurgency remained unaffected by the Soviet operation. What was anticipated only as a brief operation turned into a prolonged effort to stabilize the regime, necessitating the continuous presence of Soviet troops, massive economic investment and financial aid, and direct engagement in the internal and external affairs of Afghanistan. Soviet troops withdrew from the territory of Afghanistan only in February 1989, after a change in the Soviet party’s strategy and foreign policy had occurred a few years earlier.

While the Soviet Union tried to impose a socialist, totalitarian type of governance and state institutions on Afghanistan, there are many similarities between the challenges Soviet strategists faced and those confronting the NATO-ISAF forces in Afghanistan. First, ethnic and social divisions in Afghan society are persistent. Afghanistan is divided into ten main ethnic groups, which are further subdivided into tribes and clans. Rivalry exists not only between Pushtun tribes as a whole and the northern, non-Pushtun ethnic groups but between Pushtun tribes as well. Social structures remain rigid and are to a large extent, a product of established tribal customs. Religious divisions include the majority Sunni population versus the minority Shia Hazara population. There are significant social cleavages between urban and rural population as well. These substantial identities create an environment where the very existence of state and state institutions remains problematic. The elusiveness of state legitimacy is actually a major challenge on its own. The Afghan state is a nation-state enclave, insulated from the traditional society, in which state institutions and the state as a whole never became stable or deeply rooted (Rubin, 1988, 1189). Universal values that shape community identities are drawn from religion and tribal codes, not from the state.

The Soviet leaders and strategists had to deal with and adapt to Afghanistan’s unique social, ethnic and cultural environment. While combat engagements between Soviet troops and *mujahidin* fighters remained perhaps the most visible aspect of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, a significant amount of social and economic development, as well as internal and external negotiations with the different parties, also took place. In other words, according to modern terminology, the Soviet Union’s efforts are similar to the contemporary 3D (defence, development and diplomacy) approach of dealing with failed states. This paper surveys Soviet efforts in defence, development and diplomacy and presents lessons learned from this experience. The research is based on up-to-date Russian and English language sources, and analysis of statistical data pertaining to the conflict.

DEFENCE: THE SOVIET MILITARY EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

After the pro-Moscow People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power in the April 1978 coup d’etat, the Soviets started to deploy increasing numbers of military advisors and provided large amounts of direct military aid to PDPA government. The new PDPA government quickly embarked on a program of reforms that included land

redistribution, emancipating women, and introducing a Soviet-style economy. This reform program proved to be highly unpopular among vast segments of Afghan society and opposition to it took the form of armed insurgency by a wide array of groups. In March 1979 a mass revolt in Herat claimed the lives of an estimated 5,000 Afghans and 100 Soviet citizens. Mass desertions from the Afghan army and the growing insurgency prompted Afghan President Nur M. Taraki to request additional military assistance from the Soviet Union repeatedly throughout 1978 and 1979 (Varennikov, 1). In September 1979, Soviet concerns about Afghanistan peaked when intra-PDPA factionalism culminated in the execution of Taraki. The Soviet's suspected that Taraki's successor, Hafizullah Amin, would move Afghanistan out of the Soviet orbit and into alignment with the United States (Andropov et al., 1). Against the opposition of senior Red Army commanders, the Soviet Politburo decided to stave off this possibility and to retrench the pro-Soviet orientation of the government by intervening militarily in Afghanistan (McMichael, 3).

The main operation began on 22 December. The immediate Soviet goals were to replace Amin with the more reliable PDPA leader Babrak Karmal and then to secure the new regime by controlling communications and strategic installations in Afghanistan (Varennikov, 2). The Red Army did not envision counter-insurgency combat operations against the armed groups that had been opposing the communist regime in Kabul. By securing strategic objectives, the Red Army planners believed they would relieve the Afghan army from these duties and thereby allow it to take the lead in counter-insurgency operations. Red Army commanders expected that the operation in Afghanistan would be over by the Moscow Olympics scheduled for the summer of 1980.

The invasion plan had an air assault and a ground component. The main Soviet force consisted of four motor rifle and one and a half air assault divisions of the Red Army (Urban, 42; see Grau and Gress, 315-322 and McMichael, 177-182 for later Soviet orders of battle). Over the period of 22-26 December, the Soviet Air Force flew 350 sorties into Kabul and Bagram airports and landed a large force of paratroopers. The ground invasion was two-pronged. One force departed by road from Termez in the Turkestan Military District in the USSR. They crossed the Soviet – Afghan border and drove down the Salang highway across the Hindu Kush mountains to Kabul and eastern Afghanistan. The other group drove westward from Kushka to secure Herat, Farah and then south to Kandahar.

In the early evening on Friday, 27 December 1979 Soviet special forces assaulted Darulaman Palace in Kabul. Earlier in December, Soviet advisors had recommended that Afghan President Hafizullah Amin take refuge there for his personal safety as political unrest in the country was intensifying. There was a firefight between the KGB assaulters and Amin's guards. At 20:45 a message was broadcast over local radio frequencies announcing that Babrak Karmal had taken over the government of Afghanistan and that Soviet forces had arrived to help the Afghan people. By this time Amin was dead. This was the climax of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Urban, 46). By the end of December there were over 50,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

As was the case with the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Red Army's mission in Afghanistan was to ensure the continuity of a pro-Soviet regime through the replacement of suspect leaders in a high tempo, massive, kinetic operation. In the event, the initial invasion operation was carried out with efficiency and according to plan. The Red Army would not, however, be home for the Olympics. The task of stabilizing the new regime in the face of the insurgency that found new purpose in

combating the invading “infidel” Soviets would prove to be a much more difficult proposition. The Soviet Union became bogged down in a protracted and costly war lasting nine years.

After installing Karmal as president, the Soviets planned to stabilize the Afghanistan by establishing garrisons along major transport routes, in the cities, at airbases, and at specific logistical centres (Varennikov, 3). In terms of confronting the insurgents, the Soviets only intended to provide the Afghan army with logistical and combat support (air, reconnaissance, artillery). The Afghan army would lead the fight against the “reactionary” insurgents, prevail and then the Soviets would go home (McMichael, 10).

According to Soviet General V.I. Varennikov, the *mujahidin* began raiding Soviet units and the Red Army had to defend itself. Subsequently, the combat activity “began growing like a snowball and events began developing in an undesirable direction”(as cited by McMichael, 10). The Soviets were now facing a different kind of war from what they had envisioned. The enemy was elusive and decentralized. Soviet armoured columns that formed the main invasion force were not suited to combat operations on much of the rugged and mountainous Afghan terrain. In one disastrous operation in the region of Irgun in June 1980, a motorized rifle battalion was ambushed by *mujahidin*. The Soviets found that gun turrets on their armoured vehicles could not elevate to reach the insurgent positions. Unable to maneuver and unwilling to dismount, the battalion ran out of ammunition and was massacred by the *mujahidin* (McMichael, 11). The Soviets also discovered that their force structure based on large units, namely the 40th Army (the designation of the Soviet army in Afghanistan) and its divisions were unresponsive to small-scale insurgent attacks, and that Soviet commanders had little understanding of local social and cultural divisions in Afghanistan. With the insurgency growing quickly, the Soviets came to the conclusion that there were insufficient troop levels to control the country, and that they had to adapt. By Spring 1980 the Soviets began to restructure and adjust their forces in Afghanistan. The Red Army in Afghanistan also had to deal with the problem posed by the sensitivity of the Soviet political system casualties in Afghanistan. This sensitivity grew over the years with increased numbers of soldiers killed in action and with the introduction of the Perestroika (Reconstruction) policies after Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985. Throughout the war the Red Army command tried to keep Soviet casualties to a minimum, even at the cost of not achieving operational objectives.

One of the first steps taken by the Red Army command to adjust to the realities of Afghanistan was to withdraw all those units that had no utility in the counter-insurgency situation: anti-aircraft units, some heavy artillery, and a tank regiment. The Red Army also decentralized command to several brigade headquarters and gave brigade commanders fire power assets (artillery and helicopter gunships) and the authority to use these assets. Airborne troops were also deployed to regional bases. The Red Army brought in additional helicopters to provide air mobility and fire support. By mid-1981 the number of helicopters was approaching 300 (McMichael, 13). The 40th Army was also reinforced reaching approximately 110-120,000 by mid-1982 with additional support units based in the Central Asian military district of the USSR.

In the period 1980-1983 typical Soviet combat operations consisted of a conventional-style offensive on a brigade scale lasting from one to several weeks directed against *mujahidin* strongholds. Offensives usually began with extensive bombardment of the objective area, and were followed by the movement of a mechanized column toward the

objective. These operations were ineffective, as insurgent forces had the time to withdraw from the advancing Soviets, evade them, and then return once the Soviet operation ended. Furthermore Soviet lines of supply and communication were typically vulnerable to Mujahidin ambushes and mine strikes.

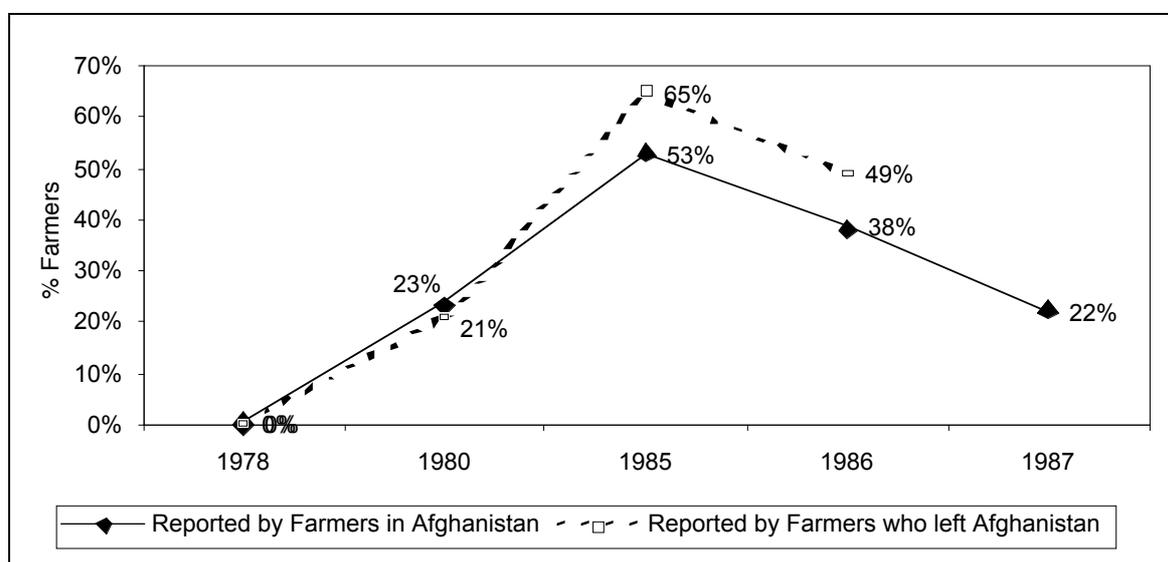
Soviet commanders learned from their early experiences and began emplacing airmobile troops (airborne and air assault) and dismounted light troops along the axes of the advancing ground forces through mountain valleys. This pre-empted the *mujahidin* from taking up positions on strategic terrain and effectively prevented many attacks on Soviet forces. The Soviets also adapted to the situation by using combined arms operations. In these operations, heliborne troops were deployed to block *mujahidin* elements from retreating. This practice permitted the Red Army to close with and destroy *mujahidin* groups. The Soviets came to rely increasingly on special operating forces (airborne, air assault, and Spetznaz) in these operations. The Red Army also had some success in establishing Observation Posts at high altitudes. These posts facilitated the physical surveillance of *mujahidin* movements and served as electronic warfare sites. Fixed outposts alongside the roads improved convoy security. Even if *mujahidin* were able to ambush a Soviet transport convoy, it was very difficult for them to recover any supplies from the convoy because Soviet troops from the roadside outposts would move very quickly to the location.

The Red Army showed flexibility in force generation by establishing a training program in mountain warfare in Soviet Central Asia for troops scheduled to be deployed to Afghanistan. Other adaptations included the introduction of new weapons systems (armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, and small arms) to increase the firepower of combat troops. The introduction of new equipment, special forces, and the combined arms operations all lead to increased effectiveness in the tactical engagement of small groups of *mujahidin*. These measures did not, however, translate into the effective suppression of the insurgency in any area of Afghanistan. The Soviets did have some success in containing insurgent groups in the northern and central regions of Afghanistan. The Red Army, however, could not contain those *mujahidin* groups that operated along the permeable Afghan-Pakistani border. The Mujahidin continued to maintain bases in Pakistan, generate forces there, and receive supplies from the United States, Saudi Arabia and other supports through Pakistani supply routes. The border proved to be a persistent strategic problem of the Soviets. In a 2007 interview, General Varennikov bemoaned the fact the Soviet political leadership prevented the Red Army from carrying out its “strategic task,” that was, “the liquidation of the [insurgent] infrastructure on Pakistani territory” (Varennikov, 4). Ultimately, the Soviets and their Afghan allies repeatedly conducted offensives against the Mujahidin with no tangible strategic results.

The greatest threat to Soviet forces came along their communications and supply lines. Most Soviet supplies moved from the Soviet Union into Afghanistan and around the country by road. Furthermore, the Afghan economy depended on the movement of goods along the road system. The *mujahidin* repeatedly targeted Soviet and Afghan government convoys, and the roadways became the settings for recurrent attacks and battles. *Mujahidin* attacks on Soviet convoys resulted in heavy losses for Soviet forces, including a large proportion of Red Army soldiers killed in action, over 11,000 trucks, 1,300 armoured personnel carriers, 147 tanks, 1,100 command vehicles and 433 artillery pieces. Contractors working for the Soviet and Afghan government lost more vehicles (Lyakhovski). The *mujahidin* ultimately succeeded in attaining strategic effects through the tactic of mining roads and conducting ambushes. In the context of growing political doubts about the Soviet mission in Afghanistan

inside the USSR, the *mujahidin* success in inflicting losses in the “Road War” had the effect of expediting the Soviet decision to withdraw the Red Army from Afghanistan.

Faced with an intractable insurgency, the Soviets resorted to several strategies to suppress it. One on hand Soviet counter-insurgency efforts included operations aimed at depopulating large areas of insurgent territory for the purpose of denying the *mujahidin* food and support from the local population. To accomplish these goals the Soviets razed villages; destroyed fields, orchards and irrigation systems; and slaughtered livestock (Graphs 1 and 12). These actions achieved the desired result of emptying entire regions such as the Panjshir, Paghman, Kunar and Logar valleys of the settled population; and they created a mass refugee exodus into Pakistan and Iran. For a period of time the strategy succeeded in depriving the insurgents of supply infrastructure (Rubin, 1995, 231). In the longer term, however, the *mujahidin* were not critically affected. Mujahidin supplies from Pakistan and Iran increased to offset the loss of provisions from local populations. The Soviets also used biological and chemical weapons in Afghanistan without any decisive effect (McMichael, 53 and 108-111).

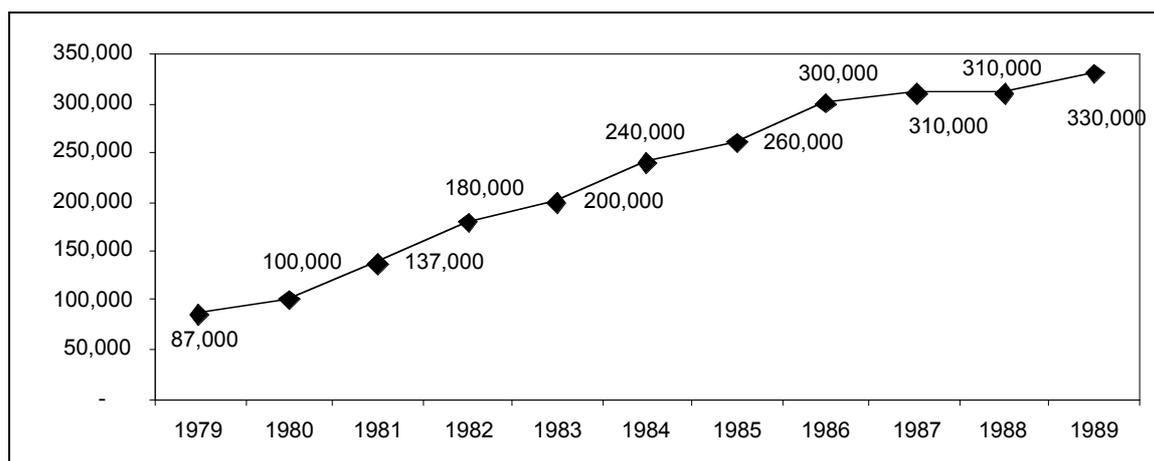


Graph 1: Afghan Farmers Reporting Bombing of their Villages by the Soviet Army (based on data from: Rubin, 1995, 228).

In the early days of the Soviet-Afghan War, Soviet officers, especially those guarding strategic sites, would occasionally try to limit hostilities with local insurgent groups and to establish friendly relations with the surrounding villages by entering into local deals and truces with village and tribal authorities, warlords and *mujahidin* commanders without formal authorization (Schofield, 111-113). Over the years, this practice became widespread. Soviet garrisons even helped some of the hostile groups in order to divert their attention to attacking rival *mujahidin* groups. Not long after Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and began the process of transforming the Soviet system and reorienting Soviet foreign policy it became clear that the Red Army would withdraw first from combat operations in Afghanistan and then from the country itself at an opportune time. Units of the 40th Army adopted a defensive posture and major Red Army combat operations were curtailed. After Mohammed Najibullah replaced Karmal as Afghan leader in 1986 and instituted the policy of “National Reconciliation,” deal-making with tribal militias and *mujahidin* groups became the official policy of the government of Afghanistan

and it received whole-hearted Soviet endorsement. National Reconciliation offered financial incentives to anti-government militias to come to terms with the government.

The most successful Soviet strategy for extricating the Red Army from its difficult predicament in Afghanistan, while at the same time ensuring the continuity of a pro-Soviet government in Kabul, was in the realm of security sector reform. In addition to party and state institutions, the Soviet strategy of state building relied to a great extent on the state security forces. These included the regular army, police force (*gendarmerie*) and secret intelligence police. Their role was as much to participate in the war against the resistance as to control the population and ensure the regime's hold over the means of violence. The regular forces were significantly weakened by the insurgency and the Soviet invasion in 1979 but were gradually rebuilt and in 1988 stood at 90,000 troops. Border guards were considered a separate force and in 1988 their strength reached 42,000. The *gendarmerie* (*Tsarandoy*) and the secret police (*KhaD*) were also heavily armed and organized alongside military lines. The former reached 92,000 people in 1988 and the latter - 68,000. In fact, units of the *Tsarandoy* and *KhaD* regularly participated in military operations against the *mujahidin* and often were more effective than the army. With the addition of Special Guards units, which were the elite units guarding the regime in Kabul, total security forces available to the government in 1988 was almost 310,000 (Graph 2).

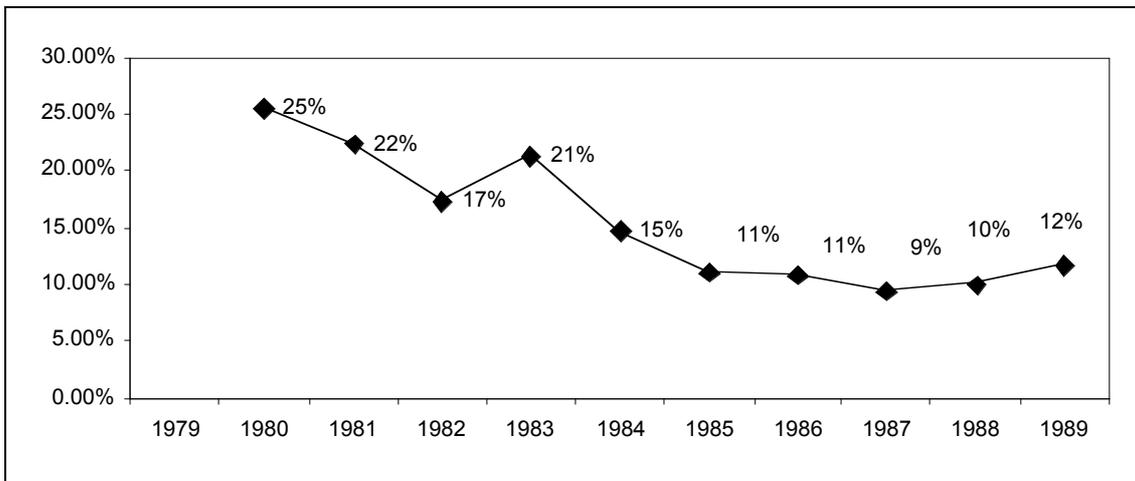


Graph 2: Growth of DRA Forces (based on data from: Giustozzi, 266).

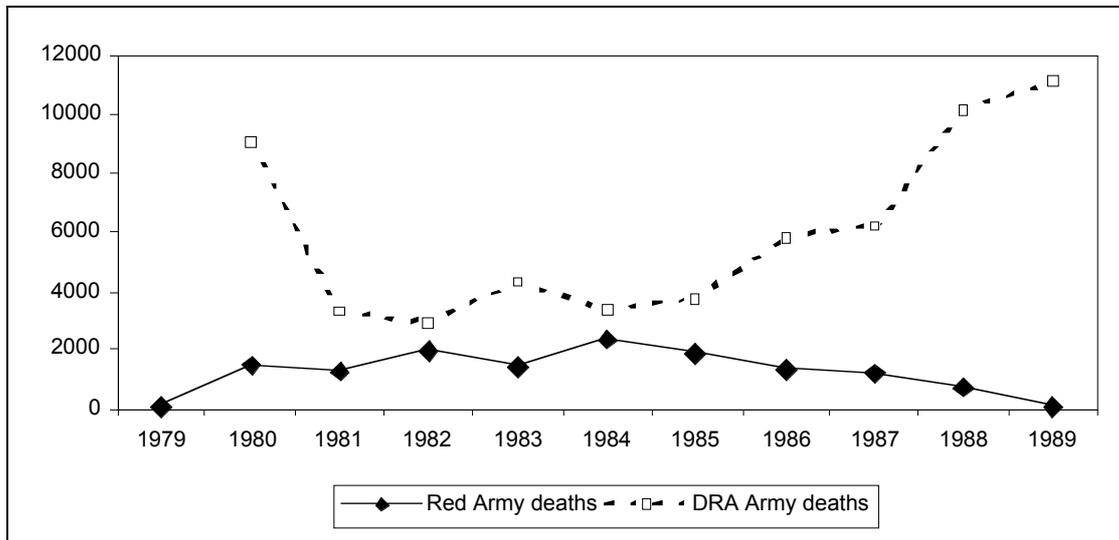
The security forces were plagued by very high desertion rates. Until mid 1980s the desertion rates were in excess of 20% but by the end of the decade this rate stabilized at around 10% (Graph 3). It should be pointed out that desertions were not motivated only by reluctance to serve on the side of the regime and by the conscript system which often used press gangs to round up youths from the streets, but also from the reluctance of Afghan men to work away from home. To a large extent the high desertion rates were driven by soldiers leaving their bases to bring their salaries to their families. In most of the cases they would later return and even demand back pay.

Soviet strategists and the Kabul regime realized that in order to defeat the *mujahidin* they had to engage them on their own ground and to use their methods. In 1983, a Jirgah in Kabul sanctioned the use of tribal forces to complement the state security forces. The objective was to create a structure based on the traditional principles of state defence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, since these troops were recruited from the local inhabitants, the tribal units

engaged sectors of the rural population, which would have rejected to serve in the regular army. By the end of the decade the tribal militia became one of the main instruments for exercising control over the countryside and engaging rebel groups. In 1988, these irregular troops, comprised of tribal militia, self-defence units at the villages and so-called Groups for Defence of the Revolution (GDR) numbered 150,000. In other words, in 1988, the Kabul regime had at its disposal 460,000 armed forces, including state security forces and militia. Combined with the Soviet 40th Army, more than half a million men were fighting on the side of the regime. In comparison, Soviet strategists estimated that the resistance had a pool of 900,000 potential fighters in the late 1980s. However, no more than 400,000 were actually armed and only one third of them ever fired a shot against the Soviet or the DRA army. It is believed that no more than 40-60,000 *mujahidin* were active at any one time (Giustozzi, 188).



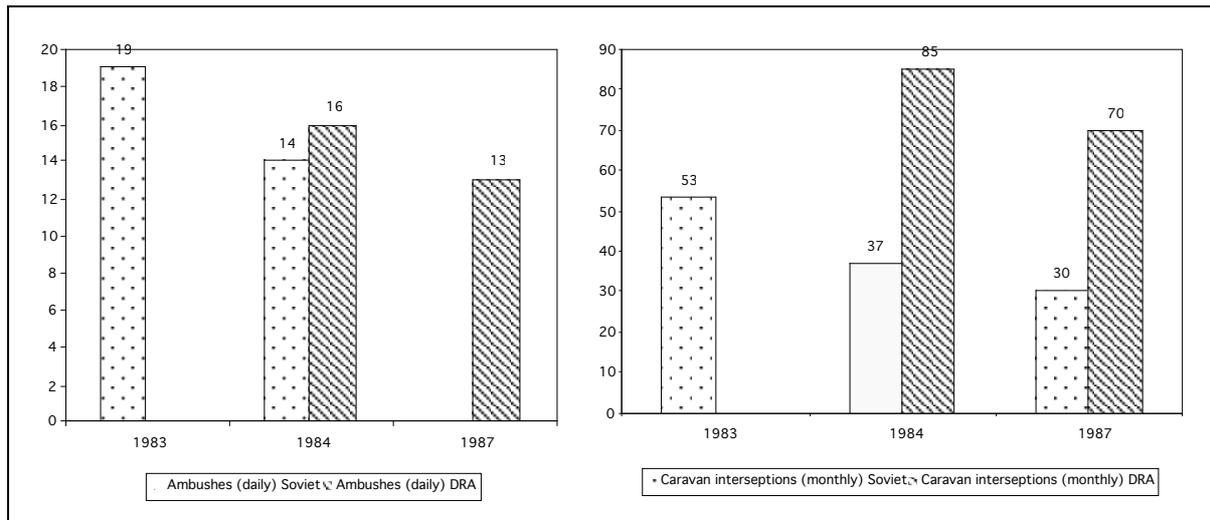
Graph 3: DRA Army Desertion Rates (based on data from: Giustozzi, 260).



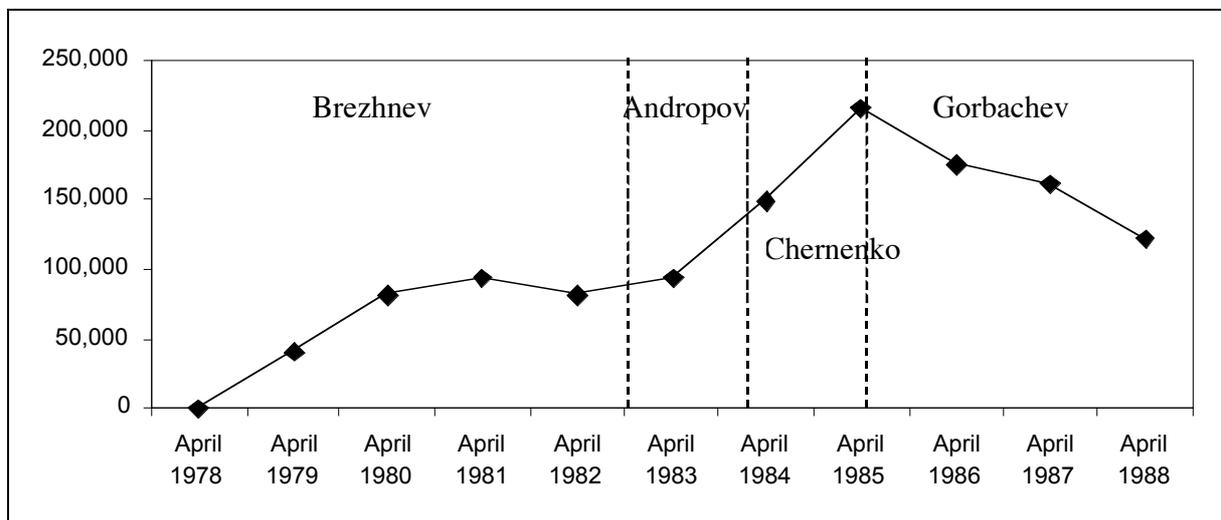
Graph 4: Soviet and DRA Army Deaths (based on data from: Giustozzi, 271 and Gareev, 328).

Many indicators suggest that the Afghan army was able to assume greater combat responsibilities after 1985. For example, from 1986 Afghan army combat deaths increased

exponentially while at the same time the Soviet ones were decreasing (Graph 4). From data about border-sealing activities such as organizing ambushes and intercepting *mujahidin* caravans could be seen that the Red Army originally undertook all such activities. By 1985 these were joint operations with the Afghan army and by 1989, border-sealing activities were performed either exclusively by the Afghan forces or with minimal participation of Soviet troops (Graph 5). By 1989 the Red Army command believed that Afghan forces could ensure the continuity of the pro-Moscow regime on their own. Nine years after the invasion, the Red Army troops in Afghanistan headed in the opposite direction. Having negotiated a ceasefire with insurgents allowing their withdrawal, the last column of Soviet troops crossed the Oxus River and returned to the Soviet Union on 15 February 1989.



Graph 5: Border Sealing Activities, 1983-87 (based on data from: Giustozzi, 271).



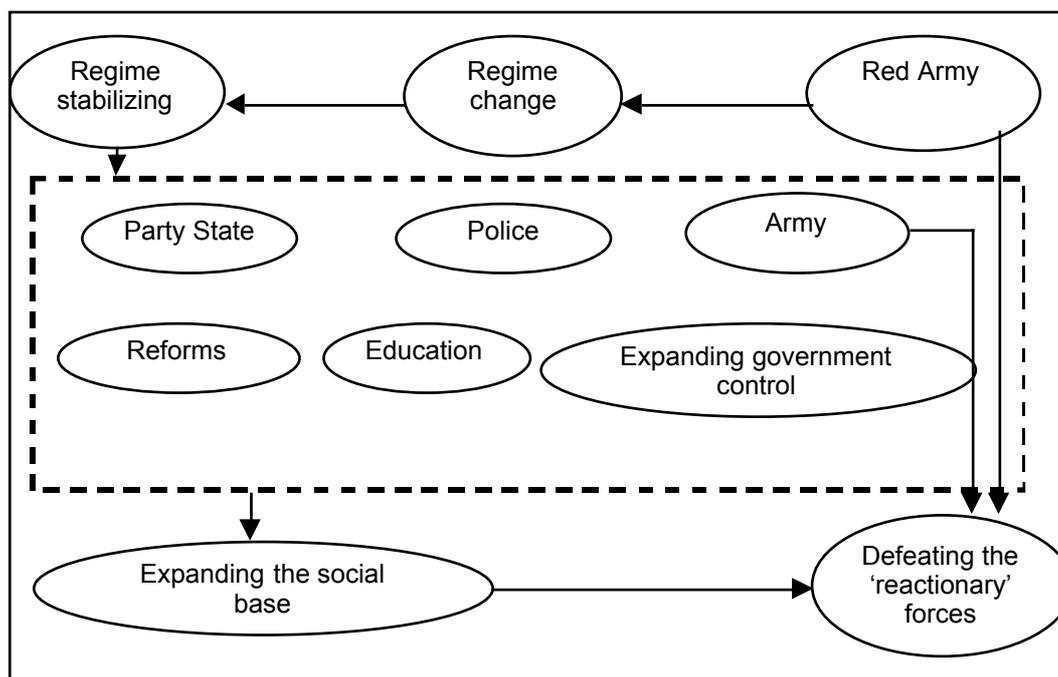
Graph 6: Afghan Civilian Deaths and Soviet General Secretary Mandates (based on data from: Sliwinski, 41).

During the nine years of Soviet combat operations in Afghanistan, 15,051 Red Army soldiers, KGB, border troops, and internal security troops (MVD) were killed in Afghanistan. 469,685 Soviet soldiers were wounded or became ill. The figure for wounded and ill includes illnesses due to infectious diseases (Krivosheev). It is estimated that 1 to 1.3 million Afghans

were killed during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan (Sliwinski, 39) and that 5 million Afghans were driven to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran (Rubin, 1995, 1).

DEVELOPMENT: STATE AND SOCIETY

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union recognized the PDPA as a fellow Marxist party shortly after the April coup of 1978. Soviet leaders were, however, quite aware of Afghanistan's state of social development. As a result Afghanistan was classified as a "socialist-oriented" country, i.e. it was not recognized as being on a par with other socialist states within the Soviet Bloc (Nyrop and Seekins, 235). According to Soviet ideologists, a "socialist-oriented" country usually emerges in underdeveloped societies. In such countries tribal divisions and institutions are still persistent and participation in mass politics is minimal. Power is held by a union of "democratic" forces, which works towards social transformation. The latter would eventually stimulate the growth of a strong working class and the emergence of a working-class party. Such a vision implies moderation and gradual implementation of changes, i.e., a long-term approach should have been taken to establish socialism in the country. Therefore, the objective was to transform Afghan society through the export of Soviet institutions, political models and ideology – a process usually referred to as "sovietization" (Roy, 48).



Graph 7: Soviet State Building Strategy in Afghanistan.

The Soviet framework envisioned establishing a strong communist party and affiliated mass organizations, which would control all state institutions, including the Afghan army, the police and the security intelligence services (Graph 7). The function of all Afghan security forces, together with the Red Army would apply pressure on the insurgency and expand government control in the countryside. PDPA officials would then establish local party cells

and appoint state representatives. Together they would enforce the social reforms, initiated by the regime. A crucial aspect of the sovietization process in Afghanistan was working with the youth, educating a new generation according to Soviet curricula (Roy, 48). The combination of gradual expansion of government control, implementation of social and economic reforms, as well as securing the support of the future generation, under the leadership of PDPA was supposed to expand the social base of the regime and ultimately deny support for the insurgency.

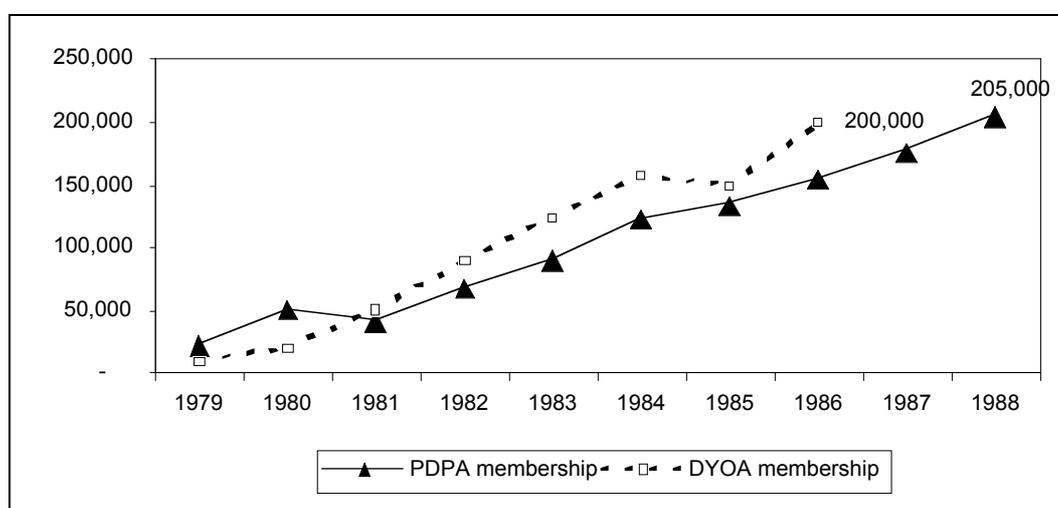
The Soviets regarded the PDPA as the key institution in fostering a Soviet type of state. At the end of 1979, when the 40th Army entered Afghanistan, the situation was exactly the opposite – the party was divided, interfactional fighting was taking place; and it was losing its grip on the government, the army and the security situation in the countryside.

Soon after its creation in 1965, PDPA had split into two factions – Khalq and Parcham, only to reunite under pressure from the Soviet Union in 1977 (Nyrop and Seekins, 226). The differences between the two factions did not disappear and came to the surface again after the 1978 revolution. The real power after the April Revolution, however, rested with the leadership of the Khalq faction and the Parcham faction was repressed. When PDPA took power in 1978, its membership was around 18,000. Although membership quickly grew, it was estimated that by the end of 1979, 16-17,000 PDPA members had been killed, purged or had left the party (Giustozzi, 4). This situation not only affected the party's morale but also that of the army, which was the institution with largest representation of PDPA members. The large number of desertions further weakened the army. Most importantly, the Khalq regime lost internal legitimacy, i.e., the support of the state bureaucracy. Since the insurgency was not yet in the position to pose any threat to the existence of the government, there is no doubt that the level of disintegration of state and party in 1979 was one of the main reasons for the Soviet intervention (Rubin, 1995, 121). It is not a surprise then that reconstruction of these two institutions was the main priority for the Soviets.

In the Soviet system there is a close overlap between party and state and thus, the Soviet style of governance is commonly referred to as the "party-state." The structure of PDPA was modeled after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the executive comprised of a Central Committee and a Politburo, the latter led by a Secretary General. These were, in theory, elected from the Party Congress. The Congress also nominated the provincial party leaders on provincial, district and subdistrict level. The state structure paralleled the party one with a Cabinet, Revolutionary Council, and a Presidium, led by a President (Nyrop and Seekins, 259-60; Roy, 49). The Secretary General, who also held the post of President, and many other party functionaries, occupying positions in the corresponding state level, ensured the dominance of the PDPA (Rubin, 1995, 128). On a regional level party control was exercised by the Governors and the district and subdistrict commissioners being party members as well. This control, however, was undermined by the continued factionalism within the Party and the difficult security situation in most of the countryside. The performance of both party and state structures was affected by rivalry between Khalk and Parcham (Rubin, 1995, 128; Nyrop and Seekins, 260). Members of the two factions fought to secure dominance in the different organizational units, which often prevented them from functioning properly. The security situation, on the other hand, prevented the party from establishing its structures in the provinces below governor level. District and subdistrict commissioners, if appointed, had very few opportunities of visiting their jurisdictions (Giustozzi, 37). Party cells in villages grew from 277 in 1983 to 1,160 in 1987 (Giustozzi,

257) but often their existence was short-lived as the *mujahidin* usually quickly moved to destroy them.

In terms of membership, the PDPA grew significantly after 1979, and in 1988 it stood at 205,000. The Party's youth organization—the Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan (DYOA)—which corresponded to the Soviet Komsomol, had a similar membership in 1986 (Graph 8). Together PDPA and DYOA membership constituted 2.7% of the Afghan population at the time. It should be remembered, however, that the Communist Party was supposed to be a vanguard, the elite of the working class and not a mass organization. The quality of the party members was a different story. Most of them were opportunists and very few were ideologically motivated. Several party purges took place throughout the decade. Some 60% of the PDPA members were serving in the army, and therefore the heavy war casualties affected the party strength as well (Giustozzi, 34-36, 251; Roy, 50-51).



Graph 8: Growth of PDPA and DYOA membership (based on data from: Giustozzi, 252-53).

To engage the population, numerous mass organizations such as the Afghan Women's Democratic Organization (AWDO) were created as well. The largest mass organization was the National Fatherland Front (NFF), which claimed to have had more than one million members (Giustozzi, 142-143). Different professional organizations and syndicates were formed to extend Party control among the working and professional classes. All these organizations were controlled by Party members and to a large degree were comprised of Party members as well. In other words, the seemingly large mass participation in the new social structures was misleading because of the overlap with the Party membership. Reportedly, many farmers were enticed into membership of the NFF by promises that their villages would not be bombed (Giustozzi, 145).

Within months of coming to power the PDPA regime promulgated a series of decrees aimed at transforming Afghan society and expanding the social base of the regime. The three reforms which had most profound impact aimed at reducing social inequality in the countryside by redistributing land, canceling land related debts and limiting the burdening payments to the bride's family required from the grooms. The poor execution of the reforms, the corruption associated with them, and the brutality of their enforcement, greatly

antagonized the rural population. According to some anthropologists, the restriction on the bride price was the principal instigator for the insurgency in rural areas (Shahrani and Canfield, 14).

The Soviet vision of social change also included women's emancipation and increased education. Women were given more opportunities for education and work. From 1978 to 1986, the number of employed women increased from 5,000 to 270,000. In the government sector women comprised almost 20% of the workforce. Some 13,000 women were present in different military and militia units (Giustozzi, 20-21). The locus of most of these emancipatory measures was the cities. It is doubtful whether the government had much success in rural areas in implementing reforms pertaining to women's rights.

Significant developments also occurred in the field of education. In 1978, the Afghan population, especially women, was mostly illiterate (Nyrop and Seekins, 130). In addition, the emigration of a large part of the Afghan professional class after the coup and the Soviet invasion created a serious void in different areas requiring highly educated people. To remedy this situation, the regime launched massive literacy campaigns and by 1985, it claimed that more than one million people had graduated from these classes (Nyrop and Seekins, 130). Special, shorter degree and diploma granting programs were instituted to create faster technical and professional personnel. According to some observers, however, illiteracy increased in the provinces because of the destruction, while the shorter programs decreased the quality of the professionals.

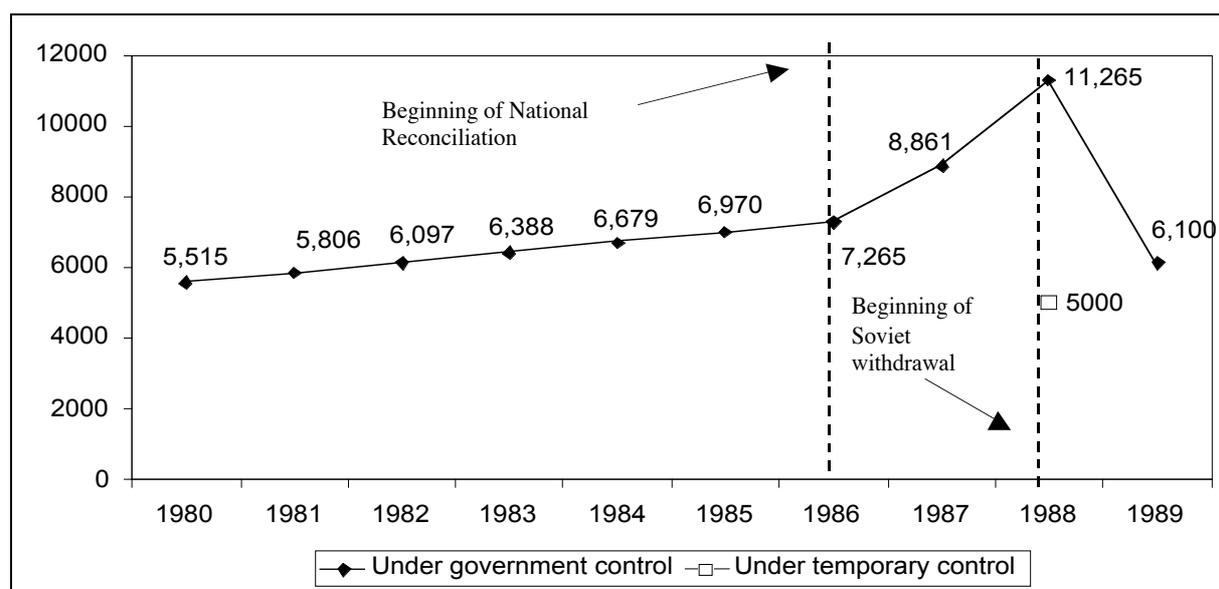
For the Soviet strategists, education was very important not just for addressing the skill shortages but also in their long-term strategy for bringing the country firmly in the Soviet sphere of influence. Educating a new generation in the Soviet way of life was crucial for the formation of new elite, which would ensure the continued survival of the regime and enforce Soviet ways. To achieve this goal, the educational system was restructured to conform to the Soviet one, while the curriculum and the textbooks were amended and fashioned to include dialectic materialism and scientific communism. The Russian language was introduced from middle school to university (Rubin, 1995, 140; Roy, 54). Numerous educational agreements were signed and tens of thousands of young people were sent in the Soviet Union or eastern European countries for short or prolonged periods of education (Nyrop and Seekins, 130; Rubin, 1995, 141, Roy, 56). The Afghan government guaranteed that they would be employed upon their return. It was anticipated that these graduates would become staunch supporters of the regime. Although there were reports of coercion in some cases, again, as in the case of urban women, who took advantage of the emancipation, many youths may have taken the opportunity for better education and willingly went to study in the USSR (Roy, 54).

Finally, sovietization was enforced through the culture and the media. The Soviet way of life was promoted as an alternate path to modernization. Soviet dress and fashion was the norm, while Soviet movies and literature dominated the cultural sphere. Newspapers and the television were used extensively to promote the virtues of the new system. Official Soviet holidays, such as the October revolution day, were celebrated in Afghanistan as well.

It was envisioned that building the Party and the state institutions, and the strength of the security forces, combined with the social restructuring of the Afghan society and educating the new elite would secure a social base for the regime. The relative autonomy of the state from the rural society, however, meant that until such time when institutions for mediating between two were developed, the only means available to the state to impose its program in

the countryside, at least at the beginning, were military. Indeed, by having a huge military advantage, the combined Soviet and DRA forces had no problem of preventing the resistance from making any significant territorial gains or to be the dominant forces on the battlefield. Despite that, it was equally difficult for the government and Soviet troops to make gains. The degree of government control over the countryside has been usually considered very small. The government's presence in the provinces varied from 10% to 60% in the north and northeast regions but in the central, south and southwest regions it was barely visible (Giustozzi, 291). However, the data show that control was gradually being wrestled from the resistance. Notably, until 1986, when most of the expansion was accomplished through military means, the gains were very gradual and disproportionate to the number of villages "freed" from *mujahidin* control. From 1980 to 1986, state security forces and the Red Army were able to "free" between 1,000 and 1,800 villages per year but the regime was able to keep on average only about 300 of them in its sphere of influence (Giustozzi, 194). Obviously, pure military methods were not sufficient to ensure support of the population and to prevent the mujahidin from coming back.

In 1986, the Soviet strategy changed and the DRA government initiated the policy of "National Reconciliation," which involved more inclusiveness, interactions with the tribal leaders and mujahidin commanders and even with the resistance parties. The policy will be discussed in greater detail in the diplomacy section. Here, it will suffice to say that among other objectives the introduction of the National Reconciliation policy was also an attempt to expand the social base without resorting to military actions. According to the available data, this was a much more successful approach. From 1980 until 1986 the expansion of government control over Afghan villages was taking place at an average of 5% per year and only 6,970 villages, out of estimated 35,000, were in the regime's sphere of influence. From the introduction of the National Reconciliation until the end of 1988, however, the number of villages on the government side increased to 11,265, which is almost double the pre-1986 situation. Furthermore, the regime claimed that it has a temporary control of additional 5,000 villages, which brought its area of control to almost half of the population living in the countryside (Graph 9).



Graph 9: Number of Afghan Villages under Government Control (based on data from: Giustozzi, 193-94).

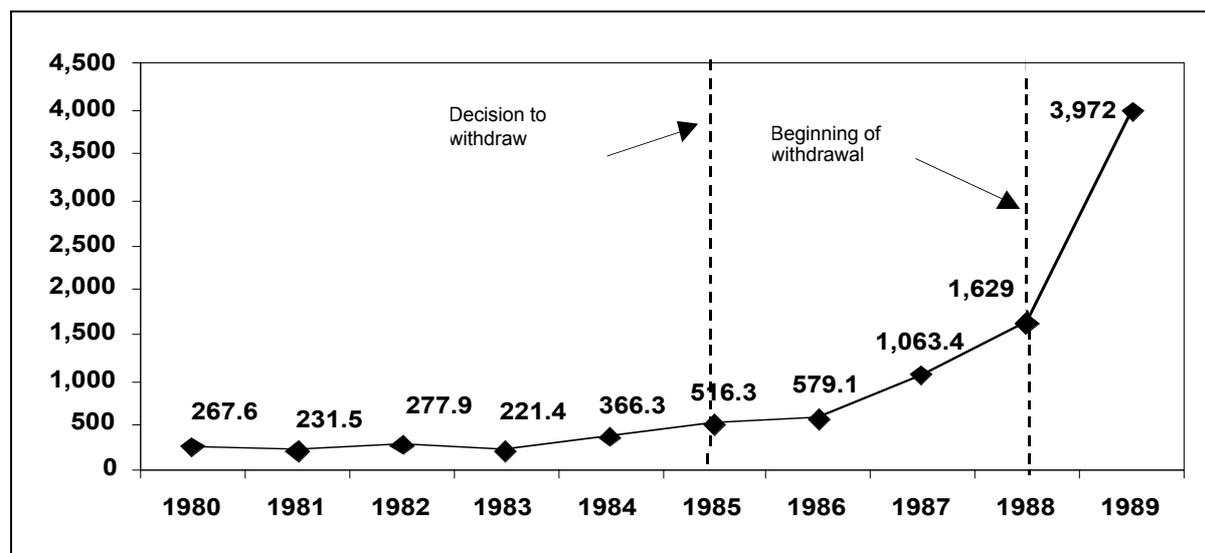
It was not a surprise then that the social base of the regime was primarily in the cities, which were easier to control. In 1986, out of a population of 5 million living in state controlled territories, 3 million lived in cities (Giustozzi, 190). Originally a party of intellectuals, PDPA attracted mostly people from the army, the professional class, bureaucrats, students and women. In 1987, 46% the party members worked for the state apparatus and 50% were in the army. (Giustozzi, 16) The strategy towards the urban population was to make it dependent on the government. For example, most of the imported wheat was distributed through a coupon system that benefited those loyal to the regime or those living in government-controlled territories. It was estimated that 80% of Kabul's population received such coupons. The question of food supply was so important that the government created a commission on food supply as part of the Homeland High Defence Council (Rubin, 1995, 170). PDPA also controlled the population through patronage. In 1988, 700,000 people, or 20% of the workforce under government control, were receiving salaries, coupons or other incentives from the state (Giustozzi, 190).

Workers and peasants were originally underrepresented in PDPA but their number in the party membership grew from 5% at the start of the revolution to about 35% by 1987 (Giustozzi, 46, 258). The participation of workers and peasants in the state and party institutions increased as well. The influence of the party and the regime in the countryside was carried out by the limited number of party cells in the villages and through the state farms and the cooperatives. The creation of the Groups for Defence of the Revolution (GDR), in essence a party militia, was aimed at spreading party influence among the masses (Giustozzi, 48). Although around 450,000 peasants were affected either by the land reforms or the cooperativization, it was estimated that only 150,000 or 12% of all peasants under DRA control supported the regime (Giustozzi, 18). The minimal support in the countryside undermined efforts to bring the ratio of workers and peasants above the 50%. The PDPA never became a truly proletarian party.

DEVELOPMENT: ECONOMIC

As a result of the Soviet intervention, Afghanistan's economy also underwent significant changes in the 1980s. It should be pointed out that the USSR and Afghanistan had a long history of trade relations. The Cold War further increased the value of Afghan friendship in the eyes of the USSR. In 1978, Soviet aid to Afghanistan was three times larger than US aid and 2,000 Soviet technical and economic experts and advisers were present in Afghanistan (Noorzoy, 147, 160). The Soviet Union was involved in both small, but publicly visible projects, such as building apartment complexes, as well as in large economic development projects such as building the highway system connecting the Soviet border with Kabul.

The core of the Soviet strategy to strengthen the Afghan regime was to rebuild and increase the capabilities of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) security forces. Therefore, military aid was the most important aspect of Soviet contribution. In 1980, the Soviet military aid was more than 7 times the pre-1978 aid (Noorzoy, 159). Military aid increased by 37% increase until 1984, but with the stepped up efforts for transferring the security responsibilities to the Afghan army and Red Army's withdrawal of active combat after 1985 it increased another 400% by 1988. The most significant increase, however, occurred between 1988 and 1989 when military aid stood at 3,972M – more than the entire amount for the period 1980-1987 (Graph 10).



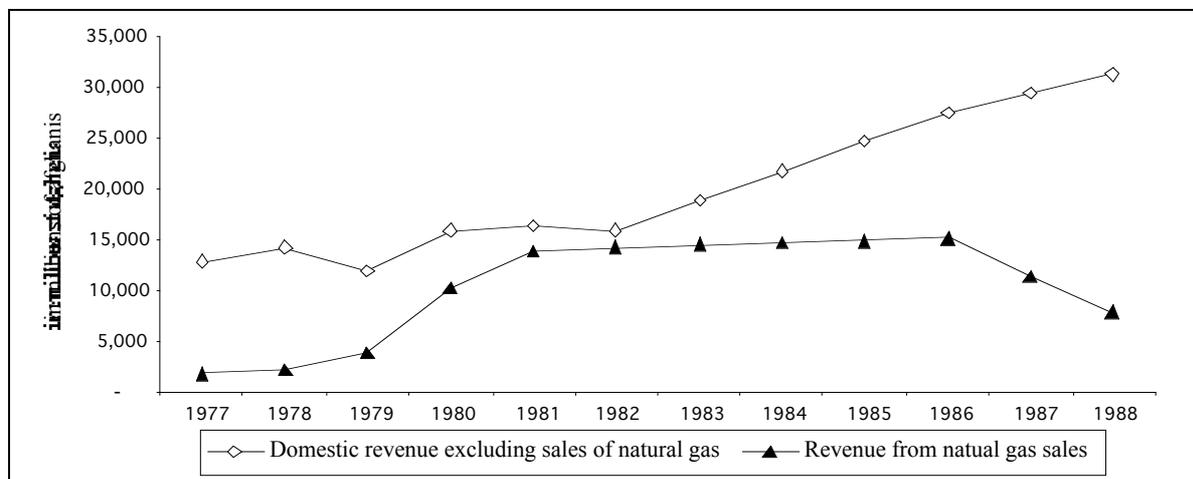
Graph 10: Soviet Military Aid (in millions of rubles), 1980-1989 (based on data from: Lyakhovskii, Appendix 14).

In addition to Soviet military aid, a significant portion of DRA's budget was devoted to military expenses as well. For the period 1979-82 defence expenditures increased with 178% (Nyrop and Seekins, 345-46). The DRA's defence budgets increased especially after 1986 with the efforts to strengthen the army and buy off resistance leaders. By 1988, defence expenditures constituted 60% of the total government expenditures and 15% of the GDP (Rubin, 1995, 113; Gareev, 98). Given the relatively successful performance of the DRA army after the Soviet withdrawal, (Urban, 273-277; Gareev, 186-218) it can be argued that the immense military aid and defense spending achieved the objective of strengthening DRA's regime survivability and ensured that it had, if not total monopoly over the means of violence, at least the means to ensure the survival of the regime.

The question of defence spending in relation to the economy as whole, however, is whether such spending can be sustained and for how long. Obviously, increased spending necessitates increased revenues from both internal and external sources. The economic strategies of the PDPA regime were largely influenced by Soviet economic theory and experience. In addition to adopting economic planning based on the five-year cycles used in the USSR, the two major thrusts of economic development initially (at least until 1986) were to increase the state share of national income and to increase the bilateral trade between the two countries (Noorzoy, 166; Rubin, 1995, 169).

Extending the public sector into areas traditionally dominated by the state such as mining and manufacturing seems to have been relatively successful. State control in manufacturing eventually reached 80%, in the construction sector – 90% and in transportation – 60%. In trade, the expansion of public sector was less pronounced. The state share of international trade was 45% and in domestic trade only 15% (Gareev, 98). The oil and gas industry was the most important contributor to the state revenues. It was, however, controlled by Soviet cadres and when the Soviet technicians began to leave the country after 1986, income from the sales of gas declined and after 1989 essentially disappeared. Still, domestic revenue, excluding sales of natural gas, grew by 142 % for the period 1977-1989 or 13 % per year. The share of public sector as part of GNP increased from 9.5% in 1975 to roughly 20% in 1989 (Rubin, 1988, 1202). Most of the growth of the public sector was achieved through the

development of joint ventures with the Soviet Union. In 1986, Afghan-Soviet ventures represented 75% of all state industry and produced 60% of the electricity (Rubin, 1995, 169). These projects also produced 75% of the domestic revenue, with the rest coming from taxes and custom duties (Giustozzi, 234). The Afghan economy was to a large extent integrated with the Soviet economy (Graph 11).



Graph 11: Growth of Domestic Revenue and Sales of Natural Gas, 1977 – 1988 (based on data from: Rubin, 1995, Table 5.1, 113).

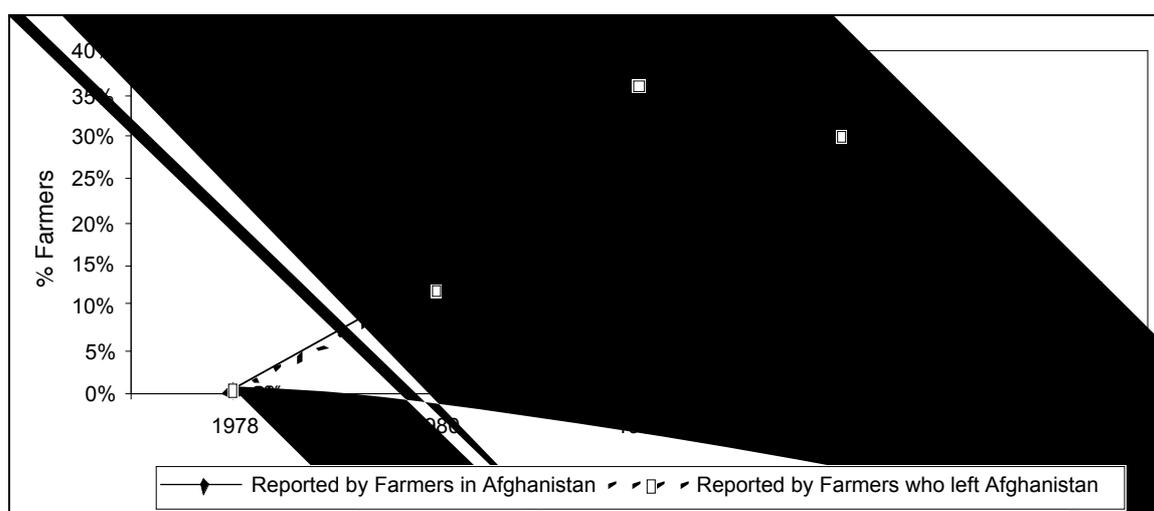
In other words, efforts to increase the state presence in the industrial sector were relatively successful. The shortcomings of this approach were realized after the Soviet withdrawal when as in the case of gas production, these enterprises collapsed because of the lack of technical personnel.

After Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the shift of economic policies in the Soviet Union towards joint public-private ventures was almost immediately echoed in Afghanistan as well. In 1986, the new Afghan leader Najibullah changed the overall direction of the economy towards greater representation of the private sector. In addition to building into the new constitution guarantees for private property, a green light was given to private investors. A number of private-sector projects were exempted from customs duties, while 100% of foreign investment was permitted in private enterprises. The 20% hold of the public sector economy on the GDP mentioned earlier was much publicized in its reverse form, as if the private sector has gained momentum to represent 80% of the national economy (Rubin, 1995, 169). Efforts to strengthen the private sector may have been initiated also with the objective to limit the DRA's economic dependency on the USSR.

The PDPA government and their Soviet advisers also recognized the importance of the agricultural sector, which not only produced a significant part of the GDP but which also was the centre of *mujahidin* economy. The position of the agricultural sector as a key element in the struggle between the regime and the insurgency prevented any economic development there. On one side, farmers were being pressured by the government to grow cash crops (cotton) in order to bring them in its sphere of influence and, at the same time, to decrease the availability of supplies for the insurgents. The latter, on their part, pressured the farmers to do the opposite, i.e., grow foodstuffs.

Efforts to expand the public sector in agriculture failed. The land reforms introduced in 1978 antagonized farmers and landlords and limited state control of the sector. The first reform – canceling agricultural loans – did not eliminate the farmer’s need for credit. The second reform was an imposition of ceilings on land ownership and the distribution of the excess land to small owners or landless peasants. It too was met various practical difficulties, such as scarcity of cultivable land overall, lack of information on ownership, lack of compensation for the expropriated land and the sanctity of ownership in Islamic law. The grandiose plans to create thousands of cooperatives also could not be fulfilled. In 1982 their number stood at 1,217 and only grew to 1,274 in 1984. The creation of new farms declined sharply in 1986, and again after 1988 (Giustozzi, 294). In 1989, cooperatives only generated 1% of all agricultural produce (Giustizzi, 169).

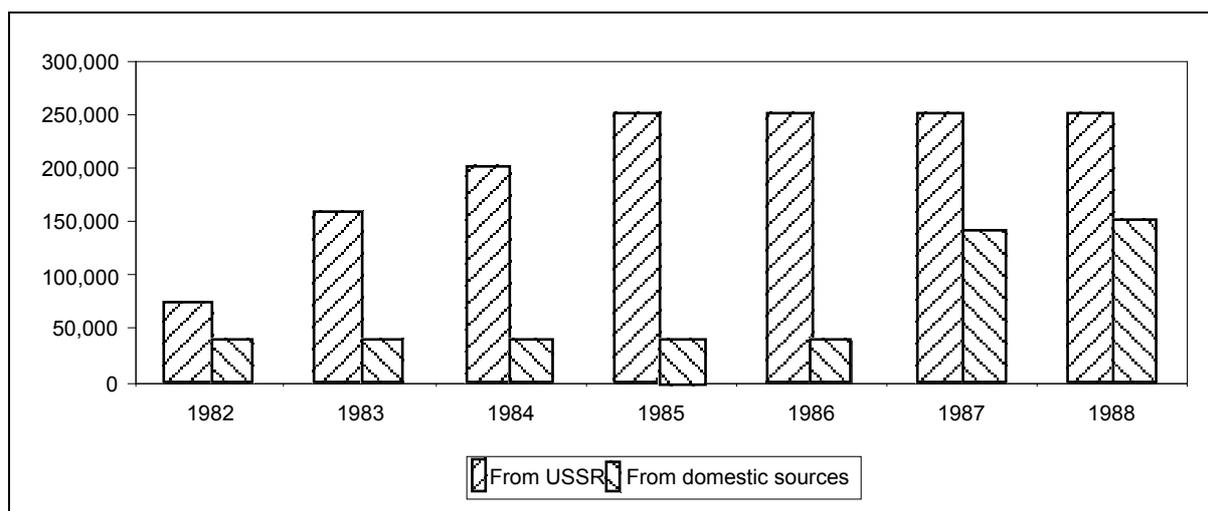
The most serious damage to the agricultural sector, however, was the Red Army’s decision to destroy the *mujahidin* economy as part of its counterinsurgency strategy. Although military operations by the Red Army to prevent the mujahidin from relying on the countryside as an economic and supply base were successful (Rubin, 1995, 180-181), as already mentioned, they also led to hundreds of thousands of casualties, the emigration of 5 million people to Pakistan and Iran as refugees, the emigration of additional 2 million to urban centers, and the destruction of 20% of the rural villages. As a result of this destruction, the abandonment of farms and the loss of labour, by 1983 the production and yields of agricultural products declined significantly (Farr and Gul, 67). Livestock decreased between one to two thirds (Rubin, 1995, 227) (Graph 12).



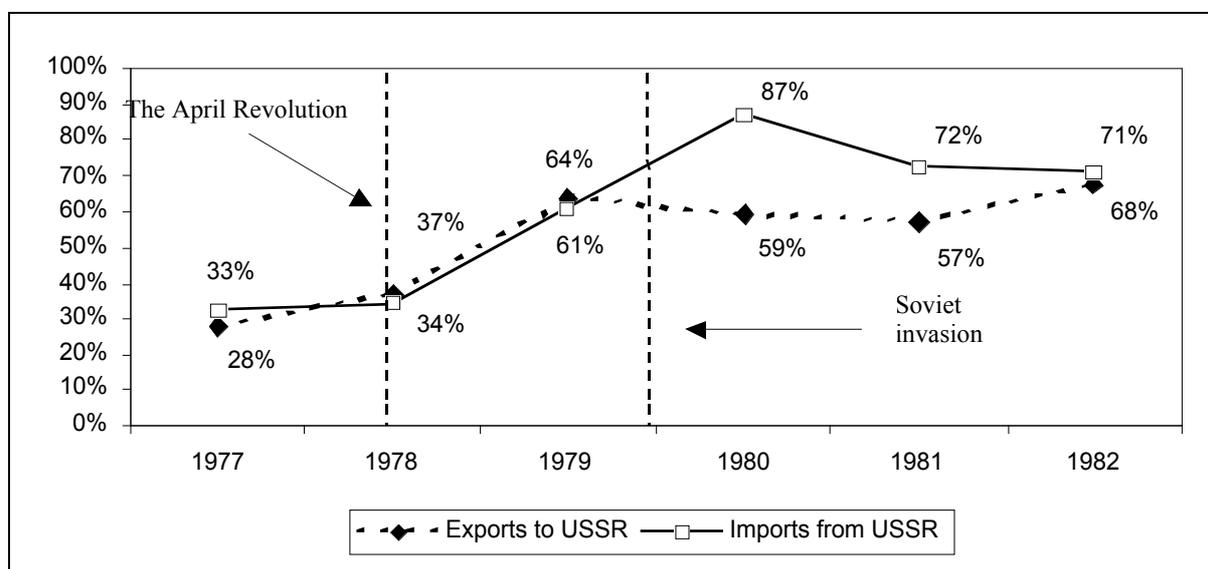
Graph 12: Farmers Reporting Destruction of Irrigation by the Soviet Army (based on data from: Rubin, 1995, 228).

Faced with a deteriorating agricultural sector and an antagonized rural population, the regime gradually softened its land reform policies. After 1989, all efforts at land reforms were officially abandoned and a guarantee of land ownership was built into the constitution (Giustozzi, 169). With the decrease of major military operations after 1985, it is believed that the agricultural sector was able to rebound, however no data exists to demonstrate this. It should be noted that by that time, the rural economy no longer provided the economic base to the resistance. This role was assumed by the foreign aid supplied by the US and Saudi Arabia and distributed through Pakistan. This aid made the insurgency independent of the local economy (Rubin (1995), 181, 231-232).

The decreased agricultural output, combined with the inability of the government to exert control over the rural economy as a whole, reflected on the state’s capacity to feed its primarily urban population. While prior to 1978, Afghanistan produced enough wheat and other foodstuff’s production, in the 1980s it relied mostly on imports of wheat from the USSR and occasionally India. The wheat imports increased from 74,000 tons in 1982 to about 250,000 tons in 1985. Government efforts to buy wheat locally only contributed around 40,000 tons per year until 1987, when as a result of the national reconciliation process and, perhaps, a rebounding agricultural economy, the amount of domestically purchased wheat increased to 140,000 tons and 150,000 tons in 1988 (Graph 13).



Graph 13: Afghan Wheat Supply, 1982-88 (based on data from: Giustozzi, 223).

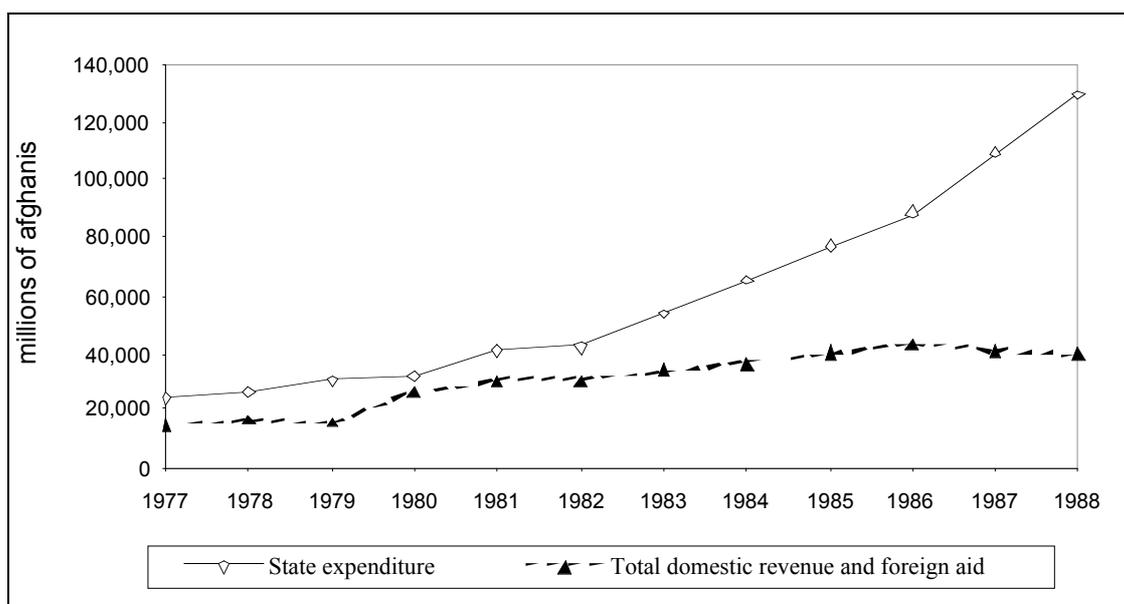


Graph 14: Afghan Trade with the USSR (based on data from: Noorzoy, 164).

The other vector of Afghan economic policy development during the 1980s – to increase bilateral trade with the Soviet Union – was also consistently followed. Exports to USSR involved agricultural products and resources such as gas and copper. Imports consisted primarily of manufactured products and military equipment. Combined with the number of joint venture projects, the rate of Soviet-Afghan trade increase reflects the economic

integration of the Soviet and Afghan economies. Before PDPA came to power in 1978, Afghan-Soviet bilateral trade, although significant, represented only around 30% of Afghanistan's overall international trade. After the 1978 revolution, the share of exchange with the Soviet Union jumped to about 60% and 70% by 1982 (Graph 14). Most likely the trend continued in the subsequent years.

Despite obvious achievements in pursuing the established economic goals, the PDPA regimes could not solve the fundamental challenge to Afghan economy – the reliance on foreign aid. From 1978 to 1988 expenditures exceeded revenue by a big margin. The efforts to build up DRA army capabilities and the national reconciliation process made state expenditures rise exponentially. In 1986, all domestic revenues covered 48% of expenditures and by 1988, only 30% (Graph 15). Despite the increase of foreign aid from 1980 to 1988 by 380%, the deficit in 1988 could not be covered by foreign aid anymore. The government increasingly resorted to internal borrowing which increased more than 10 fold from 1983 to 1988 (Rubin, 1995, 113). The deficit of currency associated with the increased spending resulted in the printing of money and inflation. Official consumer price inflation was reported as being 30% - 40% per year in 1987-89; however, on the open market food prices increased 500% to 1,000% (Rubin, 1995, 164). So much money was required for daily needs that banknotes were actually weighed rather than counted.



Graph 15: State Expenditure Compared to Domestic Revenue and Foreign Aid (based on data from: Rubin, 1995, Table 5.1, 113).

After the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the joint venture projects, the small revenue from taxes could only be supplemented by foreign aid. In 1988, 75% of the state's revenues were derived from sales of natural gas and financial aid and only 25% from direct and indirect taxes (Giustozzi, 234). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian president Boris Yeltsin halted aid to Najibullah's government at the end of 1991. The lack of basic resources decapitated the seemingly huge state military machine. The economic dependence of the population and some commanders on the redistribution of Soviet aid disappeared and the latter promptly turned against the regime. The collapse of the pro-Moscow regime in Afghanistan soon after that indicates that foreign aid was a crucial factor in the overall stability of the regime.

DIPLOMACY: DOMESTIC RELATIONS

In addition to sovietization, Soviet social strategy also included working with the traditional leaders in the countryside, from whose ranks *mujahidin* commanders usually came, playing off the traditional tribal divisions to their advantage and even co-opting the religious scholars – the *ulama*. This approach was known as the pacification process or pacification policy. What is important to note here, is that the pacification process reinforced the traditional society and thus was counterproductive for the sovietization process. Pacification was Soviets' short-term strategy in dealing with the challenges posed by Afghan diversity. To bridge the two approaches, an attempt was made to reconcile the traditional social structure and institutions with the new party-state structure and institutions.

As early as 1980, PDPA's Central Committee agreed on a policy of peace and cooperation with the Afghan tribes. Tribal traditions would be respected and economic help promised. The Loya Jirgah (the Grand Assembly of tribal chiefs, notables and religious leaders) was established as a state institution, convened by the Revolutionary Council (Giustozzi, 130). The Loya Jirgah was designated as the ultimate organ of power in the state (Nyrop and Seekins, 269). As state institutions, as well as state's abilities to provide economic help and to retaliate were gradually rebuilt, many tribal chiefs decided to accept the state's authority. The Ministry of Tribal and Frontier Affairs played important role in interaction with the tribes and in 1983, its minister claimed that he had ensured the support of 5,000 tribal notables (Giustozzi, 133).

The difficulty of PDPA to establish party cells and state administration structures at village, subdistrict and district levels left the local Jirgahs (a traditional Afghan council of elders) as the only alternative for the state to administer the provinces below government level. Thus, an effort was made to ensure that members of the Jirgah were sympathetic to the government. The PDPA had the right to nominated candidates for the local Jirgah while the population would then elect them through a vote. The process of forming the local Jirgahs, culminated with the convention of two Loya Jirgahs - April and September 1985. Almost 5,500 tribal notables, religious leaders and militia commanders participated in them. In many cases, however, the elders were bribed to be present (Giustozzi, 137-138).

In addition to traditional and tribal structures, Soviet strategy included integrating the religious figures, who in many instances were as much or even more influential than the tribal notables. A Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments was established while one of the NFF member organizations was the Council of Ulema and Mullah (Nyrop and Seekins, 270, Giustozzi, 59). The government sponsored numerous conferences of religious leaders, reconstructed mosques and distributed grants to pilgrims to Mecca (Nyrop and Seekins, 270). The *ulama*, supportive of the government, were given special allowances and coupons for food and commodities. In 1987, 16,000 Islamic leaders received such benefits and their number increased to 20,000 one year later (Giustozzi, 62). The vast majority of the religious figures, however, remained outside the state religious system. The religious authority in Afghanistan was more elusive and religious hierarchy much less developed than the one in Soviet Central Asia, which did not allow for a similar approach where the fostering of a "red" clergy elite would automatically lead to ensuring the loyalty of the flock (Nyrop and Seekins, 271).

An innovative way to establish contact with the population outside regime's control and to increase government's visibility was the establishment of special propaganda units – called Agitprop. These units were joint Afghan – Soviet detachments and included both civil and military personnel. In addition to primarily Soviet soldiers, Agitprop was composed of doctors and nurses, entertainers and political activists, the latter mostly Afghans. Initiated by some Soviet advisers in 1981 as a pilot project, the military brass initially opposed the utilization of Agitprop, but after demonstrating positive results, in 1982, it was officially constituted as part of the force structure (Giustozzi, 42). Agitprop units toured villages and spread information about the work of the government, distributed declarations of the Loya Jirgah, organized meetings, and concerts, and even projected movies in makeshift theaters (Giustozzi, 41). To win over the villagers, Agitprop provided medical help and distributed free fuel, medicine and food. In the period 1981-89, Agitprop units provided medical assistance to 400,000 people and distributed food and other supplies to 1,000,000 (Giustozzi, 44). According to some Soviet military commanders, Agitprop proved useful also for reconnaissance and negotiations with tribal chiefs and even mujahidin commanders (Schofield, 110).

In 1986, Agitprop activities were taken to another level by coordinating them with military operations. The plan was that after a military offensive, an Agitprop unit would move in and prepare the ground for the creation of a local administrative bodies and militia. The final step was the stationing of a police battalion, which would then conduct a census of the population and distribute ID cards. Agitprop activities in the field were supported by a dedicated radio station (Giustozzi, 42). It was very crucial, however, that the military successes were followed very quickly with the other initiatives because the *mujahidin* were usually able to recover and would try to recapture the lost territory within 15-20 days. Agitprop activities were also hampered by corruption as some of the free aid to be distributed by them ended up in the hands of merchants who then sold it at their shops. The quality of the personnel working in the units was of critical importance as well. Overall, Agitprop was evaluated as quite beneficial because it reduced the hostility towards the regime in Kabul and even the Red Army.

By 1986, Soviet leaders realized that policy of overt sovietization and pursuing the defeat of the resistance by military means was not going to lead to withdrawal of Soviet forces anytime soon. Following a strategic decision by the Soviet Politburo in November 1986 (CPSU Transcript), the PDPA's Central Committee launched the policy of National Reconciliation in December of the same year (Slinkin, 68).

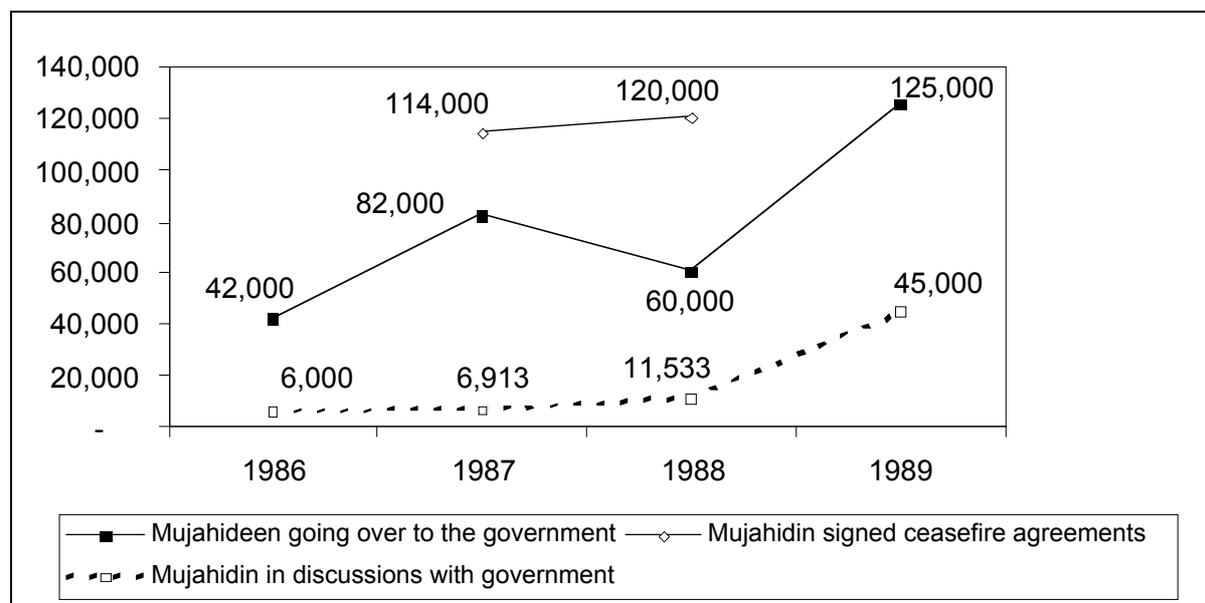
The main thrusts of the National Reconciliation policy included: restoring the peace in Afghanistan, opening the lines of communication with the mujahidin commanders, resistance parties and former political figures, negotiating deals with the tribal chiefs and other local notables, and the creation of a coalition government with participation of all political groups. As a first step, the government declared a unilateral ceasefire (effective January 15, 1987). Limited liberalization was signaled through the release of all political prisoners and the encouragement of public criticism. The right to alterative parties was recognized, although they were supposed to support the constitution and have their headquarters in Kabul, thus effectively excluding the resistance parties in Pakistan (Rubin, 1995, 168). The opposition leaders in Peshawar unanimously rejected the National Reconciliation policy (Slinkin, 73); nevertheless, the government and local administration became more inclusive by offering positions to non-party members and even mujahidin commanders. By the end of 1987, 11 out of 30 governors were non-party members – former politicians or local notables, while

mujahidin commanders were appointed in 14 districts and 4 provinces as governors (Giustozzi, 173). The first non-PDPA Prime Minister since 1978 was appointed in 1988 (Giustozzi, 163).

Despite the failure to achieve a compromise with the opposition parties, successes were registered in accommodating the tribal leaders and *mujahidin* commanders. This was accomplished through offering concessions for more local autonomy and material support. In fact, those willing to cooperate with the government were offered what amounted to effective self-rule. The controversial reforms were first amended to the point of being irrelevant and later completely abandoned. Former *mujahidin* were allowed to enroll in the militias and given large salaries and landholdings. These two developments signaled to many *mujahidin* commanders and tribal leaders that the government had corrected its mistakes and had recognized the limits of its authority. From the point of view of the *mujahidin* and the tribal chiefs, it simply paid better than the cooperation with the opposition parties. From the population's point of view, changing sides to the government was not surrender but rather a return of the power and the autonomy to the tribe (Giustozzi, 173).

As a result of National Reconciliation, by 1989, 70-80% of *mujahidin* commanders had ceased military operations against the government. By the end of the war, 25% of all non-government armed units had signed "reconciliation" agreements while 40% had ceasefire agreements with the government. It is estimated that only 12% of the *mujahidin* rejected any deals (Giustozzi, 188-189). As already mentioned earlier, the number of government-controlled villages almost doubled in the period 1986-1989 (Graph 16).

The National Reconciliation was in general lines very similar to the "pacification" policy previously pursued. The difference was that while the latter was deemed an auxiliary to the main thrust of sovietization, the former was now considered the main policy of receiving legitimacy.



Graph 16: National Reconciliation Process, 1986-89 (based on data from: Giustozzi, 282).

In fact, National Reconciliation signaled the end of the sovietization process in Afghanistan. The November 1986 meeting of the Soviet Politburo had decided that the Soviet strategy would now aim for Afghan neutrality rather than sovietization (CPSU Transcript). Marxist propaganda and promotion of Afghan-Soviet friendship was gradually discontinued while English replaced the study of Russian. Religious instruction in schools was reintroduced. In November 1987, a Loya Jirgah accepted a new constitution which removed the word Democratic from the name of the country (Rubin, 1965, 109). In 1990 it was changed once more to become the Islamic State of Afghanistan (Giustozzi, 159). In July of 1990, the PDPA completed its overhaul by renouncing its Marxist character and renamed itself the Fatherland Party. The requirement for its members was that they be good Muslims and accept the National Reconciliation policy (Giustozzi, 158).

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this overview of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan during the period 1979-89, is that despite the strong historical ties between Afghanistan and the USSR and the 10 years of direct presence, the Soviet military and political machine was not able to transform Afghanistan into a Soviet satellite state. The Soviet Union was successful in its initial mission to remove Amin and install a more reliable regime, and it had relative success in stabilizing that regime and building up its security forces to the extent that the regime survived the Soviet withdrawal for over 3 years. The prolonged, bloody course of the war and the ultimate collapse the pro-Moscow regime in Kabul in 1992, after the dissolution of the USSR, shows that the planners of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not obtain the results they had expected.

The Soviet presence, however, was not limited to military operations. One decade of social and economic development demonstrate a concerted effort to model the Afghan society after the Soviet one. The Soviet military engagements with the *mujahidin* forces should be considered only one component of the Soviet presence and the ultimate strategic failure not a direct result of a military defeat but a failure of the overall Soviet 3-D approach and the lack of political will to continue the mission.

In terms of the Soviet military experience alone, it can be concluded that the early practice of conducting large-scale conventional offensives against insurgents was unsuccessful as insurgents often managed to evade contact and then return after the departure of Soviet forces. There were insufficient troop levels to occupy the country and provide security in all regions. The Soviets also learned that they had to devote considerable attention and resources to force protection required on supply lines due to the threat of mines and ambushes. The resulting force restructuring combined with increasing reliance on the Afghan security forces and government militia proved to be more successful. The cruel Soviet counter-insurgency practices adopted in the period 1982-86 achieved their limited objective of denying support infrastructure to the *mujahidin*. However, these practices also effectively destroyed the Afghan agricultural sector while insurgent sanctuary in Pakistan and the foreign aid to the resistance parties made their success irrelevant. Ultimately, the Red Army's technical superiority, battlefield victories and operational accomplishments could not be translated into strategic success.

The Soviet experience in social development and state building demonstrates that attempts to alter traditional Afghan social structures and state-tribe relations are met with stiff resistance, regardless of the ideology or the state model being imposed, as long as they are perceived as secular and non-traditional. This is certainly the case with the Soviet model and ideology, as well as with liberal democracy. Such a situation makes balancing military operations to defeat the insurgency with civil affairs very challenging. On one side, defeating the insurgency requires strong state institutions and social cohesion, but on the other hand, the imposition of a new order only perpetuates the insurgency. Furthermore, the lack of direct government control in the countryside, that is, a lack of ability to communicate and influence the population, makes the military solution the most attractive. However, such a solution is exactly what the state-opposing forces desire because it preserves the social status quo.

Another lesson learned from the Soviet experience is that getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement. However, such an approach contains the danger of perpetuating local power centers that would eventually challenge central authority. The policy of "National Reconciliation," which aimed at binding regional groups to the state, was definitely more successful than military operations in expanding government influence over the countryside. The concessions to these groups, however, eliminated any successes in state building achieved previously and in effect meant a return to the status quo before 1978, when the state had accepted its limited power over the rural society. In fact, the National Reconciliation policy resulted in a situation where regional power centers enjoyed unprecedented autonomy.

During the 1980s, the Soviet Union committed significant economic resources and exported its economic models in order to stabilize the pro-communist Afghan regime. In the context of a weak state and the supremacy of the traditional rural economy in Afghanistan, however, Soviet economic models proved to be even less effective than they were in the USSR. Especially damaging were the land reforms and efforts to collectivize the farmers. Both initiatives collided with traditional Afghan values and undermined state legitimacy in the countryside.

Most significantly, economic policies used during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan could not break the traditional dependence of Afghan governments on foreign aid. Despite significant advances of the public sector, domestic revenue suffered from an overdependence on trade relations with one country only (the USSR) and especially from the inability to make any gains in obtaining proceeds from the agricultural sector. The rapidly increasing expenditures, needed to counter the resistance, and to maintain the population living on government controlled territory, and the money needed to accommodate resistance commanders after 1986, could not be covered by domestic revenues. Even the lifeline of foreign aid had its limitations. The failure to develop a domestic skilled labour pool, able to operate the crucial gas and mining sectors, also contributed to the economic dependence of the Afghan regime.

The status quo existing from the middle of the 1980s between the Afghan government and resistance forces was not affected by the withdrawal of the Soviet Army or by military setbacks. Simply, inadequate economic and fiscal policies and the belief that the foreign aid would come forever were the factors that led to the collapse of the regime.

There is a pattern of dependence on foreign aid in the history of the Afghan state. It is difficult in the long term to envision any progress towards Afghan stability without resolving

this dependency and putting the Afghan state's economy on sound grounds. Developing greater economic independence and countrywide market cohesion will be the most successful tools of state building.

REFERENCES

- Iu. Andropov, A. Gromyko, D. Ustinov, B. Ponomarev, 29 October, 1979. "Report to the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the Situation in Afghanistan." <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r6.pdf> accessed 27 July, 2007.
- CPSU CC Politburo Transcript, 13 November 1986. Available at Woodrow Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project: <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>, accessed 27 July, 2007.
- Grant Farr, Azam Gul, 1984. "Afghan Agricultural Production, 1978-1982," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 8, 1: 65-79.
- M.A. Gareev, 1999. *Afganskaya strada* [The Difficult Battle for Afghanistan]. Moscow.
- Antonio Giustozzi, 2000. *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan 1978-1992*. Washington.
- Lester W. Grau & Michael A. Gress, translators & editors, The Russian General Staff, 2002. *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*. Lawrence, Kansas.
- G.F. Krivosheev, 2001. *Rossiya i SSSR v voinakh XX veka: Poteri vooruzhennykh syl, Statisticheskoe issledovanie* [Russia and USSR in the Wars of the 20th century: Losses of the Armed Forces, Statistical Review. Moscow: http://www.rus-sky.org/history/library/w/w10.htm#_Toc2489843, accessed 27 July 2007.
- A.A. Lyakhovskii, 1994. *Tragedia i doblest Afghana* [The Tragedy and Glory of the Afghans]. Moscow: http://www.rsva.ru/biblio/prose_af/afgan_tragedy_and_glory/index.shtml accessed 27 July, 2007.
- Scott R. McMichael, 1991. *Stumbling Bear: Soviet Military Performance in Afghanistan*. London.
- M.S. Noorzoy, 1985. "Long-term Economic Relations between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: An Interpretive Study," *IJMES*, 17: 151-173.
- Richard F. Nyrop, Donald M. Seekins, ed., 1986. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*, Foreign Area Studies, American University. Washington.
- Oliver Roy, 1989. "The Sovietization of Afghanistan," in Milan Hauner, Robert L. Canfield, ed., *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: Collision and Transformation*. Boulder, San Francisco, London: 48-58.
- Barnett Rubin, 1988. "Lineages of the State in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, 11: 1188-1209.
- Barnett R. Rubin, 1995. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*. New Haven, London.
- Carey Schofield, 1993. *The Russian Elite: Inside Spetsnaz and the Airborne Forces*. London and Mechanicsburg.
- M. Nazif Shahrani, Robert L. Canfield, ed., 1984. *Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives*. Berkeley.
- M. F. Slinkin, 2003. *Afganistan. Stranici istorii (80-90-e gg. XX v.)* [Afghanistan. Pages from History (80s—90s of the 20th century)]. Simferopol.

Marek Sliwinski, 1989. "Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People," *Orbis*, Winter: 39-56.

Mark Urban, 1990. *War in Afghanistan*. London.

V.I. Varennikov, Interview, 15 February, 2007: <http://www.afgahnistan.ru/> accessed 31 July, 2007.

The reported results, their interpretation, and any opinions expressed therein, remain those of the authors and do not represent, or otherwise reflect, any official opinion or position of DND or the Government of Canada.