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The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War

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damage to civil liberties than to the nation's physical well-being. "Once alienated, an 'unalienable right' is apt to be forever lost." He documents this assertion with a list of police killings of innocent people in their homes and of indefensible searches and seizures. While a reasonable reader may dismiss these discomfiting examples as well researched exceptions to normal law enforcement activity in the United States, Vidal also brings up the changing nature of the law. He refers to *U.S. v. Sandini* (1987), which established that police were able to seize property permanently from an individual if the property has been used for criminal purposes, even if the individual has had no involvement with any crime. This ruling has highly negative implications, considering that 90 percent of American paper currency has traces of narcotics on it from use in the drug trade. Vidal also points out a common problem that is not commonly pondered—the incidence of homosexual rape in the U.S. prison system, a violation of the cruel-and-unusual-punishment clause of the Bill of Rights. For anyone who doubts that such punishment is state sanctioned, Vidal quotes a state attorney general who refers to this practice in a public statement made in the course of his official duties. He is reminiscent of the military author Colonel Charles Dunlap, U.S. Army, in his references to blatant disrespect to President Bill Clinton on a naval vessel by seamen, who called Clinton "the Praetorian Guard of the Pentagon," and our "ruling junta."

There is one other weakness: the book fails to address properly the meat of the issue that its title promises—"how we got to be so hated." The Federation of

American Scientists has published a twenty-page listing of American military operations dating from 1948 to 1999, documenting how the United States (like the nations of Orwell's *1984*) has an "enemy of the month club" and thus engages in a "perpetual war" hoping for "perpetual peace." This theme is underdeveloped, however, and Vidal's discussion of the United States emphasizes domestic repression, while his reprinted chapters focus too exclusively on an apology (in the Platonic sense of an explanation) of Timothy McVeigh.

Altogether, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* presents a provocative argument that will be of intellectual appeal to professional military officers. It is admittedly an alternative perspective, but it may give members of the American national security community insight into how our European allies think, as well as our Third World adversaries, who often share Vidal's perspective. Vidal's arguments are intriguing, but the brevity of the new parts of this work ultimately leaves his thoughts incomplete.

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Jalali, Ali Ahmad, and Lester W. Grau, eds. *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War*. Quantico, Va.: U.S. Marine Corps Studies and Analysis Division. 416pp. (no price given)

What could be both more poignant and ludicrous than Commander Abdul Baqi Balots's account of his survival of a firefight in which his closest friend was killed? "I saw a lot of Soviets coming at

me and they were all firing (they put ten bullet holes through my baggy trousers). . . . Habib Noor told me that, unless we crossed the stream to the north, we would not be able to engage the Soviets. . . . I ran across and jumped but landed directly into the stream. ‘Oh, Allah,’ I cried, ‘you have killed me without dignity.’ Then I made a big jump, I don’t know how since even a tank can’t clear it, but I did and got out of the stream.”

This episode is recounted in Ali Jalali and Lester Grau’s book *The Other Side of the Mountain*. The two editors are well known for a sequence of publications on unconventional warfare going back to the early 1990s. For those who follow this field, it is no surprise that they are employed at the U.S. Army’s distinguished Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Their highly readable compilation is a significant contribution to the literature on guerrilla warfare, and it has immense implications for the contemporary (at this writing) U.S. intervention in Afghanistan.

The work consists of ninety-two “vignettes” of tactical action, with a few longer accounts of more protracted operations, all based on interviews with mujahideen participants. The book was inspired by a Russian text used at the Frunze Combined Arms Academy, detailing Soviet tactical action in Afghanistan. Jalali and Grau earlier produced an English translation of that book under the title *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan* (National Defense Univ. Press, 1996). *The Other Side of the Mountain* points out when one of its short stories covers the same actions or

operations as in *Bear*, but the works are not parallel texts.

The present work consists of fourteen chapters and a conclusion, composed of two to sixteen stories apiece. Each chapter illustrates a different type of tactical combat. There is a short discussion of the tactic before each chapter and a commentary at the end. This format has been used in military writing for many years (such as in the study *Infantry in Battle*, edited by George Marshall, Military History and Publications section of The Infantry School, 1934).

However, in recent decades the implicit analysis this approach provides has been greatly strengthened by the more explicit case-study method. If these stories had been written and presented as formal case studies, some existing weaknesses could have been avoided—the chief one being burying the chapter “Blocking Enemy Lines of Communication” halfway through the book, despite the editors’ and contributors’ amply demonstrated contention that logistics dominated the Soviet war in Afghanistan and was its chief strategic (not tactical) factor.

The thematic organization of the chapters is a powerful approach, but it means sacrificing any sense of chronological development. As a result, there is little sense of the evolution of mujahideen tactics during the war or of their interaction over time with Soviet tactics, despite occasional references to such evolution in the chapter commentaries. In fact, the work places unreasonable expectations on the background knowledge of the reader. A summary of the war’s origins, conduct, and outcome is badly needed. A table listing each major mujahideen faction, with its leader, ideology, and sponsors,

would also be helpful, as these factions are referred to throughout the narrative. The book might also have addressed popular myths or conceptions about the war—for example, the U.S. view that distribution of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the mujahideen broke the back of Soviet air support and hence was the decisive point of the struggle. The editors at a number of points indicate their disagreement with this view but never provide a formal rebuttal. On the other hand, the book capriciously provides detailed background information on such relatively trivial points as the official U.S. Army load weights for mules, Central Asian horses, and camels.

The book has a strong geographic bias—most of the actions it describes are in the vicinity of Kabul or on the route connecting Kabul and Jalalabad. Most of the remaining actions are in the Kandahar area. There is nothing from the Herat region, or the area around Mazār-e Sharīf, or the Panjshir Valley. This bias may be explained by a point the editors make in their introduction, that a number of interviews could not be completed because of the 1996 Taliban advance on Kabul and the north. Still, they need to explain how they have compensated for this imbalance in their material, especially in view of their own contention that the conduct of the war varied by region and by the ethnicities involved.

There may be an issue in this book with language as well. Good interpreters are well aware of the temptation to tidy up the haphazard use of specialized terminology by speakers of a foreign language, by rendering it in precise, professional English usage. The editors remark in the introduction that

although their contributors always referred to “Russians,” they have changed this throughout to “Soviets.” Did the same process occur in transcribing the interviewees’ descriptions of guerrilla operations? In this book even the most irregular of mujahideen commanders seems to have a perfect grasp of U.S. military terms and phrasing, implying an equal grasp of the concepts behind the words.

Unfortunately, the book’s proofing and editing is distractingly bad, which is a serious handicap in a work containing so many foreign words and names. An end sheet includes production credits for the book—it seems only appropriate that one is listed for “Book Editing and Design.” A particularly unfortunate result of this hasty editing is found in the commentary following a chapter on urban combat. On first reading, this evaluation of a mujahideen bombing of a city market appears actually to be a defense of terrorist attacks on civilian noncombatants. Closer attention, however, shows that the editors were attempting to contrast this particular incident with the Soviet aerial bombardment campaign aimed at driving the population from the Afghan countryside, but the text certainly reads as though it is equating *any* air strike with terrorism.

These flaws detract from but do not negate the high value of this book. In addition to its major strength of first-hand accounts of the most significant guerrilla war of our time, the book has many other useful features. Its use of maps is particularly adept, and consistent references to Defense Mapping Agency map sheets give a sense of detail and nuance to the work. While it is exceptionally riddled with typographical errors, the glossary covers nearly all the

specialized and foreign terms used in the book, at exactly the right level of detail.

In sum, *The Other Side of the Mountain* is a unique and valuable contribution to the study of unconventional warfare. In view of the ongoing U.S. operations in Afghanistan, the editors would be performing a civic service were they to produce a revised and reedited version for general publication.

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Ellsberg, Daniel. *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2002. 498pp. \$29.95

For Americans who were adults during the Vietnam War, the name Daniel Ellsberg is portentous; it either suggests a whiff of treason or connotes heroic patriotism. Ellsberg is a Marine Corps veteran, Harvard Ph.D., former senior official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, a highly regarded analyst for the RAND Corporation, and a civilian observer of platoon-level combat in Vietnam who defiantly chose to “walk point” with the troops he was observing. In March 1971, Ellsberg released to the *New York Times* a seven-thousand-page, highly classified Department of Defense history of American involvement in Vietnam. Covering the war from the Truman administration through the Tet offensive of early 1968, this study became known as “The Pentagon Papers” when the *New York Times* began publishing it on 13 June.

Ellsberg’s action earned him federal felony indictments and a protracted criminal trial. On 11 May 1973 the judge

abruptly dismissed the government’s case, because in the last few weeks evidence had materialized showing that agents of the Richard M. Nixon administration had denied Ellsberg his right to a fair trial by burglarizing his psychiatrist’s office in search of material with which to blackmail him into not releasing more documents. This revelation became part of the unfolding drama of the Watergate scandal, the surreptitious forced nighttime entry into the Democratic Party headquarters by the same agents of the administration. President Nixon attempted to buy the silence of one of the burglars, E. Howard Hunt, with a seventy-five-thousand-dollar bribe. Facing impeachment for attempting to cover up the break-in, Nixon wailed about Ellsberg: “The sonofabitching thief is made a national hero. . . . And the *New York Times* gets a Pulitzer for stealing documents.”

Secrets is a book that must be read by anyone seeking to understand how the United States formulates its strategy and policy. Ellsberg demolishes the “quagmire” thesis favored by such influential liberal interpreters as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. By that interpretation, beginning with Harry S. Truman up to the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson, each president made a deeper commitment of American military power and clandestine activity, under the conviction that his actions would achieve a South Vietnamese victory over the invaders from the communist North.

From Ellsberg’s perspective, there was no quagmire, only endless presidential deception of Congress and the public, who were led to believe decade after decade that surely the next step would result in the successful establishment of a permanently independent South