SPECIAL REPORT

# The Red Army on Pakistan's Border:

## Policy Implications for the United States

Edited by: Theodore L. Eliot, Jr. and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.



NTER FOR ASIAN PACIFIC AFFAIRS, THE ASIA FOUNDATION
INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS, INC.
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE FLETCHER SCHOOL OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY, TUFTS UNIVERSITY
PERGAMON-BRASSEY'S

# The Red Army on Pakistan's Border: Policy Implications for the United States

*Editors*
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.

*Contributors*
Anthony Arnold
Richard P. Cronin
Thomas Perry Thornton
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr.

Special Report
1986

A Joint Publication of the
CENTER FOR ASIAN PACIFIC AFFAIRS, THE ASIA FOUNDATION
and the
INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS, INC.

**PERGAMON • BRASSEY'S**
International Defense Publishers
Washington New York Oxford Toronto Sydney Frankfurt

# Summary Overview

By posing a major challenge to the security of Pakistan and indeed to the oil-rich Gulf region, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 caused a re-evaluation of American policy toward that area of the world. The policy that has emerged contains these major features:

- Support for Pakistan through military and economic assistance totaling $3.2 billion for the six years ending September 30, 1987, and projected at $4.02 billion for the succeeding six years.
- Assistance to the Afghan freedom fighters in their war against the Soviet invader, as well as to Afghan refugees in Pakistan.
- Refusal to give India veto power over U.S. assistance to Pakistan while continuing efforts to improve U.S.-Indian and Pakistan-Indian relations.
- Enhancing the capabilities of U.S. forces rapidly to deploy to the region.

A prime objective of American policy has been to persuade the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan. Aid to the Afghan freedom fighters, public pressure, support for a UN-sponsored diplomatic effort, and attempts to persuade the Afghan resistance to unite are the principal means used to achieve the objective. Clearly the Soviet threat to Pakistan and to the region generally will be lessened if the Soviet Union is unable to consolidate control of Afghanistan.

Despite a broad range of agreement on the Soviet threat, relations between Pakistan and the United States are not always harmonious. Pakistan harbors doubts about the steadfastness of the American commitment to its security. It also desires to maintain credibility in the nonaligned and Islamic groupings of nations. On the American side, there are questions about Pakistan's human rights and nuclear policies. Nevertheless, relations between Pakistan and the United States have in recent years warmed considerably, and it remains in the American interest that Pakistan be sufficiently confident of American support so it can resist Soviet blandishments and conclude that an independent nuclear capability is unnecessary. It is also in the American interest that Pakistan's armed forces remain strong and that the country's political system becomes more democratic and more stable. In a broad geostrategic context, Pakistan

is the key nation in thwarting Soviet expansionism in southern and western Asia.

The Soviet threat to Pakistan derives from Moscow's expansionist philosophy, and Pakistan is the logical next target for absorption into the Soviet empire. But Soviet capabilities vis-a-vis Pakistan are clearly inadequate at present. In addition to the difficulties they face in Afghanistan, Soviet leaders confront in Pakistan a nation of far greater size and population, with a well-trained and -equipped military force and with solid support in the international community. Soviet actions against Pakistan are therefore likely to be restricted to military harassment and political pressure, both designed to weaken Pakistan internally and to diminish Pakistan's support for the Afghan resistance.

On its side, Pakistan pursues a multifaceted policy which seeks to gain support for its position from the United Nations and from other Moslem nations, as well as from the United States and the People's Republic of China. Its position is greatly complicated by continuing tensions in relations with India. Its long-term prospects depend on domestic stability and continuity of foreign policy, on the management of the Indian relationship, on a viable Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion, and on external support.

Despite its dominant position in the subcontinent of South Asia, India is to all intents and purposes an impotent observer of the situation created by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. India's dependence on Soviet military and economic assistance and its inability substantially to ease tensions with Pakistan make it difficult if not impossible for India to play a constructive role in the Afghan crisis.

The four papers in this book were written before Najibullah replaced Babrak Karmal at the head of the Soviet-sponsored regime in Kabul and before Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, began to stage major rallies in Pakistan calling for the end of President Zia's regime and the holding of new elections. Neither of these developments would seem to change the basic situation: In Najibullah, the former head of the Afghan secret police, the Soviets hope to find a more effective leader. So far, he seems to be having no more success than his predecessors in uniting the communist factions in Afghanistan or in subduing the resistance. Benazir Bhutto has been drawing large crowds but so far seems to have made little headway in achieving her aims. If anything, her activities confirm that President Zia has indeed made progress in opening Pakistan's political system.

The fundamental conclusion, therefore, remains unaffected by recent developments: A steadfast American commitment to Pakistan and to the Afghan resistance is the best means for thwarting Soviet expansionism in that part of the world.

# Contents

# The Soviet Threat to Pakistan

*by Anthony Arnold**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 radically altered the geopolitics of South Asia. Until then, there was a balance—however uneasy and periodically punctuated by armed clashes—between the two principal powers in the region, India and Pakistan. Their territorial quarrels had dominated the local scene since they achieved independence from Britain in 1947.

Although each of the two drew a measure of support from the superpowers, their ongoing rivalry was essentially bilateral: neither Pakistan's friends (the United States and the People's Republic of China) nor India's (the Soviet Union) were in a position to back their local partners wholeheartedly, even if they had wanted to. The most powerful, the United States, was half a world away and on several occasions had refused to come to Pakistan's aid when Indian-Pakistani antagonisms degenerated into open warfare. The USSR was separated from the combatants by the buffer state of Afghanistan and, although involved to some degree in clandestine support for Baluch and Pushtun tribal separatist movements inside Pakistan, had never threatened to intervene directly in the main conflict. The weakest of the three, the PRC, although enjoying a short common border and a vulnerable umbilical link with Pakistan via the Kara Korum highway, had always kept its commitments to Islamabad within prudent bounds.

The sudden appearance on Pakistan's long northwestern border of the massive Soviet occupation force in Afghanistan signaled a fundamental change in the regional balance. In order to assess its significance in terms of Pakistan's security, several problems must be addressed:

- To what extent was the invasion a premeditated part of long-range Soviet strategy, and to what extent can projections of future Soviet policies be made on that basis?

* Anthony Arnold is Visiting Scholar at The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University; he was with the Central Intelligence Agency from 1953 to 1979.

- How firmly is the USSR committed today to total victory in Afghanistan, and what are the prospects for such a development? In this regard, what are the implications of the recent changes in Soviet leadership?

- What are today's long-range Soviet intentions—if any—toward Pakistan? More important, how do these relate to Soviet *capabilities*? Are primary Soviet pressures on Islamabad in the future most likely to take a military, an ideological, or an economic form?

## What Led Moscow to Invade Afghanistan?

That first, rather basic question has still to receive its authoritative answer, not only in the West but perhaps even in the USSR itself. Since 1979, at least three key Soviet Politburo members—Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Suslov, and Yury Andropov—have died, and their surviving aides are scarcely likely to publish memoirs. The analyses vented elsewhere have ranged from the demonologists' view that all Soviet moves (even apparently counterproductive ones) have been the result of careful Kremlin plotting, to the "happenstance" school that sees the invasion as the result only of unpremeditated and uncontrolled events.

As in all such disputes, the truth lies somewhere in the fuzzy middle. Moscow's interest in transforming Afghanistan into a controlled satellite dates from at least the early 1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev launched the first large-scale Soviet aid program there. Soon after, the USSR agreed to undertake the training and equipping of Afghanistan's armed forces. In a society where the military constitutes virtually the only cementing force of national unity, its influence is enormous: the establishment of a virtual Soviet monopoly over its supply and education probably gave the Kremlin confidence that ultimately Moscow would have a free hand in determining Afghanistan's future.

Insofar as there was any Kremlin "plan" for Afghanistan at this stage, however, it probably envisaged a growing but peaceful Soviet role as a Big Brother, whose influence over its small neighbor's economy and foreign policy would slowly become dominating. Afghanistan's eventual inclusion in the Council on Mutual Economic Assistance would be a logical consequence, binding the country to the socialist bloc's trade network. Ultimately, there would likely be some sort of mutual defense pact that would consolidate the Soviet hold on the country. But until the mid-1960s, there were few signs of Soviet meddling in Afghan internal

political affairs, and only inconclusive indicators of advance military planning in the country.[1]

The founding of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) on January 1, 1965, signaled the beginning of a more active Soviet political role. The degree of Soviet involvement in its formation is unknown,[2] but communism as a philosophy seems to have held little native appeal to the individualistic Afghans: their party is over forty years younger than that found in any other country bordering the USSR. Nevertheless, the party, though small, unprestigious, and bitterly divided, was relatively efficient in fomenting student unrest during Afghanistan's brief flirtation with constitutional monarchy (1964-1973).

Its ability to mobilize activists among the narrow band of Afghan intellectuals resulted in a secret marriage of convenience between the PDPA's Parcham branch and Sardar (Prince) Mohammed Daoud in 1973. With communist help, Daoud overthrew the monarchy and established a republic, i.e., a dictatorship, consisting of himself as president and a small coterie of intimate advisors, most of whom had connections with Parcham. Although this resulted in no revolutionary change domestically, Afghanistan's foreign policy—despite official proclamations of continued nonalignment—became much closer to that of the USSR.

In regional terms this meant a deterioration of Afghan relations with both Iran and Pakistan, especially the latter. Daoud revived the "Pushtunistan" issue (agitation for autonomy among Pushtun and Baluch tribesmen living in Pakistan), a favorite theme during his earlier (1953-1963) tour as prime minister. As they had during Daoud's previous administration, the Soviets gave open moral support to Kabul's fomenting of unrest and even armed rebellion, and worked behind the scenes to keep the issue bubbling.[3]

The Daoud-Parcham alliance was an odd one that neither side wished to acknowledge. Daoud was a first cousin of the king he deposed, scarcely

[1] For example, Western military attachés at the time noticed that Soviet road-building engineers working in Afghanistan were building bridges with carrying capacities far in excess of normal Afghan needs but just right for main Soviet battle tanks. In retrospect, this fact became significant, but a case could have been made that such overstrength structures were found all over the USSR and the engineers were merely adhering to standard Soviet specifications.

[2] Whether by chance or design, the initial party leadership was divided almost evenly between those who would later form its Parcham and Khalq factions. It may or may not be significant that when the party was reunited in 1977 (with Soviet aid if not at Soviet instigation), the same careful balance was again established—only to collapse within weeks after the party seized power. See Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), pp. 64-73.

[3] Ibid, pp. 45-46, 144, 160, 174; Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), p. 41.

a revolutionary in the communist tradition. His job security as president of a devoutly conservative Islamic state depended in good part on avoiding unnecessary provocation of such influential elements as the rural mullahs. It was in his interest to conceal his communist support to the extent possible. For their part, the Parchamis had little incentive to be openly associated with a member of the hated Mohammedzai monarchy that had ruled Afghanistan for over 150 years, yet they needed a figurehead to run the country while they consolidated their position. Each thought to exploit the other, and for a while it seemed that Daoud had succeeded, slicing off his Parchami intimates one by one, ultimately concentrating all power in his own hands.

It was a Pyrrhic victory. Daoud's policies as he divested himself of communist support became ever less congenial to Moscow. The Kremlin viewed his various maneuvers—e.g., to patch up his quarrels with Pakistan, to diversify his foreign aid donors (including an agreement that would have made Iran by far the biggest contributor to Afghanistan's future development), and to make the nonaligned movement truly nonaligned—with greater and greater mistrust. Daoud was threatening not only to undercut the entire past Soviet economic investment in Afghanistan, but also to set an example that other Soviet targets in the Third World might find enticing. Domestically, there may even have been Soviet concern that Afghanistan's rapprochement with Iran (still at that stage ruled by a pro-American Shah, and one of the wealthiest nations in the region) might start posing a gravitational threat to the USSR's own Central Asian Republics.

Thus, probably by 1976 or early 1977 at the latest, the USSR seems to have decided that it was in its interest to see Daoud unseated and an avowedly leftist government installed in his place. This came to pass in what is now called in Kabul The Great Saur Revolution, the coup d'etat in April 1978 that exterminated Daoud and most of his noncommunist associates, emplacing in their stead the leaders of the PDPA.[4]

The Soviet long-range goal of peaceful domination of Afghanistan was probably no different at this stage than it had been previously, but there were two important distinctions.

The first was that the Soviet commitment in Afghanistan had taken a quantum jump. When the USSR had been merely an aid donor, it bore little responsibility for Afghan domestic or foreign policies; later, when

[4] Although the timing of the coup probably caught the USSR by surprise, their complicity with and encouragement of the plotters is all but certain. See Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism*, op. cit., pp. 52-63, and especially p. 59.

Afghanistan began to align its foreign policy with that of the USSR, Moscow—if only by association—had to answer in some degree for Afghan belligerence on the Pushtunistan issue, but its responsibility was still indirect at most. With the advent to power of the PDPA, however, Soviet accountability for both domestic and foreign Afghan policies became all but complete.[5]

The second was the natural corollary that unless or until the USSR could dictate Kabul's every move, it would remain saddled with complete responsibility, but with only incomplete control. This dichotomy became of critical importance as the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) began to stagger under the multiple blows of a renewed split in PDPA ranks and a groundswell of popular Afghan reaction against the social reforms and ill-concealed atheism of the new regime.

For some time, the Soviet leaders appeared not to appreciate the full dimensions of their Afghan problem. In the first half of 1979, such authoritative ideologues as Mikhail Suslov began referring to Afghanistan as "Socialist," a characterization that would oblige the USSR, under provisions of the Brezhnev Doctrine, to defend the DRA against all internal and external enemies with armed force. In June 1979, this practice abruptly ceased, and thenceforth the Soviets labeled their new partner a country "in the national democratic stage of evolution." Not so the DRA, which continued to proclaim itself socialist at every possible opportunity, until the Soviet invasion disposed of all such unapproved formulations.

The change of Soviet wording is significant because it indicates that in mid-1979, ideologically speaking, the door to retreat from Afghanistan was reopened even as Moscow continued its efforts to consolidate its grip on the country.

The next Soviet step was a bungled attempt at a coup d'etat that would have deposed Hafizullah Amin, emplaced a reunited PDPA in power in Kabul, and probably would have resulted in an official invitation to Soviet troops to intervene. By this time, such intervention seemed like the only

[5] It is noteworthy that both the USSR and the fledgling Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) strove mightily at the outset to deny the communist affiliation of the PDPA and thus the Soviet responsibility for all that occurred in the country. The new leader, Nur Mohammed Taraki, was especially vehement in his insistence that the DRA still remained nonaligned and that the PDPA was not a communist party. This doubtless reflects the concern that both sides must have felt about the new regime's tenuous hold on power and the need to salvage Soviet prestige in case it collapsed. Both sides' protestations were almost universally disbelieved, both in the international arena and in Afghanistan. To this day, the quiet Soviet disinformation campaign to deny complicity in the coup still crops up occasionally, e.g., in Mohammed Ayoob, "Dateline Pakistan: A Passage to Anarchy?," in *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1985, pp. 154–173.

way to rescue the totally discredited communist government from destruction at the hands of a growing insurgency. When that coup failed, the USSR was left with the choice of either disavowing the DRA and letting matters take their course or marching in, with or without an invitation. To the Soviet leadership, this was no choice at all, and in late December 1979, some 85,000 combat troops invaded the country, killed Hafizullah Amin, and installed in his place the leader of the ousted Parchamis, Babrak Karmal.

This series of drastic events established once and for all Soviet responsibility for all that has transpired in Afghanistan since the invasion. The price, both domestically in the USSR and internationally, has been heavy—heavier by far than Soviet experience would have led the original decisionmakers to predict. After all, military invasion and occupation had proven a most reliable means for establishing—and reestablishing—communist governments in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe; and from lessons learned there, the annihilation of all anticommunist armed resistance should have followed in relatively short order. The critical corollary to such a conclusion was the expectation that international reaction to invasion, while perhaps initially noisy, would be neither long-lived nor effective. Both assessments have proven to be costly miscalculations. The USSR has been unable to consolidate its position in over six years of continuous warfare, and the costs in men, material, and especially prestige have mounted steadily.

There are those who say that, if the USSR had it to do all over again, it would behave in exactly the same way. This is at least debatable. But for the purposes of this analysis, it is enough to state categorically that events have not moved in Afghanistan as the original Soviet planners expected and intended.

To answer the question posed at the head of this section, the fundamental impulse that eventually led to the Soviet invasion was, indeed, Moscow's expansionist philosophy, but the use of military means was probably neither anticipated nor considered desirable until forced on the USSR by the danger of losing all its preceding economic, political, and ideological investments in the country.

The underlying expansionist philosophy remains; indeed, it is a continuous thread that runs through Russian history almost as an imperative.[6] Thus, Pakistan is a logical next target for absorption into the empire. But

[6] See Robert G. Wesson, *The Russian Dilemma: A Political and Geopolitical View* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974 and 1985) for an excellent analysis of Muscovite expansionism through the ages.

history also teaches that Moscow traditionally pauses to digest its conquests completely before pushing its frontiers outward again. The more difficult the digestive process, the longer Kremlin rulers have delayed before expanding further. Seen from this perspective, the Soviet threat to Pakistan is in inverse proportion to the vigor and success of the Afghan resistance.

### How Firm is the Soviet Commitment in Afghanistan?

To restate a basic postulate: The Soviet threat to Pakistan depends to a considerable degree on Moscow's will and ability to conquer Afghanistan. As long as the USSR is unable to turn Afghanistan into a firm and stable stepping stone, Pakistan will enjoy a measure of security.

To date, the USSR has been unable to secure the country. Given the Afghan resolve and resistance to foreign invaders, the rugged terrain, and the relatively limited commitment of Soviet forces, the war could drag on indefinitely. At the beginning of 1986, the resistance continued to hold about 80 percent of the land, with DRA and Soviet authorities only in full control of the rest—the cities, some towns, and the major arterials—during daylight hours. More than six years of open, bloody warfare have shown that the Afghan fighting traditions remain in force, and the resistance will continue as long as there are any Afghans left to bear arms.

"Commitment" is, of course, an imprecise variable in the best of circumstances, and indications of the Soviet commitment in Afghanistan are mixed and even contradictory.

At one end of the scale are the utterances of Soviet officials in late 1985 that a "political solution" to the Afghan dilemma was a basic goal of Mikhail Gorbachev's new Kremlin team. At the other, Soviet combat forces in Afghanistan continued to grow inexorably during 1985, and at least through the summer the level of combat operations increased measurably. If the following breakdown gives an inconsistent picture, it at least shows that Soviet resolve still seems open to question, and that it would be a mistake to conclude that the USSR is irrevocably committed to total victory.

**Ideological.** As noted in the preceding section, the USSR has already retreated from calling Afghanistan "Socialist," and there is thus no specific ideological imperative for Soviet troops to protect the DRA. The continued invocation of "internationalist duty" as a rationale for their

presence, however, will have to be stilled before an ideologically graceful retreat is possible. This term was still being used in December 1985.[7]

**Economic.** During 1984, the USSR promised over $300 million in new aid and disbursed over $400 million in commodities and new project aid; in February 1985, it promised additional project credits for an unspecified sum. Since 1980, Afghanistan has received about two-thirds of all Soviet grants, long-term credits, and commodity support to Third World countries, but a great deal of the Soviet assistance goes for direct or indirect military costs, from equipping the DRA army to building strategic roads.[8] So far as is known, the USSR's long-term economic stake in Afghanistan is largely limited to the natural gas fields north of the Hindu Kush range, an investment that antedates the invasion by many years. There is considerable potential for exploiting other mineral deposits, but as long as the present unstable conditions prevail, those deposits will stay in the ground. Should the USSR decide to withdraw its troops, it would have to assume that the gas would be cut off, at least temporarily. On the other hand, the gas might well start to flow again when a new government was seated in Kabul; there are no other customers immediately at hand for it. Soviet profits from the natural gas today, however, are certainly more than offset by the cost of the occupation. In strictly economic terms, abandoning both the occupation and the gas would result in a net profit to Moscow.

More broadly viewed, the DRA is not fully integrated into the Soviet international economic system. Although it has achieved observer status in the Council on Mutual Economic Assistance, it is not a full member of that group, and its economy is thus less tightly bound to the socialist world than those of Eastern Europe, Mongolia, or even far-off Cuba and Vietnam. The very fact that it does not hold such membership seems to signal a measure of Soviet uncertainty about its viability in the long run.

**Military.** In 1985, the level of military operations rose sharply and involved a sustained effort to cut the resistance's supply lines to Pakistan. As has happened every year since the invasion, Soviet force levels rose; estimates as the year ended varied from 120,000 troops in Afghanistan plus another 30,000 to 40,000 across the border in Central Asia, to 200,000 overall. Instead of relying only on massive traditional offensives, Soviet special forces (*Spetsnaz*), some based in the USSR, increased their

[7] The Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) recorded three uses of the term during its December coverage of Soviet media.

[8] U.S. Department of State, *Afghanistan: Six Years of Occupation*, Special Report No. 135, December 1985, p. 11. It must be noted that most Soviet assistance to Third World countries is in the form of long-term loans, a different category from those listed here.

nocturnal operations and ambushes of the *mujahidin*. Seismic mines and other new weapons were introduced. Security belts around major urban centers were improved and expanded.

For their part, the mujahidin had also improved their skills and were getting better—if still inadequate—weapons. As in previous years, they did not yet have any fully effective answer to the Soviet helicopter gunships, although some improvement in mujahidin anti-aircraft capabilities was registered. Overall, the military stalemate remained, but with significantly higher casualties on both sides.

Soviet attacks against civilian targets continued unabated, including carpet bombings and the attempted destruction of the agricultural infrastructure. These were designed to drive civilians either into exile or into the cities, where they would be easier to control. The mujahidin responded with programs designed to hold civilians on the land, farming by night if necessary. As with the military confrontation, there is still no clearcut victory in sight for either side. The fact that the refugee flow into Pakistan has slowed, however, may signal a measure of mujahidin success.

Overall, the Soviet Army is proceeding as if there is no doubt at all about its commitment to annihilate the resistance and secure Afghanistan for Moscow. Since the downgrading or reassignment of Marshal Ogarkov in October 1984 and the subsequent death of Defense Minister Ustinov, however, the military has lost two of its most influential voices in the Kremlin councils. Indeed, after Ustinov's death, there was no military representation on the Politburo for the first time in years, and the armed forces seemed to have been pushed backstage politically. The influence of the military is still enormous, however, and it is probably beyond the capability of its two main power-group rivals—the KGB and party apparat—to dominate the military completely. Nevertheless, its position under Gorbachev seems to have eroded significantly.

Thus, in any Kremlin reassessment of Soviet options in Afghanistan, the military will have an important—but not a dominating—voice.

**Diplomatic.** In late 1985, both before and after President Reagan's first summit meeting with General Secretary Gorbachev in Geneva, there were multiple indications of a possible breakthrough on reaching a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. Before then, the Soviet position had been that all external aid to the mujahidin must cease before the USSR would consider setting a timetable for withdrawal of its troops. This was patently unacceptable to the United States and other principals involved. What exactly transpired at the summit on the subject of Afghanistan has

not been made public, but a clear, if cautious, note of optimism emanated from Washington in the immediate aftermath of the talks.[9]

Shortly after the first summit, however, a new round of UN-sponsored talks between the DRA and Pakistan ended inconclusively in Geneva. By year's end, mutual recriminations about Afghanistan were being voiced publicly in both Moscow and Washington. Outside observers could be forgiven for reaching the conclusion that Moscow's conciliatory noises had not been the prelude to serious negotiations but only "Pavlovian diplomacy," the ringing of an attractive political bell designed only to produce premature concessions and to give the world the impression of Soviet flexibility.

**Psychological.** Efforts to make the war psychologically more palatable to the Soviet people have gone through several stages, from all but denying its existence in the early years to the most recent effort to lend it an aura of heroic drama. Even today, no overall casualty figures have been registered publicly, and it was more than two years after the invasion before any specific deaths in action were admitted. Starting in mid-1985, there has been a steady increase in television coverage, although this still maintains an unreal, play-acting essence to it with no Soviet killed or wounded shown.

Whatever the level of coverage, the one consistent theme is that of *defense*, be it that of the individual soldier, the unit, or the war as a whole. Even clearly offensive operations, only recently and indirectly acknowledged in the Soviet media, are made to seem part of a broader defense of the Soviet Motherland. Previously, offensive operations—when described at all—were invariably described as "training exercises." The current effort to "Kiplingize" the war is very recent, and its durability is still uncertain.

The new propaganda strategy is probably a reaction to growing Soviet popular disenchantment with the Afghan quagmire. At least through mid-1985, the Soviet public seemed to be registering an ever greater sensitivity to the war and an ever greater reaction against it. This conclusion

[9] This author finds himself in amicable but resolute disagreement with the widely held belief that the USSR can easily sustain the present economic and human costs of the war for an indefinite period. Official U.S. estimates place the financial costs at between one and two percent of the whole Soviet military budget, and the casualties at 30,000 (about .01 percent of the entire population) killed and wounded for the first six years of the war. If these appear to be acceptably small costs in our eyes, especially when carried by a government that brooks no open disagreement with official policies, they must be seen through today's Kremlin prism: a society whose economic ills are vast and growing; a civilian leadership that seems to be struggling to dominate the military establishment; and a cynical population that believes the losses in Afghanistan are far higher than Western estimates. If these perceptions are accurate, even small incremental expenses and losses could have disproportionate political effects.

is based both on indirect indicators (such as the new, harsher penalties for military insubordination and for draft-dodging, introduced in 1984 and 1985, respectively) and on public opinion polls taken among Soviet citizens traveling in the West. In 1984, for example, from a data base of nearly 3,000 interviews, pollsters were able to determine that roughly 25 percent of Soviet travelers in Western Europe opposed the war, 25 percent supported it, and 50 percent had no opinion.[10] A year later, public opinion appeared to have become sharply polarized, with upwards of 90 percent opposed, most of the remainder in full support, and only a very few with no opinion.[11]

If these figures are at all accurate, the present effort to popularize the war represents a high-stakes gamble. At this writing, General Secretary Gorbachev has been careful to keep his options open. He inherited this war, and he has not staked his own prestige on it. To withdraw would be an almost unprecedented confession of defeat, one that would send tremors throughout the whole Soviet empire. Nevertheless, he has promised to reintroduce rapid economic growth in a society that has become stagnant, and to accomplish this without changing the system. So far, his proclaimed methods embrace only increased discipline and increased enthusiasm, means that even Stalin found insufficient without recourse to mass terror as well. Unless Gorbachev, too, will—or can—fall back on the last resort, he will find that neither discipline nor enthusiasm can be inculcated in a population that is being forced to wage an unpopular war.[12] Many if not most of the half million veterans of that war are ignoring their pledge to silence, thus already committing a small but symbolically important act of defiance against authority. And if discipline becomes a casualty of the war, enthusiasm is scarcely likely to survive. The internal pressures for retreat may not yet be great enough to force such a move, but they have the potential for doing so—and they are mounting.

At the end of 1985, Gorbachev's words about seeking a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict were at odds with his use of increasing force in the field. Before long—probably within the year—he must bring his words in line with his deeds, or vice versa, either by making it his war or his peace. The decision will have a lasting effect on Pakistan's future.

---

[10] *The Washington Post*, November 22, 1985, p. A9.

[11] *Christian Science Monitor*, September 10, 1985, pp. 7-8.

[12] Most observers believe that a return to Stalinist terror is impossible. Nevertheless, the unprecedentedly large number of Politburo members with backgrounds in the coercive organs—Shevardnadze, Aliev, and Chebrikov—indicates the present-day political power of that group and the possibility of some modern-day variant of Stalin's methods.