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# AFGHANISTAN: THE EMPIRE STRIKES OUT

by

JOSEPH J. COLLINS

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The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 appeared at the time to be yet another dramatic extension of Soviet influence, with the same promise of success already achieved by proxy in Angola and Ethiopia. Daring in scope and decisive in execution, this rare direct use of Soviet forces appeared to forge a link between the Brezhnev Doctrine and an aggressive Soviet policy in the Third World. It also seemed to herald a decisive shift in attitude toward the "rules" of the super-power game. In the words of one Soviet analyst, "We broke the rules and we know it. In Angola the rules were ambiguous. Not in Afghanistan."<sup>1</sup>

Now, more than two years later, as the details become known, the invasion of Afghanistan looks more like a colossal blunder than a daring extension of influence. What started as a decisive show of force has turned into a lesson on the limits of military power when clumsily applied in disregard of local circumstances.<sup>2</sup> What looked like the opening scene of "The Monster that Devoured South Asia" has, at least for the time being, turned into an extended run of "The Empire Strikes Out."

This article will examine the Soviet experience in Afghanistan from a number of perspectives. More specifically, it will address:

- Current Soviet policy,
- Situational factors that affect Soviet options,
- The range of choices available to the Soviets, and
- Conclusions that can be drawn after more than two years of conflict.

## CURRENT POLICY

Soviet policy toward Afghanistan can most profitably be examined in three areas: Afghan domestic politics, military operations, and Soviet foreign policy.

*Afghan Domestic Politics:* On the domestic scene, the Soviets apparently believed that a decisive show of armed might, coupled with a change in rulers, would reunite the ruling party in Afghanistan and restore order to the country. At the same time, the neo-socialist "revolution" on the Soviet Union's southern border would be preserved. Delivered in the combat trains of the Soviet invasion force, Babrak Karmal, the Soviet-picked replacement for the unpopular President Hafizullah Amin, was to have been the agent for restoring domestic political order, while the Soviet forces were to have frightened the rebels back to their villages. To put it charitably, the Soviets have not accomplished their objectives. Karmal has failed in his efforts to reunite the *Khalq* (Masses) and *Parcham* (Banner) factions of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. While the exact details of the political situation are unclear, it appears that many members of the hard-line *Khalq* faction have moved into opposition and, in some cases, have even swung to the rebel side.<sup>3</sup> This development will continually haunt the Karmal government because the *Khalq*, by some accounts, outnumbers the *Parcham* faction by two to one. Moreover, the *Khalq* is particularly strong among Army officers, as evidenced by the July 1980 revolt of the 10,000 men of the 14th Afghan Armored Division, which took place when the

government attempted to relieve its *Khalqi* commander.<sup>4</sup>

The Afghan Army is itself in disarray. Disillusionment with the government has produced defections of whole units to the rebel side. The Army has shrunk from about 100,000 to 25,000 or less. Even the paltry force that is left is more burden than boon to the Soviets. In August 1980, fearing further defections, the Soviets were forced to remove all anti-air and anti-tank weapons from the Afghan forces to preclude their falling into rebel hands.<sup>5</sup>

To bolster its forces, take the pressure off Soviet units, and perhaps regain some autonomy, the Karmal government has repeatedly resorted to desperate measures. In January 1981, after a new conscription law had been promulgated, press gangs were reported to have rounded up teenagers as young as 14 years of age.<sup>6</sup> Paramilitary groups—"Defense of the Revolution" battalions—were formed but, in spite of high pay, they have generally proven ineffective. In July 1981 the government, by design or incompetence, committed some 300 cadets of the Afghan Military Academy to combat only 16 miles from Kabul. The results were devastating—as many as 70 were killed and 200 defected.<sup>7</sup> In January 1982, after reports of the exodus of many young men from the country to avoid the draft, press gangs were once again sweeping hundreds of eligible males off the streets of Kabul and sending them off to be processed for military service.<sup>8</sup>

In short, public support for the Karmal regime has been nonexistent. Massive riots took place in Kabul over a seven-day period during February 1980 and again in April of that year. An attempt to form a "National Fatherland Front" failed. Close to 15 percent of the Afghan population has left the country for refugee camps—2 million to Pakistan and 200,000 or more to Iran.<sup>9</sup> Not only have Afghan diplomats, scholars, and athletes defected, but 250 professionals of the Afghan national airlines have joined them. Observers estimate that the central authorities control only 10 to 25 percent of the territory and only five percent of the population.<sup>10</sup>

In light of all this, Soviet policy to date

has been to take direct control of nearly every aspect of Afghan governance. In June 1980 the US State Department reported that "Babrak's bodyguard, chef, driver, doctor and six chief advisors are all Soviets. The President's isolation is described as . . . total."<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, a former Afghan diplomat stated that "even . . . Babrak Karmal is no longer allowed to compose his own speeches."<sup>12</sup> Karmal, after a visit to the USSR in November 1980, found it necessary to chide his subordinates over their behavior toward their socialist "allies":

At our request the USSR has sent experts and advisors for nearly all areas of government and for the ministries and administration of Afghanistan. We ought to make very effective and maximum use of this fraternal and disinterested assistance. We will learn from the technical expertise of our Soviet comrades. Unfortunately, some of our staff close their eyes to these possibilities—I address myself to the staff and in particular to party comrades—and some of them even lay all the burden and responsibility for practical work on the shoulders of the advisors. Such acts are basically [unacceptable] . . .<sup>13</sup>

Out of necessity, Soviet influence over the Afghan economy has also increased. More than 140 industrial facilities are being built (or rebuilt) with Soviet assistance, and

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the value of Soviet aid since 1978 has allegedly doubled. Further, total trade has seen a 100 percent increase since 1977. The Soviets claim to have trained some 60,000 Afghan workers, and, at present, there are more than 1500 Afghan students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the USSR. In spite of (or possibly because of) the Soviets' "fraternal assistance," food is now critically scarce in some areas. One analyst reported that some 2 to 3 million people in central Afghanistan are near starvation.<sup>14</sup>

*Military Operations:* The military side of policy has not been much better for the Soviet Union. To date, Soviet strategy appears to have been to hold the major centers of communication, limit infiltration, and destroy local strongholds at minimum cost to Soviet forces. This last item has, in the main, been carried out with the support of more than 240 helicopter gunships. Whether intended or not, Soviet policy has been a combination of "scorched earth" and, in anthropologist Louis Dupree's words, "migratory genocide."<sup>15</sup> The eastern provinces have been depopulated, cities have been rubble, and the narrow corridor joining China and Afghanistan has been occupied by Soviet forces.

All of this has not produced the desired results. Indeed, since January 1981 the rebels, bolstered by aid from other Islamic nations, have become increasingly bold. Major fighting has taken place in all of the eastern provinces and around every major city. Contrary to Soviet propaganda, the bulk of the fighting has been done by Soviet troops, sometimes opposed by mutinous Afghan Army forces. A Western summary of combat actions more than 18 months after the invasion included the following:

Between April 13 and July 15, 1981, at least 107 high-level Afghan Communist officials and Soviet officers were assassinated in Kabul, on two occasions at the very gate of the Soviet Embassy at midday. In Herat, a no man's-land for two years, Soviet soldiers are killed in their barracks. Unable to wrest Kandahar from the resistance, the Russians bombed much of it into rubble in June; two weeks later, the resistance again controlled

Kandahar. On June 19, the main Soviet airbase at Bagram was set ablaze, and fuel, ammunition dumps, and aircraft were destroyed. In July, the resistance won Gulbahar on the north-south supply road. The landscape is littered with ruined Soviet tanks and armor.<sup>16</sup>

Total Soviet casualties (killed or wounded) have been estimated at 15,000, although this estimate may be high inasmuch as most of the fighting in 1980 was at a low level, with one 1980 estimate putting the total number of rebels in contact with Soviet forces at only 1000 per day.<sup>17</sup> In all, despite the costs, the Soviets are preparing for a prolonged stay. Permanent logistic facilities and barracks are being constructed. Airfields are being upgraded, and at least one permanent bridge across the Oxus River has been completed. The tour of duty for Soviet soldiers has also been set at two years.<sup>18</sup>

New or untried Soviet equipment (e.g., the improved BMP, the Hind helicopter, and the AGS 17 automatic grenade launcher) has been tested, but the innovations needed to turn a conventional army of one airborne and six motorized rifle divisions into an effective counterinsurgency force have not been in evidence. Soviet innovations to date have been tantamount to applying a Band-Aid to a hemorrhage. For example, the border with Pakistan has been mined with small, scatterable antipersonnel devices; increasingly, airmobile commandos have been employed in support of ground operations;<sup>19</sup> reports of lethal gas usage have surfaced; and Soviet forces have, at a minimum, used air- and artillery-delivered incapacitants and riot control agents, primarily to flush rebels from caves or as economy-of-force measures.<sup>20</sup>

There is very little reliable information on the performance of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. A distillation of the scant information which is available reveals that:

- The Soviets initially relied on Central Asian reservists to man their invasion force. Those soldiers were poorly trained and, in all probability, politically unreliable.<sup>21</sup> They were replaced by regular forces within three months of the start of the invasion.
- Regular forces were not, for the most

part, trained in counterinsurgency techniques and have been disappointed in not finding the Chinese and American agents who they were told were causing the trouble.

- Although some tank units have been removed (with great diplomatic fanfare) and replaced by infantry units, Soviet tactics still tend toward an overreliance on motorized rifle and tank troops employed in sweep operations. Rebel ambushes of various sizes have been very effective.

- The pace of operations ranges from frantic offensives and damage-limiting operations to long periods of boredom. Soviet soldiers are not coping very well with this pattern, and reports of the use of hashish have surfaced.<sup>22</sup>

- The Soviet populace is eager to learn about what is happening in Afghanistan. Censorship within the military and the media is strictly enforced. Accounts of Soviet soldiers in combat are rare, usually anecdotal, and very heavy on propaganda content.<sup>23</sup> In spite of this fact, some truth has emerged in Soviet sources. For example, one "open letter" to a Soviet mother contained the following observations:

There are still many difficulties . . . . Well-trained and armed gangs of mercenaries are infiltrating the republic . . . . [Wherever] our soldier serves, his life is subject to strict, tightly observed routine . . . . [The] soldiers and officers, apart from everything else, have to devote a lot of time to providing the tent camp with amenities . . . . It is hard to serve in Afghanistan. [It is a country marked by a] lack of water, heat, lifeless mountain slopes, and deserts.<sup>24</sup>

All in all, the Soviet forces in Afghanistan have not demonstrated the tactical flexibility, the small-unit expertise, nor the political sensitivity needed to put down an insurgency. Soviet unpreparedness can be traced to a poor initial estimate of the situation. There is no indication that the Soviets ever believed that they could get bogged down in an extended counterinsurgency operation. More likely, informed by the estimates of the now-retired Com-

mander-in-Chief of Soviet Ground Forces, Ivan Pavlovsky, the Soviet leadership envisioned an operation like their 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, where overwhelming force met little resistance and left Soviet officials time to restore political stability.<sup>25</sup> They failed to consider both the warlike nature of the Afghan *mujahidin* (freedom fighters) and the difficulty of suppressing a revolt in a mountainous area the size of Texas.

Of these two conditions, the ferocity of the *mujahidin* is more vexing. The *mujahidin* come from at least six major groups within the country, which themselves are broken down into as many as 160 separate subelements. They have been encountered in units of platoon to regimental strength. Moreover, they are strongly motivated by Islam and are totally unschooled in such things as the Geneva Convention and the laws of land warfare. While it is impossible to know their exact fighting strength, an estimated 80,000 of them are more than able to occupy the attention of the 85 to 110,000 Soviet soldiers.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, even with better training and intelligence, the number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan would be insufficient for the task.

*Soviet Foreign Policy:* Soviet combat activities in Afghanistan have placed an enormous burden on Soviet foreign policy. Since the invasion, the Soviet Union has been condemned twice in the UN General Assembly, each time by more than 100 nations, and again by the foreign ministers of the Islamic countries on two separate occasions. Additionally, more than 50 nations boycotted the Moscow Olympics; and Cuba, partially through guilt by association, lost a chance for a UN Security Council seat. The Soviet Union suffered for more than a year under a US grain embargo and a ban on technology transfer. Further, the United States stepped up its presence in the Indian Ocean, and SALT II was formally shelved because of the invasion. Worst of all from a Soviet perspective, the invasion has contributed to greater Chinese-American cooperation in defense.

To repair and alleviate these damages,

the USSR has followed a four-pronged strategy. First, on the propaganda front, it has countered with numerous (and at times ludicrous) claims of "outside interference," justifying its "limited contingent" in terms of the Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty and (of all things!) the UN Charter.

Second, the USSR has sought out allies on the issue. India has been a principal target, but an elusive one. In spite of a generous aid package and a visit by Brezhnev himself, the Soviets' only prize in New Delhi was a joint declaration condemning "outside interference" in Southwest Asia.<sup>27</sup> Some socialist states have also responded weakly. Yugoslavia twice voted against the USSR in the United Nations, and Rumania failed to vote on either of the two motions. Cuba did vote with the Soviets in the United Nations, but otherwise its support has been lukewarm, perhaps out of anger over its loss of prestige in the nonaligned movement. In January 1980, for example, Castro remarked ambiguously: "The events in Iran and Afghanistan are taking on dramatic importance that worries anyone who wishes for peace based on peoples' right to sovereignty, integrity, and independence."<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, while the Soviet press in January 1980 carried numerous expressions of fraternal support, Cuba's was noticeably absent. Furthermore, the invasion angered the West European communist parties to the extent that the Soviets were forced to prohibit the representative of the Italian Communist Party, West Europe's largest, from making a speech at the 26th Party Congress in February 1981.<sup>29</sup>

A third and major effort to limit the invasion's unfavorable impact was the attempt in 1980 to induce Iran and Pakistan to sit down with the Karmal government to discuss Karmal's "May 14th proposals" (actually originated by Brezhnev in February), which featured a "swap" of a Soviet troop withdrawal for a guarantee of sealed borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> The Soviet motive here was part propaganda and, in the case of Pakistan, part realpolitik. Islamic, Chinese, and perhaps American support are channeled through Pakistan; and an "understanding" with President Zia Ul-

Haq would represent real progress for the Soviets.<sup>31</sup> There were reports in January 1981 that Pakistan, encouraged by the United Nations, might take the bait, but nothing has materialized. Indeed, in a letter to *The New York Times*, Ismail Patel, the Pakistani press attaché at the United Nations reiterated Pakistan's support for the rebels and said that Pakistan was committed to "total withdrawal of Soviet forces . . . [and] restoration of the nonaligned . . . status of Afghanistan."<sup>32</sup> Subsequent Pakistani acceptance of a \$3 billion American aid package makes a deal with the Afghans even more remote.

Soviet pressure on Pakistan has not been limited to gentle persuasion. Threats, overflights, and limited hot pursuit of guerrillas into Pakistan have taken place.<sup>33</sup> Babrak Karmal himself said in November 1980, "I warn [the Pakistanis] that conditions have changed and no forces . . . can divert us from our course. If they persist, they will get a reply that they will never forget."<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the USSR has attempted to deflect criticism of its Afghan policy by creating the illusion that it is prepared to discuss the Afghan issue with the West and, at the same time, initiate talks on Persian Gulf demilitarization. In his keynote address to the 26th Party Congress, however, Brezhnev added this caveat:

We do not object to the questions connected with Afghanistan being discussed in conjunction with security in the Persian Gulf. Naturally here only the international aspects of the Afghan problem can be discussed, not internal Afghan affairs.<sup>35</sup>

In short, Brezhnev was reminding his listeners that the armies of socialism still march only in one direction. Mistake or not, Brezhnev appears committed to his course in Afghanistan.

#### SITUATIONAL FACTORS

Many scenarios could be drawn projecting future developments in Afghanistan. Two seem highly unlikely to occur: a quick Soviet defeat and a quick Soviet victory. To

defeat the Soviets, the disunited rebel groups would have to come together, receive massive quantities of arms, destroy the Soviet divisions in the countryside, and then eject the remainder from the urban areas and the centers of communication. Nothing of this scale appears in the offing, and if the various guerrilla groups were to mass for quasi-conventional operations, the 85 to 110,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan, backed by another 30,000 troops across the border, could easily handle the fighting that would ensue.

For dissimilar reasons, a quick Soviet victory is also unlikely. Every additional increment of Soviet aid makes the Karmal government appear more like the agent of "foreign devils." Resistance continues to grow, not only in the countryside but also in the cities.

In the military sphere, the Soviets have very little over which to rejoice. The Afghan borders, especially the 1000-mile stretch with Pakistan, are nearly impossible to seal. Roads and airfields are scarce and heavily used, and dramatic additions to troop strength would necessitate improvements in the logistical infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> Command-and-control arrangements have not been significantly loosened to encourage initiative, and the Soviet Army has barely begun to modify conventional, European-oriented tactics to meet the unconventional situation posed by scattered rebel forces and rugged terrain. Consequently, the most probable scenario is one of continued stalemate. The Soviets will, for the foreseeable future, control the roads and urban areas by day while the countryside and the night will belong to the elusive rebels. A Pakistani official summed up the Soviet dilemma in Afghanistan as follows:

The Soviets can continue to occupy the country, but they cannot win over the people. The longer they stay, the more they alienate the people. The more they alienate the people, the longer they must stay. This Russian dilemma is also the Afghan dilemma, and both seem condemned to suffer its consequences.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, the current stalemate is by no means permanent. Unlike the United States in Vietnam, the Soviet Union is not thousands of miles from the fighting, nor will it be subject to the pressure of an impatient public opinion nurtured by an inquisitive fourth estate. One may also note here that the Soviets have in the past shown an ability to persevere under adverse conditions over long periods of time. After their own civil war, for example, they conducted counter-guerrilla operations in the Central Asian republics for nearly a decade. Time, contiguity, and military power ultimately favor the Soviets in Afghanistan. Conscious of their country's status as a great power, and beset by internal difficulties, Soviet leaders may well believe that in Afghanistan there is no substitute for victory.

Future Soviet policy choices on Afghanistan, however, will not be made in a vacuum. The question of "what will work" will be subordinated to policy issues of greater import for the Soviet Union, such as avoidance of an expanded war, US-Soviet relations, arms control, and the possibilities for trade with the West. Domestic considerations, such as economic problems or a succession struggle, could also influence Soviet choices. Long-range predictions are made doubly difficult here because a single stimulus could bring about a wide range of policy responses. If Afghanistan were to become an issue in the post-Brezhnev succession struggle, for example, there is no predicting at this point whether that struggle would generate a more draconian military solution or some form of negotiated settlement. War and politics are frequently both the province of chance.

#### RANGE OF CHOICES

There are a number of major options available to the Soviets. Options that appear to have been already rejected are annexation and the invasion of Pakistan to destroy rebel sanctuaries.

*Annexation:* The Soviets apparently believed that Afghanistan, when pacified, would occupy a position as a satellite

somewhere on the spectrum between total dependency and "tilted nonalignment." Direct annexation of all or part of Afghanistan, on the other hand, would be considered a clear and blatant violation of international law by the nonaligned nations, and politically it would probably generate more costs than benefits. Furthermore, an annexed Afghanistan would require massive economic assistance to bring its standard of living roughly up to that of the other Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union. Given Afghanistan's dismal pre-war gross national product, the cost would be staggering. A Soviet analyst quizzed on this point dismissed the annexation option with the sardonic comment, "Look . . . all we need is another 15 million mouths to feed!"<sup>38</sup>

In the distant future, the Soviets might decide to annex the narrow corridor that connects Afghanistan with China. The probability of such action would increase dramatically if Pakistan were to make peace with the Karmal regime, leaving the PRC and Iran as the only direct arms conduits to the freedom fighters.

*Invasion of Pakistan:* Invading Pakistan to destroy rebel sanctuaries and disperse refugee settlements would be an enormous undertaking in terms of men and materiel. In all likelihood, it would generate a militant response from both the United States and China. Were this not enough, the mountainous terrain and stiff Pakistani resistance would make the cost prohibitive. The antagonistic effect that such an undertaking would also have on other Islamic nations, coupled with the risk of superpower collision, would seem to make this option totally infeasible, unless the Soviets were to accomplish the impossible task of rebuilding an Afghan Army to do the job.

There are four policy options, on the other hand, that the Soviets might look with more favor upon: reinforcement, "Afghanization," a negotiated settlement, and the Baluchi option.

*Reinforcement:* The Soviets might choose to continue the same pattern of operations inside Afghanistan but at dramatically increased troop levels. Some

experts have estimated that the Soviets would need as many as 300,000 troops to subdue Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> While a plan of this magnitude would be difficult logistically, it could force the freedom fighters back to their sanctuaries in Iran and Pakistan. Unfortunately, even if it were possible to limit infiltration, the freedom fighters would be able to renew their efforts whenever the Soviets let down their guard. On the other hand, a dramatic reinforcement, coupled with an effective strategy of pacification, could give the Soviets time to pursue the policies needed to end the insurgency. This option would not be an end in itself, but it might be an essential first step to accomplish "Afghanization."

*"Afghanization":* This option would call for the long-term rebuilding of the Afghan government and armed forces, a process that would be heavily dependent on new, Soviet-trained cadres to provide the leadership. "Afghanization" might provide a long-term solution, but efforts to carry out such a policy to date have shown little immediate return. This lack of return is not surprising since the Soviets have not generally been successful in developing Soviet-style cadres in Third World countries. Indigenous, pro-Soviet movements have been successful, but only when they have drawn on nationalism or on ethnic or tribal affiliations. Soviet prospects for exploiting these unifying factors in Afghanistan are extremely poor.

*Negotiated Settlement:* Up to now, the Soviets have rejected neutralization schemes proposed by Europeans, the most notable of which was the July 1981 "Carrington Plan," rejected by the USSR only 24 hours after its presentation. The Soviets have insisted that the Afghan government must be made a party to any talks. Such participation would, of course, legitimize the Karmal government and provide support for the Soviet claim that the freedom fighters constitute "outside interference." For the West, de facto recognition of the Karmal government is not an acceptable basis for starting negotiations.

It is unlikely that the Soviets would ever accept a plan proposed by the West. It is equally unlikely that the Soviets would



negotiate with the freedom fighters or that they could persuade any of them to come to the table.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it is not clear that giving the Soviets a way out is in the Western interest. If we assume that Soviet leaders, like our own, formulate policy with an eye on lessons learned from previous failures, even a limited success in Afghanistan could further increase their confidence in the Soviet military establishment and make them more prone to use force to solve future foreign policy problems.<sup>41</sup> In short, it is in the Western interest to insure that the lessons that the Soviets learn from Afghanistan are recorded on the debit side of the balance sheet.

*The Baluchi Option:* In spite of its problems, the Soviet Union is now in a good position to exploit ethnic rivalries in the area. The Baluchi people, who occupy parts of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, are, by some accounts, receiving aid and advice from Soviet agents.<sup>42</sup> A turbulent Pakistan could be seen as a promising target—all the more tempting because thousands of Baluchis died fighting the Pakistani Army in the early 1970s. Recognition of an independent Baluchistan inside of southern Pakistan could ultimately net the Soviets access to the Indian Ocean port of Gwadar.<sup>43</sup> In any case, the Baluchistan issue could be a convenient lever to pressure Pakistan to limit its support of the freedom fighters. Fostering a Baluchi revolution also carries the advantage of being an “indirect approach,” which would enable the Soviets to deny direct participation. Additionally, support for “liberation movements” is something that carries little stigma when compared to outright invasions.

These four options, of course, do not exhaust all the possibilities. It is quite possible that the Soviets will continue attempts at “muddling through,” knowing they cannot quit, but unable as yet to muster the political wherewithal needed to win the war. This appears to be the option that they are taking at present. The Kremlin has not gone much beyond its “wait-and-see” attitude toward the Reagan Administration and will undoubtedly gauge its policy in Afghanistan in part by the level of risk and reward promised in its relations with the

United States. Additionally, the still possible requirement for massive numbers of troops in the all-important East European theater is a significant constraint on new Soviet initiatives in Afghanistan. The fate of the Afghan rebels is not unrelated to the activities of their less violent cousins in Gdansk so long as the situation in Poland remains less than wholly resolved.

In sum, one can predict a near-term continuance of the status quo—a hungry Soviet Union pitted against an indigestible Afghanistan. Options exist for the Soviets in the long term, but all are costly and some are dangerous.

## CONCLUSIONS

For the student of international relations, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan supports a number of conclusions, some of which have only slight claim to novelty and all of which could have been arrived at short of the mounting of an invasion.

First, Afghanistan is proof positive that great power does not insulate its holder from great mistakes. Indeed, having great power tempts the possessor to regard it as invincible whatever the circumstances. Afghanistan vividly demonstrates that even superpowers are at the mercy of religious, ethnic, racial and other such historic forces in their dealings with Third World countries. Armored divisions and unusable ICBMs have rarely overcome the indigenous forces of nationalism and religious faith. Great powers must take this into account in their dealings with Third World countries. There are tides which one dares not swim against.

Second, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan demonstrates again that, in the formulation of great-power decisions relating to Third World countries, greater allowance must be made for the elusiveness of “popular support” in the Third World. Had the Russians swallowed their ideological pride and distanced themselves from the unpopular President Amin in 1979, they would have avoided putting their prestige on the line and might then have avoided their costly intervention in Afghanistan.

Finally, there is perhaps one conclusion

that we should *not* draw from events in Afghanistan. Learning the wrong lesson from history can hurt far more than ignoring experience altogether. Attaching too much significance to the inability of the Soviet Union to achieve its goals in South Asia could be foolhardy. A Soviet defeat, even if it were to be essentially irreversible, would not prove any static, general proposition about Soviet power. Even if the Soviets were to leave Afghanistan without having accomplished their purpose, such an outcome would not prove impotence. As Kenneth Waltz has reminded us, a jackhammer is no less powerful because it cannot be used to drill teeth.<sup>44</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Quoted by Robert Legvold, "Containment without Confrontation," *Foreign Policy*, 40 (Fall 1980), 81.
2. The Vietnam analogy does not generally fit the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. In one area, great-power decision-making, there are, however, some interesting parallels. Compare, on Vietnam, Stanley Hoffman's *Primacy or World Order* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978), pp. 22-32, with, on Afghanistan, Jiri Valenta's "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: The Difficulty in Knowing Where to Stop," *Orbis*, 24 (Summer 1980), 201-19.
3. See US Department of State, *Soviet Dilemmas in Afghanistan*, Special Report 72 (June 1980); and Michael Kaufman, "Disaffected Afghans Said to Aid Rebels," *The New York Times*, 7 November 1980, p. 3. An unsubstantiated Agence France Presse dispatch reported that Karmal's trip to Moscow in November 1980 was designed to obtain permission for a partial purge of *Khalqis*. See *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report (South Asia)*, 7 November 1980, p. C4 [hereinafter cited as *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*].
4. *Soviet Dilemmas*. Further information on recent feuding between factions can also be found in Zalmay Khalilzad, "Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan," *Problems of Communism*, 29 (November-December 1980), 26-29; and Nancy and Richard Newell, *Struggle for Afghanistan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 179-81.
5. *Soviet Dilemmas*. See also US Department of State, *Afghanistan: A Year of Occupation*, Special Report 79 (February 1981).
6. *Soviet Dilemmas*. The new Afghan draft law can be found in *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*, 26 January and 2, 5, and 9 February 1981.
7. A 23 July 1981 story by Michael Kaufman titled, "Three Day Battle in Kabul Suburbs Called One of the Biggest for Afghans," *The New York Times*, 23 July 1981, p. 3, reported that the cadets had been committed to battle, but a story by Edward Giradet, "Afghan War Goes On: Biggest Battle Near Kabul," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 23 July 1981, p. 1, reported that the cadets had been passing through the area and were subsequently ambushed.
8. "Roundup of Afghans in a Surprise Draft For Army Reported," *The New York Times*, 20 January 1982, p. A12.
9. On the issue of refugees see "Russia in Afghanistan," *Economist*, 23 May 1981, pp. 33-37; and Nicholas Wade, "Afghanistan: The Politics of Tragicomedy," *Science*, 1 May 1981, pp. 521-23. On the National Fatherland Front see US Department of State, *Afghanistan: 18 Months of Occupation*, Special Report 86 (August 1981).
10. Rosanne Klass, "Afghans Battle On," *The New York Times*, 30 July 1981, p. A19; and *Afghanistan: A Year of Occupation*.
11. *Soviet Dilemmas*.
12. *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*, 6 November 1980, p. C7.
13. *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*, 17 November 1980, p. C3.
14. See Tass press releases in *FBIS Daily Report (Soviet Union)* 9 September and 29 December 1980, p. D1. Furthermore, see *Izvestia*, 20 August 1980, p. 5, translated in *FBIS Daily Report (Soviet Union)* 25 August 1980, p. D4. Also see "Russia in Afghanistan."
15. Cited in Wade, p. 523.
16. Klass.
17. Drew Middleton, "2 Afghans Who Fled Say Rebels Languish," *The New York Times*, 23 November 1980, p. 11.
18. *Soviet Dilemmas*.
19. See reports by Drew Middleton, "Afghan War: Rebels Fading," *The New York Times*, 17 November 1980, p. 15; and "Afghanistan: A Year Later," *The New York Times*, 26 December 1980, p. 7. Mining operations are described by George Wilson, "Soviets Lay Mines to Slow Afghan Guerrillas, Arms," *The Washington Post*, 8 July 1980, p. 1. Photographs of the new scatterable mines can be found in *Soldier of Fortune* (April 1981), pp. 23-24.
20. Numerous reports of lethal chemical use can be found in US Department of State, *Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea*, summer 1980. The State Department has recently changed its position on the Soviet use of lethal agents in Afghanistan from being "under investigation" to being "verified." See Undersecretary of State Walter Stoessel's statement, quoted in *The New York Times*, 15 September 1981, p. A6.
21. See, for example, accounts in Alexandre Benningsen, "Soviet Muslims and the World of Islam," *Problems of Communism*, 29 (March 1980), 48-49.
22. Alain Faudeux, "Soviet Captives Describe Afghan War Roles," *The Washington Post*, 28 September 1981, p. 15.
23. See, for example *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 7 August 1981, p. 2.
24. *Ibid*. Another account of the death of a Soviet advisor can be found in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30 September 1981, p. 3. A combat action on the Pakistani border is graphically described in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 26 September 1981.
25. For a comparison between Soviet methods in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan see Jiri Valenta, "From Prague to Kabul: the Soviet Style of Invasion," *International Security*, 5 (Fall 1980), 124-27.
26. Authoritative sources generally use 85,000 as the number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. There are some unconfirmed indications that another 20,000 may have been added. See Afghan Foreign Minister Dost's remarks, cited in Agence France Presse dispatch in *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*, 30 March 1981, p. C2; and Michael Kaufman, "Afghans Tell West That Soviet has Sent More Troops," *The New York Times*, 9 April 1981, p. 7.
27. Michael Kaufman, "Soviet and Indian Leaders Criticize Any Interference in Southwest Asia," *The New York Times*, 12 December 1980, p. 12.
28. Robert Rand, "Cuba Continues to Take an Ambiguous Stand in Soviet Actions in Afghanistan," *Radio*

*Liberty Research Bulletin* RL56/80, 6 February 1980, p. 1. Subsequent reports in the European press concerning the involvement of Cuban troops in Afghanistan have not yet been verified by official sources. For an example of such reports see *FBIS Daily Report (South Asia)*, 1 December 1980, pp. C8-C9.

29. R. W. Apple, "Some Comrades Question Soviet Policy," *The New York Times*, 1 March 1981, p. 3.

30. Brezhnev's offer of a withdrawal as a quid pro quo for a security guarantee was made in February 1980. Karmal's proposals followed in May and were detailed in *Pravda*, 15 May 1980, p. 5.

31. See a detailed account of US actions to arm the rebels by David Binder, "US Supplying Afghan Insurgents With Arms in a Covert Operation," *The New York Times*, 16 February 1980, p. 1. That account was later denied by the US government. In 1980, the best source of rebel arms appears to have been Afghan deserters and the Soviets themselves. This trend may be changing. Islamic nations, especially Egypt, appear to have stepped up their efforts in this area. See Michael Kaufman, "Afghans Said to get New Guns After Trip to Egypt," *The New York Times*, 22 January 1981, p. 3; and "Afghan Rebels Bristle With New Arms," *The New York Times*, 14 April 1981, p. 3. See also Carl Bernstein, "Arms for Afghanistan," *The New Republic*, 18 July 1981, pp. 8-10; and Anwar Sadat's oblique confirmation of the US role in "Sadat Says U.S. Buys Soviet Arms in Egypt for Afghan Rebels," *The New York Times*, 23 September 1981, p. A15.

32. Ismail Patel, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, 11 February 1981, p. A26.

33. For a detailed description of violations of Pakistani sovereignty see Agence France Presse release in *FBIS Daily*

*Report (South Asia)*, 4 December 1980, pp. C2-C3.

34. Michael Kaufman, "Disaffected Afghans Said to Aid Rebels," *The New York Times*, 7 November 1980, p. A3.

35. *FBIS Daily Report (Soviet Union)*, 24 February 1981, p. 20.

36. Anonymous experts have indicated that even a two division reinforcement would be logistically difficult. Barry Shlacter, "Soviets Might Pour Troops into Afghanistan," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 October 1981, p. 13.

37. Quoted in Lord Saint Brides, "Afghanistan: the Empire Plays to Win," *Orbis*, 24 (Fall 1980), 536.

38. See Tyrus Cobb, "From Russia with Doves," unpublished International Research and Exchanges Board trip report, January 1981.

39. Newell, p. 209.

40. For a different view on the prospects for and the value of a negotiated settlement, see Selig Harrison, "Dateline Afghanistan: Exit Through Finland?" *Foreign Policy*, 41 (Winter 1980-81), 163-87.

41. Edward Luttwak, "After Afghanistan, What?" *Commentary* (April 1980), 40-48.

42. Drew Middleton, "Moscow's Goal in Afghanistan: Encircle Iran?" *The New York Times*, 6 April 1980, p. 16.

43. Selig Harrison, "Nightmare in Baluchistan," *Foreign Policy*, 65 (Fall 1978), 136-60. A recent firsthand account of Baluchi resentment of the Pakistani government can be found in William Ellis and James Stanfield, "Pakistan Under Pressure," *National Geographic*, 159 (May 1981), 668-702.

44. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 189.

