

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOVIET AND THE US OBJECTIVES AND  
EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN

A MASTER'S ESSAY SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
FOR PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

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MAY 2013

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May 2013

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Graduate School of Political Science and International Affairs for the two challenging and extremely eventful years of study. I also want to thank AUA faculty members for their readiness to help and guide me through my learning process.

I want to specifically thank AUA library staff for being extremely helpful and efficient in providing all the necessary service for the best learning and research experience in the library.

My special gratitude goes to Dr. Khatchik Der Ghougassian, who has been endlessly patient and understanding in working with me. His valuable remarks and comments pertaining to my studies, as well as discussions on life will always stay with me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a spread opinion that the Soviet and the US interventions in Afghanistan are extremely alike in terms of their causes, means and effects. Though we can draw a few parallels between these two instances of intervention, there are also significant differences that need to be pointed out. The following essay will discuss the differences of goals and objectives the two intervening states had, the respective political context and response of international community, the nature of the actual intervention operations along with a brief discussion of distinct military realities of the two cases.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of the following Master's essay is to conduct a comparative analysis of the experiences of the US and the Soviet Union during their intervention and subsequent stay in Afghanistan.

Within the last 40 years, Afghanistan faced two interventions. Both instances of intervention have been highly criticized, at least at some point, by local and international actors. There are a number of striking similarities in the context of those interventions and the way they have been carried out. Both the states, at the time of invasion, were at the peak of their international presence and had quiet bold foreign policy. For both the states this has been the lengthiest, in terms of duration, military operation abroad and they both faced the issue of legitimizing the interventions both domestically and internationally.

There is a bulk of literature in which the two invasions are labeled similarly based on the analyses of the outcomes of the invasion. However, through this essay I hope to show that the initial context of the intervention, its style and consequent military operations were rather different. Many lessons from the Soviet experience in Afghanistan have been studied and never repeated by Americans.

This essay is aimed at answering the following three research questions:

1. What are the aspects making the context of and decision of the US to Intervene in Afghanistan militarily different from those of Soviet Union?
2. What was the nature of international response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan versus that of the United States?

3. What are the aspects making the intervention operation performed by the Soviet Union different from that of the United States?

To answer these questions, the essay has been structured to contain literature review, three parts and a concluding section. The first part analyses the context of the intervention of Soviet and the United States. It discusses the goals and objectives of the intervening states in Afghanistan. It also gives certain insight on decision making process of the Soviets and the US on militarily intervening in Afghanistan. The next part dwells upon reasons and the nature of international response the two cases of intervention faced. Finally, the last part is devoted to bringing up the differences of the nature of the ways the military intervention in Afghanistan was performed.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY**

The essay aims to explore the similarities and differences in between of the two instances of military intervention and occupation of Afghanistan of the Soviet Union (1979-1989) and the United States (since 2001), decision and implementation forms as well as international response to these cases of intervention. To reveal the topic under study, secondary data has been reviewed through from a historical/comparative analysis theoretical perspective. As I would be focusing on the interventions in their respective context, my approach is primarily structural. The main data I will use for this research has been drawn from secondary sources, including academic books, journal articles, and official records of meetings, memos, and deliberation and memoirs of people relevant to the topic. The collected data has been studied to single out the differences of the two interventions and the results will be communicated in the conclusions section.



## LITERTURE REVIEW

The number of literature comparing the two invasions is rather limited, however there are numerous sources that describe in great details all the possible aspects of the invasion. As it is already clear from the research questions the literature review will describe the research that has already been done in regards of the mentioned aspects of interest.

The US led invasion and further occupation of Afghanistan has already lasted for already twelve years make it a perfect fit for the comparison with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The similarities of these tow invasions have started to be more actively outlined by media starting 2011. This may be conditioned by the fact that in 2011 the US marked ten years of its military presence in Afghanistan, same number of years that Soviets remained in Afghanistan before their withdrawal. In 2011 we observe release of various articles drawing parallels between the two conflicts, comparing the outcomes and state of affairs in order to draw conclusions regarding the future policies. Usually these articles call for learning the lessons from Soviets and stating that otherwise the US will end up in Afghanistan without having any serious achievement as Soviets.

One of the recent articles discussing the matter is authored by Larry Goodson and Thomas Johnson. The article titled “Parallels with the past - How the Soviets lost in Afghanistan, How the American are Losing” discusses three parallels between the Soviet and the US and NATO policies towards Afghanistan. The three major policies they have pointed out is the concentration of both the US and Soviet forces on “key population centers, reconciliation and the development of “Afghan” solution to a variety of security concerns” (Goodson & Johnson, 2011) According to the author the Soviets were focused on securing the urban areas and main road

networks while launching offensive operations on the rural areas, where Taliban was active. Similar to this tactic, as they suggest, is the policy of the US to focus on securing the urban areas and key transit routes, concentrating on largely populated areas. The authors argue this policy to be inefficient as though the urban areas are indeed secure the insurgents are operating predominantly from rural areas and small settlements.

The next similarity they bring forth is the reconciliation efforts led by both the US and Soviets. After briefly introducing the reconciliation tactics by the US and Soviet governments, the authors argue that, given the *jihadist* nature of both the conflict the reaching of agreement will not be possible through negotiation. Finally, the third similarity is the efforts by occupying countries to build Afghan security, through training security forces and enhancing Afghan police capabilities.

Based on the analyses of these three similarities in the US and Soviet led policies the Authors conclude the US is not likely to reach a considerable success with its initiatives in Afghanistan. Another major argument they put forth in the end is that security should not be regarded as number one guarantee for the success in Afghanistan. It is rather the “government legitimacy” that should be given the primary importance in the hierarchy of objectives. They also advise the US government to focus more on final objectives first, and then only develop policies that would enable to fulfill these objectives. (Goodson & Johnson, 2011)

However David Kilcullen, in his “The Accidental Guerillas”, in his efforts to measure the largeness of the Taliban forces, estimated that “as of mid-2008, between 32,000 and 40,000 insurgents were operating inside Afghanistan at any one time. This includes 8,000 – 10,000 full time fighters or “core” Taliban, or about 25 percent of the total.” (Kilcullen, 2009, p. 48) According to him, the rest of the members who fight only in separate occasions. These fighters,

are not motivated but the hatred toward the US or NATO forces, nor are they necessarily supportive of Taliban. One of the major reasons driving them to fire on foreign soldiers might be the fear of being later punished by Taliban as a traitor. This idea is comprehensively framed in the chapter “Crazies will kill them”, conveying the message that winning the faith of the population on the issue of their safety can by large decrease the sometimes “involuntary” support for Taliban.

Kilcullen also puts a strong emphasis on building and enhancing the legitimacy of government and local institutions. According to him, this can be achieved in case of substantially reducing “corruption and abuse”, appointing responsible governors who would genuinely be interested in the well-being of their community, and again, providing security. (Kilcullen, 2009)

Paul Dibb is yet another author who tried to look for similarities between the Soviet invasion failure and the problems facing the US. The article titled “Soviet Experience in Afghanistan, Lessons to be learnt?” published in 2010, enumerates a few similarities on of the two conflicts. According to him, both the countries were not able to take advantage of their advanced technological capabilities, conditioned by the terrain and nature of insurgent warfare. (Dibb, 2010) The mujahedeen fighters, same as Taliban or al – Qaeda could revert to mountains whenever they were about to loose the battle and also they could attack whenever the Soviet and the US or NATO troops where in a vulnerable position. Thus, the knowledge of the terrain and composition of small mobile units enabled them to be constantly in an advantageous position over their enemy.

Another similarity the Author points out are the failure by the occupying states to understand the cultural ideologies of the Afghan state. Each of the occupying states, though

having their distinct motifs and manners for doing this, tried to impose socialist or democratic rule in Afghanistan.

Anyhow, Dibb also notes the importance of differences of the two military experiences in Afghanistan. He notes the fact of the Soviets leading the war alone without its allies of Warsaw pact while the United States is leading the war along with ISAF forces. Also, the author mentions about the ability of the US army to quickly change its tactics and adopt the fighting environment, whereas the Soviets showed almost no innovation and lacked counterinsurgency doctrine. (Dibb, 2010)

Both the US and Soviet invasions have been thoroughly described by various authors. To being with, Ariel *et.al* gives detailed analyses on Soviet intervention and consequent events. The chapter “Soviet Union in Afghanistan” describes the context of the intervention, the early engagement of Czarist Russia, and later, Soviets in Afghanistan. The book goes on analyzing the possible Soviet interests in the region and drivers for the decision to intervene. Further analyses evolve around the arrangements to intervene and the military’s attitude towards this decision. The subsequent chapters of the book describe the Soviet military strategy in Afghanistan, its efforts to persuade Pakistan not to support insurgents on Pakistani territory, efforts to preserve the “irreversibility” of socialist revolution. (Levite, Jentleson, & Berman, 1992)

Anthony James is yet another author who looked at the context of the decision making to intervene in Afghanistan. He starts his chapter on Soviet Intervention by providing contextual analysis and the factors that have influenced Soviet decision making on Afghanistan. He mainly discusses the US engagement in the region, strategic and ideological grounds for the Soviet invasion. He then provides the overview of the Afghan PDPA regime performance during Soviet occupation. Finally he discusses the Soviet efforts to fight counterinsurgency, the condition of

Soviet army, its military performance against guerillas, the course of the war, the military equipment the Soviets were using. According to him, the most efficient weapon the Soviets possessed was the helicopter gunships which have been actively used since 1980. (Joes, 2010)The last part of his chapter is devoted to the description of the process and tactics of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

However, the most detailed analyses of Soviet policy and decision making on military intervention and further policies on Afghanistan is presented in the book “Condemned to Repetition?” by Andrew Bennett. After discussing various schools of interventionism the author starts a new chapter posing the question on the reasons behind the lack of military learning by the Soviet Union during their occupation in Afghanistan. According to him, the “mistake” of intervening in Afghanistan militarily was supposed to be evident already after a year of actual invasion, however, the incompatibility of Soviet and the US interest in the region made Soviets stay. The issue of inflexibility of the Soviet policy and army is also touched upon in his work. After briefly introducing the sources for Soviet learning on intervention (Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and Mozambique) the author starts the analyses of policy process during all the phases of the occupation. He described Brezhnev’s policy as one that was trying to avoid any drastic changes, Andropov’s as one where he did not accept the military intervention in Afghanistan as a mistake and was not eager to find a political solution for it. At a later period, Andropov did review his beliefs on Afghanistan which was reflected in the new policies he would implement there. (Bennett, 1999) The author goes into great lengths describing each and every president of the USSR, their policies and views on Afghanistan thus providing a valuable source for analyzing the dynamic of decision making on Afghanistan by the Soviet Union.

A more thorough review on Soviet military operations in Afghanistan is presented by Liakhovsky. He gives credit to Soviet leadership for a carefully planned and successfully executed intervention operation. However, as the war dragged on, the Soviet military performance did not show similar outcomes where all of its objectives were met. Through the description and in depth analyses of the subsequent military operations Liakhovsky is one of many authors pointing at Soviet army's inability to adapt to Afghan type of insurgency. (Liakhovsky, 1990)

Drozdov, however, states that the Soviet army has been quiet innovative in some cases as using armored groups and and new force structures. According to him the operations with large and heavy equipment and large units of sldiers did give tactical advnatage over the enemy, but, wihout many tanglibe startegic gains. (Drozdov, 1996)

One can get a comprehensive image on the dynamic of Mujahedeen tactics during Soviet occupation from a paper published on the same topic by Conflict Studies Research Center. After dividing mujahedeen tactics into offensive and defensive categories, the author dwells upon their performance in each of the two cases. According to him, mujahedeen where especially successful in provoking the Soviets into large scale offensives, which cause loss of large amounts of military equipment and human lives. (Dick, 2002) From these analyses he draws certain points where he contrasts the Soviet military experience with that of the US and coalition forces. According to him, the alienation of the bulk of the population will not be repeated by coalition forces. Also, he mentions the difference of military equipment and having a specific counter insurgency training which had the US soldiers better prepared for what was waiting for them in Afghanistan.

The Soviet Air operations have been studied by Markovskiy. His descriptions of the operations led by the Soviets show that the weaponry available to mujahedeen has had a significant progress in course of war. While, in the beginning, the bullet injures on Soviet aircraft was of 5,45 and 7.62, during the later period mujahedeen would use Orelikon aircraft guns and Soviet made Strela missiles. (Markovskiy, 1994)

The American motives and context of Invasion is Presented by George Friedman in his book “America’s Secret War”. He starts form the context of formation of al-Qaeda, its objectives and operational methods. In the following chapters he provides thorough analyses on the motives and assumptions by al-Qaeda on planning the 9/11 attacks. He goes on discussing the response the US government and the arrangements of the war. According to him, the United States was dragged into the conflict and was pressured to form an adequate response. (Friedman, 2004)

The 9/11 commission reports goes even further, describing every single meeting and public announcement that has been made after 9/11. Through the report the amount of diplomacy the US had to do prior to the invasion become evident. (9/11 Commission Report, 2001)

The CRS reports on military operations in Afghnsitan by the US and NATO troops gives helps build the profile of the US air and ground campaing. The reports also provide stattistical data on the number of casualties, programs initiated in Afghnaistn their costs and operating efficiences.

Gideon Rose, through his analyses of US militayr performance in afghnasitan, states that the initial succes of the US was not repeated during the course of war. Nontheless, the rapid seizure of major towns and toppling Taliban governemnt, did not yet indicate the victory in Afghnsitan, (Rose, 2010) According to him, no sharp and cnsiderable chnages were going to happen in Afghnaistan any time soon. Irrespective of the US politicla and military power rasi

decline it still would be dragged in other conflicts in the future, thus he dissects three lessons the US policy makers need to learn. Namely: “plan ahead and work backward”, “define goals precisely and check prices before buying”, “pay attention to implementation and anticipate problems”. (Rose, 2010, p.284-286)



## **PART ONE**

Despite the very similar nature of the two interventions in Afghanistan carried out by the United States and the Soviet Union, their goals and objectives were quite different. In case of the Soviet Union it was an amalgam of ideological and strategic factors, the invasion by the United States was a rapid response to the 9/11 attacks on New York World Trade Center in which more than three thousand people died.

In order to have comprehensive analysis of the differences and similarities that characterized the intervention experiences of the two superpowers in Afghanistan, it is essential to examine three factors. The first is to discuss the political environment of the time, the second to examine the peculiarities of making the decision to intervene militarily, and third, the specific ways the two instances of intervention operations were carried out.

To begin with, the intervention of the United States in Afghanistan was not a “choice” as the US was dragged into the conflict due to the 9/11 attacks. This is not to state the absence of any alternative to military intervention, but to point out that the time and circumstances were not chosen by the USA. By contrast, in case of the USSR, there was a deliberate decision on the part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to intervene militarily in Afghanistan, meaning that the Soviets “chose” to intervene at a specific time when they deemed appropriate.

## **The Soviet Intervention Context, Decision Making and Objectives in Afghanistan**

The Soviets engagement in Afghanistan was accomplished through the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a Marxist-Leninist party that was comprised of two factions: *Khalq* (masses) and *Parcham* (banner). Named after their newspapers, the two factions had a number of ideological differences as well as ethnic and personal rivalries. (Bennett, 1999) Established in 1965, PDPA was led by Nur Mohammed Taraki. The party split into the above mentioned two factions in 1967 and was again reunited in 1977. All the founding members of the party represented the highly educated class of Afghanistan, however there were differences between the two factions. *Khalq* was mainly rural and Pashto-speaking while *Parcham* members were Soviet inclined and Dari-speaking.

After a successful coup against the first president of Afghanistan, Mohammed Daoud Khan, in April 1978, the PDPA came to power. The new government was headed by the former leader of *Khalq* faction Taraki and was comprised of both *Khalq* and *Parcham* members. The level of Soviet involvement in the coup is hard to discern. However, the Soviet Union was the first to recognize the new, Taraki government. The relations with the new government quickly evolved, *inter alia* by signing of twenty bilateral agreements and doubling the number of Soviet military advisers in Afghanistan up to 700. (Levite, Jentelson, & Berman, 1992)

The leaders of the PDPA government leadership consisted of the President of the PDPA Nur Mohammed Taraki (*Khalq*), Foreign minister Hafizullah Amin (*Khalq*) and Deputy Prime Minister Babrak Karmal (*Parcham*). Shortly after gaining the power, the PDPA leadership undertook the mission of removing from the government organs all the supporters of Daoud regime and later *Parcham* fraction members. The latter were sent on diplomatic missions out of

Afghanistan, Babrak Karmal himself was appointed as the ambassador in Czechoslovakia. This way Amin and Taraki had the freedom to run domestic affairs in accordance with their preferences. Both Taraki and Amin, being subservient to Soviet regime, imposed policies aimed at radically transforming Afghanistan into a socialist state. This included changing the traditional Afghan flag from black, red and green to completely red, similar to other communist regimes. Another example is the executions of religious leaders and political prisoners, who did not share the ideological beliefs of the government. Such cardinal character of the changes in a traditional, tribal and conservative society caused a considerable turbulence. One example that Anthony James brings in his book *Victorious Insurgencies* discusses the policy of trying to raise the status of women to the same level as men. This, obviously, required women to get the same education as men, which in turn meant that women had to leave their houses and spend considerable time in classrooms. Apparently this was not a change Afghan society was ready for, the situation was even worsened by local mullahs who were calling all these reforms as anti-Islamic. (Joes, 2010)

Trying to radically reform the society and state structure, the regime developed enemies and caused widespread public discontent which later grew into a full-fledged uprising. Irrespective of the nature of those reforms such as land, market, credit, whether good or bad, created and further heightened negative response in public. This can be attributed to poor planning and administration of the policies on one side and the harsh punitive measures employed in case of failure to comply with the established order on the other side. “Who opposed such practices was often simply shot by enlightened young Kabuli PDPA types.” (Joes, 2010, p. 174)

Despite all the above mentioned developments in Afghanistan, in December 1978 a treaty of “friendship and cooperation” was signed between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. The treaty ensured twenty years of friendship as well as increased economic assistance to the new Marxist-Leninist government in Kabul. The treaty ensured Soviet support to Afghanistan through the provision of Afghan’s acceptance of 1969 Asian Collective Security Plan. Thus, the Taraki regime carried on its agenda of radical transformation of Afghan society. “Internal security situation prompted the dispatch of a senior military delegation headed by Soviet General Alexei Epishev, then in charge of the ideological and political supervision of the Soviet Armed forces, to Kabul in early April 1979”. (Jiri & Potter, 1984)

The strong commitment of the Soviet Union to securing the PDPA regime in Kabul was previously stated in clear terms by Soviet Vice President Alexei Kosygin, during Taraki’s visit to Moscow on March 20, 1979. According to the record of the meeting, at which Taraki, Andrei Gromyko (Foreign Minister), Dmitriy Ustinov (Defense Minister), and Boris Ponomarev (Chief of the International Department; Secretary of the CPSU) were present, Kosygin stated that “...the friendship between Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan is not conditional, dictated by some temporary viewpoints, but calculated for ages. We have given and will continue to give you assistance in the fight against all enemies which act against you at the present time and against those enemies with which you may clash in the future.” (CPSU Meeting, 1979)

After the increased Soviet military presence in Afghanistan did not succeed in quelling the public discontent towards the PDPA, according to Andrew Bennet, the Soviets decided to oust Amin from his position in the party and create a new government under Taraki. Amin, in turn, arrested Taraki and had him executed. He then named himself the head of the PDPA. A

decision was then “reportedly reached in late November to overthrow Amin, whom the Soviet leadership viewed as both ineffectual and politically unreliable.” (Jiri, 1980)

“Just during the period following the events of September (execution of Taraki) more than 600 members of the PDPA, military personnel and other persons suspected of anti-Amin sentiments were executed without trial or investigation.” (Andropov et.al., 1979).

The decision to militarily intervene in Afghanistan militarily was made on December 12 by the Central Committee of the CPSU meeting, with the presence of Leonid Brezhnev, Dmitriy Ustinov, Konstantin Chernenko, Yuri Andropov, Andrei Gromyko, Boris Ponomarev, and others. It is important to note that Kosygin, who was against the introduction of Soviet troops to Afghanistan, was not present at the meeting. Thus the decision was made even without the presence of all the members of the Politburo. Those who were present unanimously agreed on intervention, thus the official document on this decision to a certain extent nominates those who supported a military solution. This, however, should be taken critically as “every Politburo member knew how a disagreement with the opinion of General Secretary would be received, and therefore all proposals were received unanimously.” (Lyakhovsky, 1995)

The decree on December 12 did not specify the means for reaching the political objectives in Afghanistan. Rather, it vaguely discusses “measures”, because of security issues. The stated objective of the military forces deployed in Afghanistan was “rendering internationalist assistance to the friendly Afghan people, and also to create favorable conditions to prevent possible anti-Afghan actions on the part of the bordering states.” (Kornienko, 1994)

As mentioned above, the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan was not based on a single factor but rather a combination of factors. Therefore, when trying to answer the question

of why the USSR intervened in Afghanistan, it is important to discuss the ideological and strategic grounds for the decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

One of the primary reasons for Soviet interest in Afghanistan was border security. According to Ariel *et al.*, the USSR was seeking to foster Afghanistan, the latter being a weak and dependent state, in order to secure its southern borders. Thus the invasion of the Soviets may be regarded as a defensive policy as it was promoted by an intrinsic interest – security.

The author mentions the presence of reputational goals as well. However, these gained more importance at a later period, when the intervening states sought to fulfill their officially stated objectives. This is one of the aspects where the intervention of the United States in Afghanistan significantly differs from that of its Soviet counterpart. In case of the United States, the intervention was primarily reputational.

Another possible factor responsible for the decision to intervene in Afghanistan might have been the assumption from the Soviets' side that the alternative to the PDPA government in Kabul was an Islamic one. According to Anthony James, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was to a certain extent conditioned by ideological factors, though the importance of Soviet Muslim aspect has not yet supported by direct evidence. (Joes, 2010) However, given the demographic realities of the 400-mile long southern frontier of the USSR, the possibility of penetration of radical Islamic ideas from Afghanistan into the neighboring Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik SSRs could not be entirely ruled out. Indeed, much of the northern part of Afghanistan was inhabited by ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz. Though most were indigenous, many others had fled from the Soviet Union during the Islamic-oriented Basmachi Revolt of the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, Alexandre Beenningsen argues that the events along the northern border of

Afghanistan had the potential to significantly impact domestic policy within the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. (Benningson as in Levite, Jentelson, & Berman, 1992)

Though Afghanistan was not a socialist state but merely a state governed by communists, the overthrow of the Marxist-Leninist government would not add prestige to the Soviet Union or the Soviet cause. The ideological beliefs, such as the irreversibility of socialist revolution, meaning that once it is accomplished the state will never abolish it, would look seem to be a failure in the eyes of neighboring and Western countries. (Joes, 2010)

The Soviet decision to send troops into Afghanistan in order to protect the socialist client state status of the country may be also explained by the concern on Soviet side of the increased US involvement in the region. This is evident from documentary evidence of Politburo meetings and deliberations on the issue of Afghanistan. For example, in the Politburo meeting of March 17, 1979 (after the Herat Uprising), Gromyko stated that “only one thing is clear - we cannot surrender Afghanistan to the enemy (the US).” (Bennett, 1999, p. 172) During the following months the military leadership, and specifically Kosygin and General Valentin Varennikov, had been active in discussing the possible negative consequences of getting involved in military actions in Afghanistan, pointing out the high costs, inevitable weakening of forces along European and Far East borders, and the American experience in Vietnam. (Kornienko, 1994)

Thus the Afghan pleadings for Soviet troops were rejected in March. This decision changed after the physical removal of Taraki and introduction of Amin loyalists to PDPA high offices. Amin himself believed that the leadership of the Central Committee of the CPSU was striving for a “balanced policy” between the Soviet Union and United States. (Lyakhovsky, 1995) According to the document cited by Lyakhovsky in his *The Tragedy and Valour of the Afghan*, it was known by the Soviets that the Americans were striking deals through their Afghan

allies to shift the policy of Afghan government to a more suitable one for the West. According to the same document, in order to prevent a counter-revolution, it was decided to “continue to work with Amin and overall with the current leadership of the PDPA and the DRA, not giving Amin grounds to believe that we don’t trust him and don’t wish to deal with him. Use the contacts with Amin to assert appropriate influence and simultaneously to further expose his true intentions...” (Lyakhovsky, 1995, p. 102 )

Later explanations by Soviet officials reveal US involvement as indeed being one of the key factors on the decision to intervene. Varrenikov, for example, discussed the Soviet leadership’s concerns that the Americans were “making Pakistan a base for the rebels” and that they were “looking to replace the listening posts lost in Iran and make Afghanistan a base of operations against the Soviet Union.” (Bennett, 1999, p. 173) Another example is the words of Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin regarding the December 8 meeting where Ustinov and Andropov mentioned the possible installation of US short-range missiles on Afghan soil, aimed directly at the Soviet Union's southern flank. (Bennett, 1999)

Thus the fall of the PDPA was most likely to produce a government unfriendly to the USSR right on its border. Even if the PDPA did not fall, the Soviet experience with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat would be enough for the Kremlin to suspect a shift on the future foreign policy plans of Amin. In fact, such suspicions were expressed openly by Andropov, Gromyko, Ustinov, and Ponomarev at a meeting in late December 1979. According to the report, Amin was seeking to establish friendly relations with the West while simultaneously spreading rumors about the inefficiency of Soviet policies. (Andropov *et.al.*, 1979)



## **The US Intervention Context, Decision Making and Objectives in Afghanistan**

In contrast to the Soviet intervention, the US invasion of Afghanistan was conditioned by the Afghan Taliban government's refusal to hand over Osama Bin Ladin– the mastermind of 9/11 attacks on New York World Trade Center. The attacks required urgent actions from the Bush administration, taking into account, as George Friedman puts it, political, military, and psychological considerations. Unlike the Soviets, who had at least a year to carefully plan and decide whether or not to intervene, the United States was required to initiate a major offensive that would, if not eliminate, at least scale down the ability of al-Qaeda to carry out similar attacks in future. Given the high number of casualties and domestic pressure from citizens who might lose the trust in the ability of American institutions to protect them, a quick decision had to be made by the US government.

According to the 9/11 Commission report, President Bush, during his meeting with the narrow staff of the National Security Council (NSC), including Secretary of State Colin Powell, FBI director Robert Mueller, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, stated that the United States was going to pursue punishment not only for those who carried out the attack but also those who support them. (9/11 Commission Report, 2001)

Being well aware of the structure of al-Qaeda and its ability to carry on with its operations even without bin Ladin, a broader and a more demanding objective was set. This was “to destabilize al-Qaeda by unseating Afghanistan’s Taliban government, destroying al-Qaeda’s facilities in Afghanistan, and forcing al-Qaeda’s leadership into abandoning its command facilities without devolving command onto the next layer of leaders.” (Friedman, 2004)

Unlike the Soviet Union, the United States did not consider a long term military presence in the country with the objective of pacifying it. This is evident from the nature of the military operations carried out in the beginning, the number of troops deployed, and the initial preparations for the intervention.

According to Friedman, the war in Afghanistan was supposed to have both vague and complex objectives from the intelligence services perspective. At the same time, it also had to have a clearly defined military perspective with feasible and narrow goals such as the assassination of Bin Ladin and the removal of the Taliban government from power. An additional burden was to manage the publicity of the war, given the amount of the domestic pressure on government and state agencies.

After 9/11, the Central Command began to develop a plan to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban. The plan was finally approved on October 2 and on October 7 the United States initiated its invasion of Afghanistan.

It should be noted that, in the case of the Soviet Union, the intervention was a military operation aimed at toppling the Amin government but preserving the status quo of a socialist state under the rule of Babrak Karmal. This is different from the case of the United States, especially given the official declaration of war on Afghanistan after the Taliban's refusal to hand in Bin Ladin.

This speed of assembling the force and launching the war after only 26 days from the attacks is still surprising, even given the fact that United States has a wide variety of contingency plans. In fact, there was a plan on the invasion of Afghanistan until 1990. However these plans lacked clarity. (Friedman, 2004)

In contrast to the Soviet case, where the military was against the introduction of troops to Afghanistan, the US military was rather concerned about the feasibility of the plan. Having studied the Soviet case, it was obvious that 300,000 soldiers, deployed by the Soviets, did not prove sufficient for quelling the insurgency. Also, the lack of clearly defined, narrow objectives and consequently immediate results were discouraging factors for the military. Finally, the actual method of deployment of US troops to Afghanistan was a problem by itself. This obviously was conditioned by the geographical distance of Afghanistan from the United States and the absence of ports through which the supplies could later on be transported.

The tactic allowing the US military to start the invasion within weeks rather than months and which also gave them the factor of surprise consisted of the following steps:

1. "Suppression of enemy air defenses, called SEAD.
2. Attack the enemy command, control, communications and intelligence system making it impossible for the national command authority to command its military.
3. Attack enemy troop concentrations and facilities to shelter ground forces."

(Friedman, 2004, p. 138)

The outcome after the successful implementation of such an operation is the ability to completely dismantle the communication ability of the enemy, thus eliminating opposition forces for the attacker.

In December 25, the Soviets had the same objective of blinding the enemy and depriving them of any communication opportunity by exploding the central communication system in Kabul at half past six. Only three days prior to the explosion the minister of communications of the Soviet Union was accompanied to the same communication center. The Afghans were

hoping to get the Soviet expertise on the issue; however the minister had an absolutely different purpose for being there. (Kakar, 1995)

### **Pre-Intervention Arrangements**

If the United States was to pursue such an ambitious military objective in Afghanistan, it had to gain a wide international support, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Also, the above mentioned strategy of the United States would not be as fruitful in Afghanistan. This was conditioned by several factors, such as the absence of a “serious” air force and geographic terrain. Thus if the United States depended only on their airpower for a strike against Afghanistan, then there would not be much in the way of “considerable” results. The US would not be able to detect small targets with their satellite system, consequently making the whole air force blind to such threats. So, the United States also needed ground forces that could at least be used to detect targets on the ground. This, in turn, raised the issue of supplies of the military and non-military character for the troops and, inevitably, a deal had to be agreed upon with Pakistan in order to use that country's ground territory.

However, this was not the only reason why the United States needed Pakistan. A significant portion of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan (also known as the Durand Line) arbitrarily cuts through a large swath of Pashtun-inhabited territory. Security on this porous frontier had to be strengthened to prevent any kind of exchange from the two sides. Also, Washington needed the permission of Islamabad to use its air space for the American Air Force to reach Afghanistan. Having discussed all these issues during the Committee meeting on September 13, the Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage was already on his way to meet

the Pakistani ambassador to the US Maliha Lodhi. The latter would, later that night, agree on all the points put forth by the Americans. Those points were as follows:

- “to stop all al-Qaeda operatives at its border and end all logistical support for Bin Ladin.”
- “to give the United States blanket overflight and landing rights for all the necessary military and intelligence operations”
- “to provide territorial access to US and allied military intelligence and other personnel to conduct operations against al Qaeda”
- “to provide the United States with intelligence information”
- “to continue to publicly condemn the terrorist acts”
- “to cut off all shipments of fuel to Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan”
- “if evidence implicated that Bin Ladin, al Qaeda and Taliban continued to harbor them, to brake relations with Taliban government” (2001, p. 331)

This was only the beginning of the US diplomacy prior to the intervention in Afghanistan. A week after the 9/11 attacks, Armitage met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Vyacheslav Trubnikov, a former head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. It was a secret meeting and, according to Friedman, the aim of the visit was to gain access to the Northern Alliance and to Russian intelligence on Afghanistan.

The Northern Alliance was a coalition, primarily comprised of Tajiks and Uzbeks, that opposed Taliban rule in their areas. Since 1996, Russia had succeeded in fostering relationships with two key leaders of the group, Ahmed Shah Massoud, an ethnic Tajik, and Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek. Moscow also secured the transit of crucial weapons and supplies to

the Northern Alliance through their bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Thus by, 2001, they had become the chief supporter of the Northern Alliance and, consequently, controlled virtually all access to the group. Gaining this access meant that the US could use the Northern Alliance as ground forces to compensate for the above mentioned disadvantages of using its Air Force in Afghanistan. The small, mobile units of the Northern Alliance, which were familiar with both the terrain and the local population, perfectly suited the needs and interests of the US military.

However, as Friedman points out, the most important issue of the meeting was Washington's request to use Russian military bases in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as the military bases in Pakistan lacked the capacity. Obviously, this was a very sensitive issue for Moscow, given the recent NATO expansion, which, by 1999, had already reached the borders of the former Soviet Union. (Friedman, 2004) Therefore, Russia was not ready to come to an agreement on the day of the meeting. Russian President Vladimir Putin and American President Bush were having extensive consultations with their staff. For the US, the Russian response would be definitive for the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) as the American war in Afghanistan was officially known. If the Russians denied airspace to Americans in the former Soviet Union, then the only alternative routes would be through Iran and China. The option of Iran had be excluded, due to the tense relations between Tehran and Washington since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Beijing, meanwhile, was deemed too unreliable.. (Friedman, 2004)

After extensive consultations, Putin and Bush had a long telephone conversation which resulted in Moscow agreeing on the American use of military bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as access to vital intelligence on Afghanistan. In exchange, Washington agreed to reduce its presence in Central Asia and to curtail arms smuggling to Chechnya through Georgia, ceasing all support for Chechnya's secessionist movement. (Friedman, 2004) Only a few days after the

deal was set, US intelligence teams were already in Afghanistan, prior to the military intervention.

The negotiations with Iranian President Khatami were led by Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom Jack Straw. Despite tense relations with Washington, Tehran had demonstrated an interest in cooperating with the US on its efforts to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban from power. Both, being Sunni Islamic extremist movements, were considered to be a threat by predominately Shia Iran. The meeting with Khatami took place on September 25. Iran was reluctant to publicly negotiate with the Americans directly. Straw explained the US requests which had already been partially agreed upon by the President of Iran. In the end, Khatami agreed to “work on the ground in Afghanistan”, while rejecting the request to curtail support to anti-Israeli terrorist organizations and to provide the Americans with Iranian Intelligence services. (Friedman, 2004, p. 180)

Unlike all the diplomatic efforts made by the US, there was virtually no diplomacy made by the Soviets. As the relations with the United States were in the context of the Cold War, the Soviets did not have much to lose by simply ignoring the American position on the invasion to Afghanistan. However, the US, and not only, were critical about the active Soviet military engagement in Afghanistan as well as the latter’s internal developments. Andrew Bennett cites the first Soviet-USA communication on intervention to be after the already mentioned Herat uprising in 1979, through Soviet newspaper *Pravda*. The Kremlin accused Iran, Pakistan, China, Egypt, and “some western courtiers” of fomenting unrest in Afghanistan. (Pravda as in Bennett, 1999) The response from the United States did not come late. Washington, of course, denied all the charges and stated that the US “would regard external involvement in Afghanistan’s internal

problems as a serious matter with the potential of heightening tensions and destabilizing the entire region.” (Bennett, 1999, p. 197)

## **PART TWO**

### **INTERNATIOANL RESPONSE TO THE TWO INSTANCES OF INTERVENTION**

The international response to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was, by far, not as approving as it was in the case of USA. The NATO member countries along with several Middle Eastern countries and China strongly condemned the decision to intervene. There can be named a number of factors, specific to each of the states, influencing their decision to back go in line with American diplomacy in regards with this issue. For the sake of clarity however, it can be mentioned that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan left Carter administration confused and, the rest of the world was alarmed with the Soviet expansionist policies in Southern Asia.

One of the most condemning rhetoric may be considered the January 15, 1980 UN General Assembly resolution. The latter was passed with 204 states voting for it with only 18 abstentions. The total number of states represented in UN General Assembly at that time was only 152, thus the vote of 104 - 18 comes to show the general consensus that existed regarding the case issue under discussion.

The resolution called for “immediate, unconditional, and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan.” (Assosiated Press, 1980) The resolution did not name Soviet Union but simply stated that UN General Assembly “strongly deplores” the intervention. The General



Assembly resolution was a result of an emergency session which was held a week after Soviet Union used its Veto power in the Security Council.

As the General Assembly does not have an authority to impose its decisions on states, the resolution did not play any role in constraining Soviet actions in Afghanistan. What it did show however, was the strong opposition of the Third World and non-aligned countries towards Soviet intervention. The Muslim world, represented by 42 states (by votes), demonstrated their protest on Soviet efforts to quell the Muslim insurgency in Afghanistan.

According to the Israeli Ambassador, Yehuda Blum, the intervention was a demonstration of aggression from Soviet side and had to be condemned in strongest terms.

Another country that has been rather critical in its rhetoric towards the Soviet intervention was China. Despite the strong communist governments of both the states, China has been very active in its efforts of creating anti - Soviet environment in southern Asia, thus trying to constrain Soviet expansion in Asia. The tensions between these communist regimes specifically escalated after 1979 intervention. China named the Soviet military deployment in Afghanistan a threat and perceived the Soviet “high level” engagement in Asian and African countries as a national security issue. (Hilali, 2001)

On Chinese side of the shared short, 90 km, border Afghanistan is Xinjiang Autonomous Region, which is the only province in China with Sunni majority population. The province has been most troublesome in China; however the lack of Chinese government interest towards the region can be explained by no strategic interest in Afghanistan during early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nonetheless, after 1960s, with the growing involvement of Soviet Union in the Afghanistan, China became more attentive towards its “communist” neighbor. Moreover, the signing of the 1978 treaty on “friendship and cooperation” between Soviet Union and

Afghanistan meant the joint defense of Afghanistan by Soviet and Afghan forces. The reason of China's added concern might be explained by its nuclear arsenal location in Xinjiang.

After Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan, China began an active engagement with Pakistan and most particularly with Iran. According to Hilali, China went so far, as to "give financial and military assistance to Pakistan and Peshawar based mujahedeen groups." (Hilali, 2001)

Afghans and Iranians share a lot of similarities when it comes to ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. Historically, though, these similarities did not prove to be sufficient for the fortification of robust neighborly relations. (Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance , 1985) After the Islamic Revolution of Iran the Shiite clerics of the latter have been very active in organizing the Shiite population of Afghanistan, thus the Soviet support for communist regime was not the best development of actions for Iran.

The condemnation from Iranian side was quite harsh in its rhetoric. The supreme religious leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini considered the intervention as a direct national security threat to Iran, given, *inter alia*, the shared border with Afghanistan and the considerable flow of Afghan refugees to Iranian side. Iran was even

The war with Iraq, which lasted till 1988, limited Iranian engagement in Afghanistan. Still, starting from mid 1982, Iran had strong contacts with Pakistani based Mujahedeen fighters. "Unspecified number of rifles (M-1, G-3), land mines, shoulder -fired antitank rockets, heavy machineguns, uniforms and boots were supplied to at least the Hesb -e Islami (Islamic Party) led by Gulbuddin Hekmatiyar, for operations in the southern and eastern Afghanistan." (Iranian Support to the Afghan Resistance , 1985)

There is no one, generally accepted view on the extent of British support in USA efforts to "punish" Soviet Union for the Intervention. According to some authors, Thatcher's

government's response to Soviet intervention was simply rhetoric. Another group of authors describes UK's actions as clear demonstration of UK commitment to back up the US position against Soviet Union.

Daniel James, in his article about UK's government response to Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan, takes somewhat moderate stance. He argues that, though there indeed was a serious official rhetoric of condemning Soviet invasion, it was mainly because of the UK's economic conditions of the time that prevented it from imposing harsh economic sanctions on the Soviet. (Lahey, 2013)

The strongest reaction, obviously, came from the US. President Carter was quoted calling the Soviet invasion "the new threat to World stability." (Carter, 1980) The Secretary of the US National Security Council Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote a memorandum for the President, where he outlined the necessary steps for an adequate response to the Soviet "aggression". According to that document the US perceived three basic objectives: punitive, coercive and deterrent. The first was directed towards punishing the Soviets for violating the principles of international law. The second was the achievement of immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The third outcome would be the determent of any similar activity in the future by the Soviet regime. (Brzezinski, 1979)

The US was using all the media sources available for the condemnation of the Soviet intervention. Likewise, the US was active in lobbying other states to take a similar stance. This was in accordance with Brzezinski's memorandum aims which states the following "We are also interested in the impact of our responses on other international actors, including European Allies, nervous Eastern Europeans, nonaligned Third World countries, and Islamic governments." (Brzezinski, 1979, p. 3)

Another, relatively immediate response from the US President was the decision for the US not to participate in the Olympics that were going to take place in USSR.

This nature of response has been anticipated by the Soviets and did not come as a surprise. The Soviet causes to intervene in Afghanistan, however, outweighed the strategic interest of the US in that region. According to Andrew Bennett, though, the Soviets had the opportunity of mitigating the harshness of the US condemnation. He argues that, not only did not the USSR prepare the US about the possible intervention, but it also publicly named the US involvement in the region as one of the major causes of intervention.

Despite the absence of international support the Soviets did intervene on December 25. A few hours after the explosion of the central communication systems in Kabul in the midst of the darkness, the Soviet troops had already begun to arrive during the previous days headed to the Palace Tapa-e-Tajbeg where President Amin was staying.

“At Twenty past seven, the Tapa-e-Tajbeg was shelled by rockets from west.” (Kakar, 1995, p. 22)

Considering all the above mentioned, the US intervention to Afghanistan, in 2011, was sharply different form that of Soviet Union. Aside from all the pre-intervention arrangements already settled by the US, it now had to gain legitimacy and support of international community. The previous analyses already show that the US had the support of Russia, Iran and Pakistan before actual intervention.

The United States did not intervene in Afghanistan alone, but along NATO forces. By itself this is another factor different from that of the Soviet experience. The reason to mention NATO's involvement in the conflict is to bring up the level of international support and legitimacy the US led invasion has, in contrast to the Soviet intervention. NATO's

responsibilities in Afghanistan are being governed through UN National Security Council resolutions. NATO led International Security Assistance Forces are currently engaged in Afghanistan along with Northern Alliance and the US troops.

The US started its Air operations at 9:30 pm by Afghanistan time, again, sometime after darkness.

**PART THREE**

**INTERVENTION AND DISTINCTIONS IN THE SUBSEQUENT MILITARY**

**PERFORMANCE**

Both the US and Soviet led military intervention in Afghanistan were performed rather successfully and the narrowly defined objectives of the intervention were all fulfilled.

Having this said, the nature of the Soviet intervention was quite different that of the US led intervention. These differences can be explained by the earlier discussed difference in their goals and objectives in Afghanistan.

The US military intervention started on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001. The chose date had a significant political meaning. The initial assault on Afghanistan was to be performed before winter time. Being already granted access to Northern Alliance leadership, the US had to persuade them to commit to US rather than Taliban. For this purpose CIA agent have been sent to Afghanistan, to strike deals with the local leadership.

For all that, because of the lack of credibility of the CIA agents in Afghanistan as well as the mistrust on the Afghan side towards the level of the US commitment to ousting Taliban where serious grounds for the local leadership to hesitate on taking a definitive side. The tactic of bribing the local officials was common, however even this would not be much productive. Those, taking the bribes had clearly understood that they will have to pay back with their lives if the US abandons Afghanistan in the same way it did after the Soviets left.

Deployment of large number of troops in such a short period of time was not practical for the US, so the invasion should be performed by air. This would clearly address the above elaborated two major concerns by Northern Alliance. First, to demonstrate the seriousness of the US commitment and, second, its capability to reach the northern parts of Afghanistan. According to Friedman, the Air strikes of October 7<sup>th</sup> were quiet successful at the given task.

What makes the Soviet case quite different is the fact that the Soviets already had military presence in Afghanistan and shared a long border with it.

The Soviet major goal in Afghanistan, at the time of planning the intervention, was to secure the communist regime under a moderate leader Babrak. Similar to the US, Soviets also had to make a few arrangements before the actual intervention. These preparations, though, where entirely different from diplomatic negotiations the US has been involved in, they included removing the batteries from Afghan army tanks and getting the Afghan generals drunk and locked, prior to invasion. (Joes, 2010)

Soviet, unlike the US, already had a considerable number of troops in Afghanistan. Moreover, “10 000 additional Soviet airborne troops were flown in to Bagram air base”, just a few days prior to intervention. (Levite, Jentelson, & Berman, 1992)

Yet another difference of the two cases under discussion is the absence of an official document to deploy military troops in Afghanistan. From security perspectives, the already discussed December 12, 1979 decree did not even name the “measure” that have to be taken towards Afghanistan. All the orders, in Soviet Union, regarding the military intervention in Afghanistan where given orally. (Lyakhovskiy, 2007)

Quite the opposite is true about the United States, which openly declared war to Afghanistan, after Taliban regime of the latter refused to hand in Osama bin Ladin.

One of the primary difference between the US led military campaign and that of the Soviets, was the fact that the USSR did not have a counterinsurgency doctrine. According to Marxist-Leninist ideology, rebellion was possible only in case of a lower, oppressed class struggling against the oppressing class. There was no need to produce a doctrine on how to quell an uprising in a communist country, as in such states there are no rebellions. (Joes, 2010)

The Soviet military tactics did shift under the administration of different General Secretaries of the CPSU (Brezhnev, Andropov, Cherenkov, and Gorbachev). Yet, the Soviet Union did not produce a counterinsurgency document and, in general, was reluctant and slow in changing the structure of the Army and its combat tactics. It showed, in comparison to United States, little flexibility in adjusting their military tactics to Afghani terrain and mode of war.

The Soviet army “was trained to fight within the context of a theater war against a modern enemy who would obligingly occupy defensive positions stretching across the northern European plain.” (Glantz, 1996, p. 245)

Analyzing the US counterinsurgency tactics, we see that the US had a two sided approach to insurgent operations. On one side, separating the guerilla fighters from the general public and, on the other side, the US forces where active in engaging with the local population and gaining their support.

A totally different tactic was being used by the Soviets. The military operations conducted by the Soviets during the invasion predominantly used the tactic of sweeping off mujahedeen strongholds, usually with heavy bombardment. The bloodiest years of Soviet combat on insurgency were 1986-1987. (Glantz, 1996)

The technical innovations of the Soviet army in 1986 were demonstrated by extensive use of helicopters which have been a great success, in the beginning. The absolute air dominance of



the Soviets made them invincible, until guerillas adapted to ruthless air attacks. Mujahedeen learnt to attack only at night hours, making helicopters considerably ineffective. Thus, the Soviet army had to continue innovating and adjusting its combat tactics to the local realities.

## CONCLUSION

Afghanistan is a very unique country in terms of its geographic and human terrain. Its rugged terrain, harsh winter cold and exhausting summer heat, almost complete absence of communication lines makes it a very hard country to control militarily. Its human aspect, however, is no less complicated. The various religious, ethnic and tribal divisions of Afghanistan make it extremely hard, even impossible, to unite around a single ideology. Abundant in tribal deep animosity and widely spread, predominantly rural population of Afghanistan is used to fighting and exhausting military superpowers.

Starting the written part of its history Afghanistan has been invaded by the Alexander Macedonian, became subject of the “great game” between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain and, coming to more recent times, invaded by the USSR and later by the US.

The last two instances of invasion have a number of striking parallels as well as differences. Through the analyses, this essay tried to point out those differences and discuss them in the appropriate contents along with their possible causes.

Perhaps the most striking difference of the two invasions is the initial goals and objectives that the two intervening countries were following. Similarly, the two contexts of intervention, which shaped the goals, also are quite different.

To sum up, the major factor influencing the Soviet decision to militarily intervene in Afghanistan was the need to secure its southern border by attaching weak and dependent socialist state to it, thus creating a buffer zone. Other reasons, though not less important, were Soviet perceptions of increased American influence in the region, particularly in Iran and Afghanistan,

where the territories of the countries, according to the Soviet intelligence reports were planned to be used against the USSR. The Soviet concerns have been exacerbated after Taraki's death and by inability of Amin's created government to quell the uprising. Amin's radical position on implementing social reforms, which heightened the popular uprising against the PDPA, the Soviet distrust towards him and the rumors of his sympathy to a more "balanced policy" towards the West were all major concerns for the Soviet leadership. Finally, ideological considerations played a key role in the decision-making process. As one can see from the cited documents, the risk of a counter-revolution was clearly acknowledged by Soviet officials and was considered to be a threat to, at least, Soviet state prestige. Thus, the Soviet decision to intervene militarily was conditioned by intrinsic interests and preservation of the status quo of the socialist government in Kabul.

In contrast to this, the US intervention in Afghanistan was a responsive policy. The time of the action was decided by Al – Qaeda and the US was pressured by military, political and physiological reasons to arrange a quick response. Unlike Soviet Union, which was in Afghanistan to secure a client, communist regime, the US was there to topple the Afghani Taliban government.

Unlike Soviets, the US did not have a long established strong involvement in Afghanistan. The USSR had already established communist institutions in Afghanistan and had a strong military presence in the country, prior to intervention.

Given its physical distance from Afghanistan, before the US could intervene in Afghanistan, it had to engage in robust diplomatic efforts to secure strategic deals with Russia, Iran, Pakistan and Northern Alliance.

The Soviet invasion, however, confused the international community, as the Soviets did not make any public statement about their intention to intervene nor was the USSR engaged in any diplomacy regarding its decision to intervene in Afghanistan. Moreover, there was no official document that would formulate the Soviet decision. Meanwhile, the US officially declared war on Afghan Taliban government as the latter refused to hand in Al - Qaeda's leadership.

The international response towards Soviet intervention was quiet harsh and unanimous. Non-aligned countries, Muslim and European states strongly condemned the Soviet "aggression." China went so far as naming it a national security threat, while the US imposed economic sanctions on Soviet regime. The highest criticism came from the United Nations General Assembly resolution, which demanded the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

The US led NATO coalition was acting under the umbrella of a number of UN resolutions, aimed at stabilizing quelling Afghan insurgency.

The specific nature of the intervention operation was performed in an interestingly different manner. While the US started with impressive air strikes, the Soviets depleted several thousand troops in Afghan military uniforms and the actual intervention started by ground routes.

Finally, the Soviets did not have a counterinsurgency doctrine, and lacked the training and structure of an army to fight insurgency. Instead, the Soviet army was perfectly suited for fighting against NATO troops on European terrain.

One of the major limitations of the study is that it does not compare the tactical effectiveness of the military equipment used by the sides of the conflict.

A further research should focus on studying the different military tactics used by Taliban and Mujahedeen fighters, as the former, unlike Mujahedeen, launched attacks with large number of fighters and with considerably more knowledge of military tactics. Also, the hearts and Minds operations of the campaigns deserve to be evaluated and compared. Given the scheduled withdrawal of the US and coalition troops in depth analysis of the state of government institutions in Afghanistan after the US and Soviet withdrawal would shed more light on the effectiveness of policies implemented.

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