

The Civil War in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Author analyses (a) the causes leading to the Afghan Civil War 1979-1989 (the war is above all the result of global rivalries between the super-power states and conflicting political systems); (b) Politburo decision to send Soviet troops into Afghanistan (there is reason to believe that the leaders of the Soviet Union became "victims" of strategic misinformation, skillfully put into effect by American intelligence agencies); (c) the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan (brought about an intensification of the internal Afghan conflict, and brought about an abrupt international reaction, especially from the US, the NATO countries, the countries of the Islamic world and China); (d) combat operations (the Soviet troops conducted mainly partial military operations in the DRA, with very limited forces and equipment); (e) the national reconciliation policy and withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan (A civil war should end through consensus within a given society. Such a consensus has not been achieved in Afghanistan to this day, and therefore the war continues); (f) the Civil War without Soviet troops (After Soviet troops departed, the scale of fighting between the Afghans themselves increased); and provides (g) summations and conclusions (The Afghan conflict facilitated the defeat of the USSR in a global military and strategic confrontation between the two super-powers, socio-political systems, and military blocs. One million men passed through Afghanistan. The dead numbered 14,626. About 50,000 men were wounded, 6,669 were disabled, and over 500,000 contracted various severe illnesses. In addition, 147 tanks, 1,312 armored vehicles, 233 artillery guns and mortars, 114 airplanes and 322 helicopters were lost).

Causes for leading to the Civil War

The causes of the Civil War in Afghanistan can be conditionally subdivided into internal and external, objective and subjective causes, although they are, of course, interconnected.

During the last two decades, events in Afghanistan have brought this country, one of the most backward and poorest nations of the world, increased attention from the international community. The contentious situation arose in Afghanistan during the mid-1970s, immediately after Prince Mohammed Daud in 1973 overthrew King Zahir Shah, abolished the monarchy and proclaimed himself president of the republic. Supporters of the

deposed king, as well as representatives of leftist forces and Islamic fundamentalists, initiated the struggle against Daud. Afghani-Soviet relations at the time were good. By 1978, there were over two thousand Soviet technical, economic, and military advisers in Afghanistan. The total sum of Soviet loans reached a level of 1.265 million dollars, while American loans and non-returnable grants reached a total of 470 million dollars.

The situation in the country noticeably deteriorated following the military coup in April 1978 carried out by a relatively small group of people with the support of the army and certain lower middle class elements. As a result of this adventurism and voluntaristic action, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was proclaimed. And although the Soviet Union was not directly involved in the revolution (it appeared to Soviet representatives in Kabul like "a bolt from the blue"), in the USSR such a turn of events was welcomed with satisfaction—even more so since the members of the PDPA proclaimed a policy of establishing socialism in the country. This, in fact, set the tone for overall aid and support to the new regime from the Soviet leadership.

From that moment Afghanistan found itself drawn into the orbit of the fierce confrontation that marked the apex of the "Cold War" between two different socio-political systems. This is precisely what makes it possible to explain the importance attached to Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as other countries. In my article, I will briefly examine some aspects of this conflict, its results and the lessons learned.

At first (after the military coup), the US administration did not have a unified approach to the situation in Afghanistan. However, the US national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, convinced the administration that although growing Soviet influence in the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) did threaten US national security, the situation also provided a valuable political opportunity for the Americans in their global conflict with the USSR. As stated specifically in a paper submitted to the State Department: "...the overthrow of the DRA would show the rest of the world, especially the 'Third World,' the fallacy of the Soviet concept of the inevitable socialist course of history."¹

The US, having accused the USSR of exporting revolution, began to exert pressure on the latter, inducing it to abandon support of the DRA and make concessions in a series of other issues. After the situation created in Afghanistan as a result of the military coup had been discussed during the May (1978) session of NATO, and upon consulting with Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, that summer the White House already took concrete steps to destabilize the state of affairs in the DRA.

At the same time, political priorities in the region and the methods of realizing them were re-evaluated. A policy was adopt-

ed to expand cooperation with various Arab states and with Beijing, and then with Pakistan. Great efforts were undertaken during this period to induce the governments of the Arab states to pay less attention to local problems, including to their relations with Israel. In February 1979, President Carter declared that the Americans are prepared to protect their vital interests by any means, including military force, be it in the Near East or anywhere else.

Most countries in the West, their allies in the Islamic world and also China, reacted negatively, even with hostility, to events in Afghanistan. They saw in them the threat of a shift in the regional balance of power to the advantage of the USSR.

The new leaders in Afghanistan, on coming to power, began to introduce radical transformations in the country and implement an impractical maximalist course. In a feudal society with deep-rooted remnants of a gentile-tribal order and the domination of Islam in all spheres of life, they proclaimed their intentions to establish socialism in the shortest possible period, for which there was neither a social nor an economic basis, nor mass support. Concentrating their main efforts in three basic directions – the agricultural sector, the national question and religion – they ruined the system of village management, shaped over the centuries, exacerbated ethnic tensions and provoked a harsh negative reaction from the clergy.

The new government also proved incapable of responding to the expectations of the broad masses of the population and enlisting their support. The land and water reforms, as well as transformations in the social field, had a piecemeal nature and did not take into consideration the specific aspects of Afghan society. The government committed the grossest errors and leftist deviations in the socio-economic sphere, in ethnic issues and with regard to religion. This pushed the population into the opposition camp.

Leaning on support from the Soviet Communist Party, the leadership of the PDPA was able to impose its will upon the people and to take a line of action towards establishing an authoritarian regime in Afghanistan based on fear and coercion. However, in this country, with its traditional democratic liberties, this could not but encounter fierce resistance from the population. It was precisely the errors permitted by the PDPA's leaders, who had strove to achieve quick results through radical reforms and force, that brought about civil war in Afghanistan.

It soon became evident that the government was in no condition to secure control over the situation in the country, even more so since it did not have firm support in the armed forces, and desertion became widespread.

The military coup brought about a breakdown in the balance of power that had been developing in the country for years. It pro-

voked a new spiral of tense rivalry between the US and the USSR, since it was regarded by the Americans as having reinforced the Soviet Union's position in this region.

To settle the conflicts that had arisen in Afghan society, and to avert civil war, it would have been necessary to pursue a flexible policy, based on the traditions and customs of the Afghans, which would have taken into account the real situation in Afghanistan and the distribution of forces both in the country and on the international scene. But this the members of the PDPA could not ensure.

In a situation of political disorder and internal party strife, the general secretary of the PDPA, N.M. Taraki, was soon removed from the post of president and killed. "His faithful disciple" H. Amin, a man with avanturist leanings, a dubious political profile and external ties, demoralized the party and isolated the regime from the people even more once he seized power through harsh repression.

This created conducive conditions for setting the opposition forces into action, as the latter immediately established ties with Islamic states and the USA. With external support, rebel fighting units began to form, relying on politically backward peasants and artisans. The Muslim clergy, having been subjected to persecution by the Amin regime, assumed a hostile stance. Disturbances broke out among the tribes whose interests and historical traditions the government had not considered. Thousands of refugees began to flow into Pakistan – and, partially, into Iran.

Rebel military camps sprang up in Pakistan. These became a military and political base for the Afghan counter-revolution, and from them new and increasingly larger armed units were sent into Afghanistan. Through Pakistan, the rebels received increasing amounts of American, as well as Chinese and other arms, and as diverse aid from Western and Islamic countries.

The Politburo decision to send Soviet troops into Afghanistan

Under conditions of growing tension in and around Afghanistan, the Afghan leaders began to send appeals for assistance to the DRA, which would entail the direct use of Soviet troops. They were delivered personally during meetings between the leaders of the two countries, through Soviet representatives in Kabul, and also during visits of top-level party and government delegations.

In such circumstances, the Afghan leadership frequently turned to the Soviet Union, requesting military aide through the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The first such appeal was made by N. M. Taraki in March 1979, during the Herat uprising, when he arrived in Moscow and met with the leaders of the USSR, including Leonid Brezhnev. However, the request was at that

time categorically rejected. The Soviet leaders acted similarly on subsequent occasions as well. Yet in December their position regarding the deployment of troops changed, because Brezhnev changed his opinion. True, it should be said that his views were not shared by some members of the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, first of all not by A. Kosygin, nor by a number of top General Staff officials (N.B. Ogarov, V.I. Varennikov), and not by the head of the ground forces, I. G. Pavlovsky.

Deployment of Soviet troops was based on a corresponding article (Article 4) existing in the Afghan-Soviet agreement (1978) and also on the fact that the request by the Afghan government and its acceptance on the part of the Soviet Union was exclusively a matter between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, the two of which could, by joint agreement, regulate their mutual relations. Just as any other member of the UN, they had the right not only to individual but also to collective self-defense, as provided by Article 51 of the UN Charter.

At that time, the Soviet leadership long refused to act on the appeal of the Afghans to dispatch Soviet troops to Afghanistan. Yet on December 12, 1979 a positive decision in this matter was nonetheless made. The decision was taken against a background of contradictory, rapidly changing, and acute factors that directly effected the Soviet Union's state security interests. The last straw that tipped the balance in favor of troop deployment was a decision made by the NATO foreign and defense ministers during their December 12 summit in Brussels. They had approved a scenario involving the deployment of new American "Cruise" and "Pershing-2" mid-range missiles in Western Europe. By moving arms to Western Europe, they could strike at the territory of the Soviet Union. In the opinion of Soviet leaders, after this step NATO no longer had anything to lose. However, as the further events showed, the action in question, taken without appropriate predictions and considerations of the effect that the deployment of Soviet troops would have on development of the situation in and around Afghanistan, brought tragedy to both sides.

While examining the issue of Soviet troop deployment in Afghanistan, it should be noted that the realities and the evaluations of the international situation at the time without doubt effected the elaboration of Soviet policy in regard to the DRA. Analysis of the international situation at the end of the 1970s shows that it was characterized by extreme tension. This was a period when détente was abandoned, when the world was being drawn into a new escalation of arms build-ups, when the West launched wide-scale activities to undermine the USSR and its allies. The "Cold War" was on. Global military and strategic confrontation emerged between the two superpowers (the US and the USSR), the

two systems, and the two military blocks. It was still unclear how events would develop in Iran, where Khomeini had come to power. The anti-Shah revolution in Iran and the establishment of an Islamic regime there had forced the Americans to seek new site for military bases. Thus, mass aid to the Afghan rebels and the increasing concentration of US forces in the region, in the immediate vicinity of Soviet borders, could not but arouse serious alarm among the leaders of the Soviet Union. Moreover, since the end of the 1970s, the development of the détente process in relations between the USSR and the USA had noticeably broken down.

Under pressure from Washington, a long-term program of armament and rearmament was initiated in Western European countries. The Carter administration unilaterally decided to freeze, for an indefinite period, the ratification of the SALT-2 accords. This was interpreted in the Soviet Union as a sharp change in the general military and political policy of the United States. NATO examined the issue of annual increases in the military budgets of its members up to the end of the twentieth century. The Americans created rapid intervention forces, etc. Pursuant to this, the nuclear potential of the block was increased in an attempt by the West to undermine strategic parity.

Such a confrontational approach spread into virtually all areas of the relationship between the two large countries and their allies. The Americans placed an entire series of world regions within the sphere of Western vital interests. Naturally, the revolutions of 1978 in Afghanistan—which the Soviet Union had not in any way instigated—and later in Iran, were perceived largely in the context of this confrontation. Attempting to compensate for a weakened position in the Middle East, the US stationed its military-naval forces in the Persian Gulf and developed plans for the invasion of Iran. The Americans, as well as their allies, had to ask themselves how far Afghanistan would go in its relations with the USSR. A policy was adopted to change the regime in Kabul.

Ideas emerged on setting up American radio-electronic surveillance equipment in Afghanistan to monitor the USSR, and maybe some forms of missiles in case pro-Western forces came to power in that country. The Soviet leadership had learned of plans drawn up by the American and Pakistani intelligence agencies to kindle nationalistic, pan-Islamic sentiments in the Soviet Central Asian republics by using the territories of contiguous states. It is easy to assume that under such circumstances the Soviet leadership was most likely inclined to conclude that a fundamental change in the situation in Afghanistan, the strengthened position of the USA and its allies in that country, would produce, in regard to the USSR, an overall negative shift in the balance of power, not only in the region, but also within the Soviet Union's southern

boundaries. The West, undoubtedly, was hoping to stir up, through Afghanistan, a wave of national-democratic revolutions. This was, precisely, indicated repeatedly to representatives of brotherly parties, who at the time considered Soviet-American rivalry in the Third World as being natural.

Analyses show that the Soviet Union was also disturbed by the fact that the US and China were continuing to draw closer together on an anti-Soviet basis. In particular, the two countries had arrived at agreements on exchanging visits at the level of cabinet members, trade delegations and military missions; on reducing the number of US troops on Taiwan (while maintaining the right of the US to sell arms to Taiwan); on Chinese support for American peace efforts in the Near East; on establishing discrete Chinese ties with Israel; on using American influence to improve relations between Saudi Arabia and China; on the willingness of Washington to alter COCOM procedures so as to facilitate the transfer of new technologies to China; on American and Chinese aid to certain regimes in Africa, especially to those that would be able to raise the cost of Soviet-Cuban intervention, and also on issues such as Afghanistan, aid to Pakistan and joint efforts in Southeast Asia to obstruct Soviet support of Vietnam.

Taking such a step, the Soviet leadership was acting on the basis of assessments that existed at the time regarding the situation in the world and in the region, and also on the basis of views on the prospects of rivalry with the US. The predominant opinion was that deployment of American missiles in Europe had made Soviet installations vulnerable, right up to the Urals, and that this action would make it possible to reduce tensions and divert attention from European areas. The reinforcement of aircraft carrier concentration in the Persian Gulf and of the air force on Diego García Island, created problems for anti-aircraft defense in industrial locations and the main petroleum, natural gas and coal extraction centers in Siberia. The possibility of placing American equipment in Afghanistan, in light of the revolution in Iran, intensified the situation further. In the opinion of some experts, the danger existed that the Americans might intervene in Afghanistan, which would produce a threat to the security of the southern borders of the USSR.

Moreover, a considerable role was likewise played by the personal factor, by the ambitions of certain Soviet politicians (H. Amin could not be forgiven for having ignored the request to spare N. Taraki's life, made by the Soviet Politburo, and also in person by Brezhnev). It was precisely the personal ambitions of the general secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee that had a decisive influence on the other leaders of the Soviet Union, hence eliminating wise statesmanship and forcing a change in the previously expressed conviction that the use of one's own troops in the

internal Afghan conflict would be futile. A certain role was played, apparently, by the wish of Soviet leaders to prevent the establishment of Amin's terrorist regime and to protect the Afghan people from genocide, while also not allowing the opposition to come to power, thus preserving an ideological ally. Moreover, the style of the leadership was, at the time, dominated by Great Power thinking. One could notice, at the time, a somewhat condescending attitude towards the Afghans, and not only towards them. However, underestimation of one's opponent always leads to gravely negative results.

The Soviet leadership was also greatly worried by the prospects regarding the evolution of the regime. The personal power of Hafizulla Amin was quickly rising in the party and in the country. Representatives of the opposition forces in the PDPA frequently turned the attention of the Soviet side to the fact that the reckless actions of the Aminist clique were leading to the complete physical extermination of the country's national-patriotic and progressive forces. Reports of Amin's collaboration with the CIA became particularly severe.

In addition, it should be noted that in their assessment of the situation in and around the DRA, Soviet leaders also reacted with alarm to declarations made by Islamic fundamentalists that in the event that they came to power they would carry the struggle under the green flag of jihad onto the territory of the Soviet Central Asian republics. Likewise, Soviet leaders found themselves in a situation in which they could not refuse support to a "brotherly" party – for this would not be understood by their allies nor by other Communist parties. They strove to act in the interests of state security on behalf of a higher goal: to save the "socialist" course of development in Afghanistan.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the complex measures taken during this time by the Americans, not only in Afghanistan (in particular, the Strategic Defense Initiative and the "swing" in the American arms race), it may be said that Soviet intelligence "swallowed the bait"; they were intentionally led into deception by the excellent use of extensive misinformation on a strategic scale. While amassing troops for deployment in Afghanistan, the military command vainly nurtured illusions that it could achieve the element of surprise and secrecy. Perhaps some details even could be kept secret, but this was hardly that important. The main point is that the Soviets found ourselves in a trap from which they extracted themselves only after great efforts and losses. Not having any idea about the misinformation, Soviet leaders pursued the arms race beyond all permissible levels, by which they undermined the economy of the country and brought the subsistence of the population to poverty. The same can be said for the deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The "Afghan War" was a segment of

the “Cold War” in which the American strategists strove to achieve political goals without direct armed force, but rather through the application of other forms of coercion, undermining the power and military organization of the USSR from within, which brought victory without a fight and bloodshed.

The Soviet Union underestimated the influence of the international factor. It was assumed that Washington would not react too keenly to such an operation. Well, isn't Afghanistan a purely Soviet patrimony? This would not seriously effect its relations with the US. After all, while the Vietnam War was going on, for example, the Soviets continued to cooperate with the Americans.

However, objectively it was favorable for the United States to have the Soviet Union tied up in regional conflict for an extended time. The US received with satisfaction the information that Soviet troops had been sent to Afghanistan, and it protracted their stay in the country as long as possible. The goal was to exhaust the Soviet Union economically and morally, to force it to carry the back-breaking burden of a drawn-out war.

In my view, there was no overriding need to send troops to the DRA. No objective circumstances, even then, necessitated it. The subjective, “personal” factor was decisive. And we went there to secure peace, but what did we bring was war. It is extremely important to consider this fact today, when making decisions on conducting peace operations under the aegis of the UN. After all, the deployment in combat zones even of multinational peace-keeping troops will often play the role of detonator, provoking an escalation of the conflict and showing itself to be scarcely effective.

The officially proclaimed primary goal of the Soviet presence in the DRA was peace-making. This was formulated unequivocally: providing assistance to stabilize the situation, repelling possible aggression from abroad. The Soviet troops had to take up garrison duty and not be involved in internal conflict and combat operations. They were ordered to offer aid to the local population everywhere, to protect it from gangs, and also to distribute food-stuffs, fuel, and other necessities. It was predicted that the very presence of Soviet troops would become a strong stabilizing factor, that it would significantly reinforce the PDPA regime, that it would have a restraining effect on opposition movements... Today, of course, it is widely known that such arrangements were unrealistic, but at the time it was considered acceptable. In reality, the troops were expected to secure Hafizulla Amin's removal from power and support the establishment of Babrak Karmal's regime. According to estimates, the Soviet troops should have been withdrawn from Afghanistan in three to four months. If that had happened, possibly there would not have been such severe consequences for the Soviet Union. However, in life everything

turns out differently. The troops stayed in the country for over ten years.

The Deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan

The deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan brought about an intensification of the internal Afghan conflict. The Soviet military presence was associated with the spread of institutions, foreign to the national peculiarities and feelings of the Afghan people, which did not respect the multi-structured economy and other specificities: tribal, regional. The military and political situation, contrary to expectations and hopes, did not improve, but rather deteriorated significantly.

The arrival of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and their later involvement in the war on the side of the Kabul regime brought about an abrupt international reaction, especially from the US, the NATO countries, the countries of the Islamic world, China... They saw it as a direct attempt by Moscow to disrupt—to its own advantage—the strategic balance of power that had taken shape until then on the global and regional level. In their opinion, owing to further instability in Iran, there was no longer any other barrier in Southwest Asia to a Soviet breakthrough to the Indian Ocean. The arising imbalance was quickly eliminated by the amassing of arms and supplies for the Afghan opposition in Pakistan, and by reinforcing Western military presence in strategically important zones in the region.

Among Western states, the US was the most negative in its reactions to events in Afghanistan. Disturbed by the acute crisis in American-Iranian relations, by the possibility of socio-political shifts in the oil producing nations of the Near and Middle East, the administration concluded that events in Afghanistan destabilized US influence in the region even more, at a time critical to its interests. Recognizing that it was impossible to directly intervene in the affairs of the DRA with the aim of aiding the Afghan opposition, the US placed high hopes in the use of Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, certain Islamic countries, and also its allies in NATO.

The American government reached a decision to urgently send arms and technical supplies to Pakistan, up to the sum of 100 million dollars. The USA conducted consultations with the leaders of Pakistan and China, and likewise within the framework of NATO.

Pakistan, which on the eve of the "Afghan War" had been facing the threat of economic and political bankruptcy, was transformed into a "front-line state" and started to receive extensive military and economic aid from the US and Saudi Arabia. The United States took an unprecedented step – supplying such aid in circumvention of American legislation that prohibited giving it to

countries that were developing nuclear arms. The regime of Zia-ul-Haq also succeeded in establishing direct contacts with the leaders of Great Britain, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Japan, having reinforced its role in the Islamic world and consolidated its ties with China in the business of developing nuclear weapons. In connection with this, one may recall the actions of the US in the analogous problem regarding Iran and Iraq.

Pakistan expressed a strong negative reaction to events in Afghanistan, deducing that the Soviet army would soon essentially be present on the Pakistani border. Among Arab states, the most negative response to the arrival of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was that of Egypt. The move of the USSR was condemned by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates... Yet in leftist Arab circles, the Soviet Union's actions were received with satisfaction.

The actions of the Soviet Union provoked a negative reaction in Beijing. Chinese leaders accused the Soviet Union of trying to establish full control over Afghanistan and expressed their readiness to support any American activity in connection with events in the DRA.

After making officially a negative statement on Afghanistan, the political and religious leaders of Iran assumed a relatively quiet stance, which was explained by the extreme tensions in Iranian-American relations, by Khomeini's desire to improve relations with the USSR, and by Iran's interest in the Soviet "veto" during the debate on sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council.

The further development of events showed the Afghan theme interested the US and its allies in as much as it enabled following a course of increased confrontation with the USSR. Applying various methods of pressure, the Americans strove to exploit the situation that had arisen here as one of the factors in their external policy, after having launched an extensive campaign to discredit the USSR.

When Soviet troops had entered Afghanistan, the United States, their allies, certain Arabic and Islamic regimes, as well as China, openly announced their support and aid to the opposition. This aid was shown even before, but now it significantly increased. Afghanistan found itself isolated on the international level and found support only in the socialist camp, mainly in the Soviet Union.

The United States launched a propaganda campaign aimed at demonstrating to the leaders and people of the Islamic states that the USSR, and not the US, was the "mortal enemy of Islam." Thus, the US strove to undercut the Soviet Union's position in the "Third World," primarily in the Arabic East, and also to exert pres-

sure on American NATO allies and Japan to obtain international condemnation of the Soviet Union for its role in Afghan events.

During the session of the Security Council on Afghan issue on January 14, 1980, most member states of the UN General Assembly condemned the USSR's actions, calling for immediate withdrawal of Soviet units from the DRA (104 countries voted "for," 48 were "opposed" or "abstained"). The actions of the Soviet Union were also condemned by countries of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as by some socialist countries.

Listed concisely, the measures taken by US government took against the USSR, after comprehensive deliberation and consultations with its allies, included the following: pushing demands in the UN Security Council for a condemnation the USSR for open, unprovoked aggression against an independent state; ending deliberation in Congress on the SALT-2 accords until the aggression stopped; a temporary freeze of all bilateral negotiations, top-level visits, transfers of advanced technology and, possibly, imposing a ban on the sale of grain; limiting loans for the USSR from the US and its European allies; refusal to diplomatically recognize the new government in Afghanistan by the USA and, consequently, by the NATO member states; providing periodic aid to Pakistan in order to reinforce its defense potential; reaching an understanding with the governments of Egypt and Somalia for the use, by the Americans, of military bases on their territories in the event of a military threat to the Middle East or the Persian Gulf region; adopting a covert program to provide Muslim insurgents in Afghanistan with anti-tank and anti-aircraft projectiles of Soviet make, possibly from Egypt; encouraging China to provide aid to the insurgents in the form of machine-guns, mortars, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines; and boycotting the Olympic Games in Moscow.

By sending troops to Afghanistan, the Soviet Union crossed the permissible limits of confrontation in the "Third World." The benefits of this action showed themselves insignificant in comparison with the damage that was inflicted to the country's interests: in addition to two fronts of opposition—in Europe against NATO and in East Asia against China—a third dangerous hotbed of military and political tension arose along the southern flank of the USSR, in unfavorable geographic and socio-political conditions; the anti-Soviet bloc surrounding the USSR from the West to the East, was significantly extended and consolidated; the influence of the USSR on the Non-Aligned Movement, especially on the Islamic world, significantly suffered; détente was blocked and the political preconditions for limiting the arms race were eliminated; economic and technological pressure on the USSR rose sharply. Afghanistan had for many years been to us a friendly country;

however, after deploying troops on Afghan territory, instead of a friend it made an enemy.

The United States did everything it could to make the Soviet Union pay a high price for its involvement in Afghanistan, choosing Afghanistan as a polygon for decisive counteraction against "Soviet expansion." Defeat of the latter had to bring about not only the withdrawal of Soviet troops from that country and the downfall of the "pro-Communist Kabul regime," but also destabilization of the situation in the USSR itself.

A plan developed by the CIA in collaboration with the secret service of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, code-named "Program-M," counted on extensive use of the Islamic factor and, above all, of the armed Islamic opposition in Afghanistan. It foresaw a coordinated operation by all mujahidin units, providing arms to them, organizing the training of combatants in special centers, and the creation of a spy network in the DRA and in the southern parts of the USSR. Realization of the intended measures also entailed the engagement of participation of various Islamic centers operating in Islamic states, including organizations with a fundamentalist character.

In providing military aid to the Afghan democratic forces, the Soviet leaders, contrary to the view of military experts, had overestimated the effect that the very deployment of troops to the DRA might have. Also, they had not sufficiently studied the fact that, due to centuries of war with different subjugators, a firmly ingrained view had formed in the awareness of each Afghan, by which foreign troops entering the country, even with good intentions, are always foreign occupiers with whom one must do battle.

With the arrival of Soviet troops in the DRA, the main unifying ideological and political catchword of the anti-government forces became the call to holy war, "jihad." One should admit that this call of the Mullahs was understood by a large part of the Afghan population, fed by centuries of Muslim tradition and also the action of the Islamic authorities.

It is no secret that for many years the Soviet Union's policy of foreign security had been built to a great degree on ideological dogmas. These, precisely, became the criteria for judging the validity of the decisions made at the time. The state and national interests of the country were subordinated to them. Particular attention was given to supporting ideological allies.

Conducting combat operations

Finding themselves in Afghanistan, the Soviet troops conducted mainly partial military operations in the DRA, with very limited forces and equipment. In all of the years of the war, there was not one case when the entire body of the LSTC (Limited Soviet Troop

Contingent) simultaneously and in all areas conducted active combat operations against the rebels. Military operations were limited to the following:

- combat with the most dangerous opposition units;
- destruction or capture of their base areas, together with their reserves of arms, materials and technical supplies;
- control of the main strategic communications with the aim of securing stable administrative and economic ties between the center and periphery;
- escorting convoys with material supplies – both for the LSTC and for the Afghan government;
- rendering aide to government troops in blocking the Afghan-Pakistani and Afghan-Iranian borders, with the aim of preventing the arrival of manpower in Afghanistan for the opposition units and the passage of caravans bringing them supplies;
- providing support to Afghan troops during operations against armed opposition formations.

However, with the composition of forces and equipment at the disposal of the Soviet troops in the DRA, it was impossible to fully solve the entire complex of military tasks with the necessary effectiveness. Yet even taking this into account, the mujahidin could not stand up to regular troops in open combat. They suffered defeats. But these defeats did not cost them as much as victories cost its troops.

They faced difficult specific problems when operating in high altitude conditions, with low and high air temperatures, green zones and desert areas, with a complex epidemiological situation... The personnel turned out to be poorly prepared for combat in the conditions of Afghanistan. Here everything happened differently than predicted in tactical textbooks and military manuals, different from the way in which the troops had been instructed. Likewise, the Soviet army had not participated in actual combat operations for a long time. This why the war became a war of continuous "surprises."

Soviet regular military units, sub-units, and individual servicemen turned out to be insufficiently trained for the operational tactics of the small mobile armed groups of the opposition. Until the middle of 1980, they conducted actions in a traditional manner, conducting raids mainly along roads and in valleys, where it was possible to apply military technology; these proved highly ineffective, not producing results. There were also problems with the control of operations: if bits of information on the situation and the troops came to government troops, they would immediately fall into the hands of the opposition, as a result of which combat operations proved ineffective.

It was necessary to seek out totally different forms and methods of conducting combat operations, different from those that had been described in military manuals. Consequently, operational tactics were continuously re-evaluated, corrected, brought into line with local conditions.

In Afghanistan, the 40th Army, fighting armed opposition units, operated, as a rule, with success – although it had to suffer great burdens and hardships, since it had to fight in very complex climatic conditions. Mountain and desert areas, high and low temperatures, sudden downpours, low oxygen levels, the absence of water, infectious diseases – all this contributed to make additional difficulties. Yet throughout the “Afghan War,” not a single sub-unit of Soviet troops either retreated or surrendered its position. However, partial successes did not lead to reducing tensions, and the scale of the rebel movement expanded. After all, the main causes lay not in the military, but in the political sphere.

The opposition quickly restored its forces. It created new armed units from among refugees in Pakistan and from the local population. It also did not experience a shortage of arms. The main principles by which these armed units conducted operations were: avoiding direct clashes with the superior forces of regular troops; not transforming operations into positional warfare, forsaking possession of occupied territories for a long time; attacking suddenly, extensively using guerrilla tactics, and also terrorism, blackmail and the ideological preparation of government soldiers and the population. The level of sophistication of their equipment and arms, especially small-scale arms, and likewise the use of terrorist fighting methods, enabled the armed units of the opposition to solve strategic tasks in the civil war with the use of small forces.

As the war in Afghanistan showed, against terrorists it is essential to apply forestalling measures, utilizing sub-units specially trained for these purposes and applying special fighting tactics. Negotiations with terrorists are, as a rule, largely ineffective and encourage them in the further implementation of terror. In local wars, a professional army must be used, well trained and with battle experience.

The intensity of the internal crisis in Afghanistan continued to grow, and the Soviet military presence was associated with the expansion of institutions, foreign to the national character and feelings of the Afghan people, not in tune with the multi-structured economy and other specific features, such as tribal and religious factors.

Every year the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated further. The extent of the territory over which the PDPA held sway persistently grew smaller. Declarations by the government that it controlled the greater part of the country were refuted by reality.

One line of action was clearly visible among the leaders of the DRA: fight the mujahidin on the whole with military means. In this they counted to a great degree on the Soviet army. But mere military measures could not attain the desired result. Unless the opposition was deprived of its social basis, of the possibility of reinforcing itself with local and external resources, it would be impossible to achieve a fundamental improvement of the situation in the country in a short time. However, this is precisely what the Afghan leadership did not want to comprehend, or perhaps such a position suited it.

In the USSR, many leaders began to understand that it could no longer continue this way. To them, and not just to military leaders, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the internal Afghan problem could not be solved through by military means. Such a course was leading to a dead-end. Not immediately, but still, a conviction developed: new approaches are needed, additional steps in the development of a strategy capable of extinguishing the fire of this fratricidal war.

Yet some forces remained, primarily the US, to whom it was advantageous that the Soviet Union remain in this war as long as possible, suffering political and economic losses. The Americans not only prolonged negotiations on an Afghan settlement and provided aid and support to the armed units of the opposition, they also did everything to make the USSR pay the highest possible price for its military involvement in Afghanistan. The director of the CIA at the time, William Casey, conducted an active operation meant to undermine the Soviet Union. In October 1984, Casey made a secret trip to Islamabad. He suggested, and the Pakistanis agreed, to extend destabilizing propoganda activity through Afghanistan to the southern Soviet republics with their predominately Muslim populations. Management of this illicit activity was conducted by Pakistan's Interdepartmental Intelligence Directorate. There were also suggestions to conduct raids into Soviet territory, but fearing an adequate response from the Soviet side and an unfavorable effect of such an operations on Soviet-American relations, the Reagan administration did not decide to initiate an extensive underground war on the territory of the USSR at the time.

In March 1985 president Reagan signed national security resolution No. 166, which provided for increased clandestine military aide to the mujahidin and clarified the new goal of the secret Afghan war: the defeat of Soviet troops in Afghanistan by means of covert operations and a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

At the same time the Reagan administration, due to strategic considerations, torpedoed negotiations on an Afghan settlement that were being conducted under the aegis of the UN. In particular, in June 1982, following the first official negotiations in

Geneva, President Reagan decided to increase the amount of clandestine aid to the rebels. In December 1982, after the meeting between Yuri V. Andropov and Zia-ul-Haq, during which the latter was told that the USSR would leave Afghanistan “quickly” if Pakistan would stop its support to the resistance, Reagan gave instructions to the CIA to deliver more, and higher quality, arms to the mujahidin. Then when Diego Cordoves, in May 1983, declared that “95 percent of the text of the preliminary comprehensive resolution is already complete,” the US government published information that it had shared with Saudi Arabia expenses of up to 50 million dollars on arms for the rebels. The negotiations immediately became more complicated. In March 1986, Cordoves declared that all elements were present for a comprehensive solution to the Afghan problem. And the Reagan administration began supplying the Afghan rebels with “Stinger” anti-aircraft missiles.

The passive, basically spur-of-the-moment and retaliatory military actions, relatively limited in scale, that the Soviet troops had carried out in Afghanistan, i.e. along the lines developed by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff labeled low-intensity conflict, could not bring about defeat of the enemy, but at the same time it did wear down the Soviet Union, either economically and morally.

In connection with the participation of Soviet troops in the internal conflict in Afghanistan, the international prestige of the country began to fall: even in the eyes of its allies. The arguments offered by Soviet leaders on the righteousness of the Soviet military presence in the DRA were not satisfying. It was condemned in various forums, including in those conducted under the aegis of the UN, and with an overwhelming majority of the votes. The negative effects of this war started to make themselves felt within the Soviet Union. The death of Soviet boys in a foreign land aroused consternation not only in their families, but also in all decent people. In the mid-1980s, the Soviet leadership finally decided that it was essential to bring matters toward a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

The national reconciliation policy and withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan

In 1986 there was a change in the leadership of Afghanistan. The post of general secretary of the PDPA, and later also of president of Afghanistan, went to a new figure: Najibullah, a man willing to seek out solutions to the problems and who understood the expectations of his countrymen. He began to implement a completely new policy, calling for an end to the war – a policy of national reconciliation. The Afghan leadership developed its efforts to consolidate the armed forces and the local administration, to broaden the mass base of popular rule. The leadership

also set to work on resolving socio-economic problems, turning to the real needs of the entire population. In accordance with this, the position of government rule began to strengthen. One has to give credit to Najibullah and his colleagues: they showed outstanding courage, resolve and consistency, proposing and implementing a policy leading to the cessation of military conflicts, wherever this was possible.

The opposition, however, aware of the strategic orientation of Soviet leadership to pull its troops out of Afghanistan, and calculating that without the direct assistance of Soviet troops Najibullah's regime would not know how to protect its position, continued the course towards destroying him by armed means. It became clear that the opposition would not settle for sharing power today, if it could seize all of it tomorrow.

On April 14, 1988, with UN mediation in Geneva, the foreign ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a package of documents, calling for an end to the bloodshed in the RA. The US and the USSR stepped forward as guarantors assuring fulfillment of the agreements. The most essential aspect of the agreements, as it seems, was that in principle they provided the possibility of solving the main issue in the Afghan situation: halting armed and other interference in Afghanistan affairs from abroad.

In a bilateral agreement on the principles of mutual relations, the following was specified: Afghanistan and Pakistan accept the commitment that their territories must not be used in any way to violate the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and national unity of either side, or to destabilize the other side's political, economic and social stability; they pledge to abstain from assisting, encouraging and supporting, directly or indirectly, insurgent or separatist action, aimed at undermining the unity, or overthrowing the political order of the other side; they must not permit equipping, funding or recruitment of mercenaries in their territories for the purpose of hostile operations against the territory of the other side and, consequently, they deny assistance, including funds for training, supplying and transit to such mercenaries; they will not permit any aid to, use or tolerance of terrorist groups, saboteurs or subversives; they oblige themselves not to permit the presence or sheltering of camps and bases on their territories, as well as organizations for training, funding, supplying or arming persons or groups for the purpose of carrying out diversionary operations, creating disorder, disturbances, utilizing the mass media, or transporting arms, ammunition and equipment.

The bilateral agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan on the voluntary return of refugees obliged both sides to take the necessary measures for resolving the problem.

In accordance with these understandings, the USSR committed itself to withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan within a nine-

month period, starting from May 15, 1988. In the course of the first three months of the year, half of all Soviet troops were withdrawn.

Pakistan and the US had to stop all interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.

On the basis of these agreements, the Soviet Union pulled its troops out of Afghanistan. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, realized in exactly the period specified by the Geneva understanding (starting on May 15, 1988 and ending on February 15, 1989), was conducted in an organized manner and with minimal losses. At this time, the Soviets experienced virtually no problems. The mujahidin did not hinder the withdrawal of the troops and did not use any force against them.

The Civil War without Soviet troops

After Soviet troops departed from Afghanistan, not much changed in the country. The scale of the fighting between the Afghans themselves even increased. More and more people perished. It became clear that the cause was not, or maybe not so much, the presence of the Soviet troops in the RA! For they left Afghan territory and the war intensified! Apparently, the bloodshed benefited those who had profited greatly from the war, who continued to receive large dividends. Likewise, an entire generation of Afghans had come of age to whom participation in the war became a highly lucrative profession.

Having survived for three years after the end of military assistance and support from the USSR, the Najibullah regime nevertheless fell in April 1992. It would seem that now the war had come to an end, all mujahidin leaders proclaimed unanimously that they would establish peace and tranquility. But the war flared up with new vigor between the mujahidin themselves—former partners and rivals in the opposition party groups. The mujahidin leaders were utterly unable to share power. The country found itself divided into zones, where this or that mujahidin group would manage affairs. The political and territory integrity of Afghanistan was virtually shattered.

In this context, the Tajiks (B. Rabbani, Ahmad Shah Masud) had established their authority in Kabul and opposition between the Pashtu and members of ethnic minorities increased. A new force stepped onto the political scene in the form of the Taliban Islamic Movement, which was also fighting for power. In a brief time, the Taliban were able to take control of the greater part of Afghanistan, and here they established their institutions.

The Taliban had stepped forward with the slogan to “clean” the country of violence, murder, and lawlessness, but instead of

the promised relief, they threw millions of Afghans into conditions of great severity, the likes of which had never been seen in the past. In the zones under their influence, they set up Sheri'at laws. Thieves would have their fingers or hands cut off. Everywhere they destroyed television sets and video recorders ("boxes of the devil"). They issued orders forbidding the education of girls and the employment of women outside of the home, which placed many widows on the verge of death by hunger. Women were forbidden to appear in the streets without male escort. They had to wear traditional Muslim dress that covered them from head to foot...

The initial favorable impression of the Taliban rapidly turned into disillusionment. The regime they established – a mix of archaism and intolerance – was unacceptable for Afghanistan. Through the ostentatious Islamic fundamentalism one could detect a striving to restore the dominant position of the Pashtu.

Today, the country is virtually divided into several autonomous areas or zones, controlled by diverse groupings (the Taliban, Masud, Dustom, Khalil, Naderi etc.). The war in Afghanistan has continued to the present, and there is no end in sight.

What will happen in the future? Most likely a prolongation of the conflict awaits Afghanistan, but, plausibly, if the war stops, it seems the final result could look like this: a traditionally weak central government as well as powerful provincial (peripheral) rulers (field commanders, most likely, that had replaced traditional tribal chiefs in the provinces and with control over given zones), interacting with one another on the horizontal level and making concluding agreements... In order to remain in power in the provinces, they would naturally defend their positions from any central government – whatever it was. It is clear that the unity of the country can be preserved only if some inter-ethnic compromise can be achieved. And it is unlikely that a leading position in the Afghan state could be taken by members of non-Pashtu ethnic groups, such as Tajiks and Uzbeks. The Pashtu will maintain a dominant influence in the structures of power. A relative interethnic balance might be restored, with some predominance of the Pashtu people.

Since it is not likely that the Pashtu will be able, as before, to dictate their conditions to ethnic minorities, and the latter also will not give up their gains, there is also the likelihood that several autonomous zones or states will be formed in Afghan territory according to ethnic affiliations (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Khazarians). In this, however, much depends on whether the present leaders of the ethnic minorities will know how to arrive at agreements among themselves, for their coalition is extremely unstable and its basis is anti-Pashtuism. This is a very shaky foundation. If it collapses, then the Taliban will have the full strength to establish their control over the

entire territory of Afghanistan. Yet the war will not end with this. Armed units from among the ethnic minorities will prolong it through guerrilla methods.

The possibility should also not be excluded that a confederation of states or some other type of compromise, with consideration for the balance of forces created in the region, might emerge in the territory of Afghanistan. It is wholly possible that new states on an ethnic basis will form in Afghan territory and, partially, in Pakistan and Iran – for example, Pushtunistan, Khazarajata, Baluchistan. Although this process is very long, much depends on what sort of interests will be pursued by influential foreign powers: first of all by the USA, Western Europe, and the Islamic states.

Apparently the Afghans themselves cannot stop the war and, in all likelihood, international mechanisms will have to be introduced to force the warring groups to make peace. However, priority must be given to political methods of settlement, with the participation of all interested sides.

Some summations and conclusions

- The experiment involving forced reconstruction of society in Afghanistan ended in failure. This cost the country great losses: thousands of villages (kishlaks) and irrigation systems were ruined; enormous areas of fertile land and gardens were destroyed; millions of peaceful inhabitants became refugees, homeless persons, many died (according to some estimates 1–2.5 million people) or were disabled. Afghan society was hurled far behind in its development.
- The consequences of the Afghan conflict for the Soviet Union turned out to be most severe. It facilitated the defeat of the USSR in a global military and strategic confrontation between the two super-powers, socio-political systems, and military blocs. The Afghan ordeal worsened the political, economic, and ethnic crisis points that began to be visible in the Soviet Union country in the 1970s. Afghanistan did not allow Soviet involvement in looking for a way out of the crisis and in many ways it contributed to the disintegration of the USSR and its army.

Above all, the Soviet Union suffered great material and moral losses. One million men passed through Afghanistan. The dead numbered 14,626, not including those that died in captivity or that are considered missing in action. About 50,000 men were wounded, 6,669 were disabled, over 500,000 contracted various severe illnesses – there were tens of thousands of shattered lives, hundreds of thousands in need of psychiatric rehabilitation. In addition, 147 tanks were lost, 1,312 armored vehicles, 233 artillery guns and mortars, 114 airplanes and 322 helicopters.

- There is never a winner in civil war; there is only a draw. And in fact, the very war, as a rule, continues until a point when a balance of power is established. It is impossible to resolve political problems through military methods. In the ideal sense, a civil war should end through consensus in society. Such a consensus has not been achieved in Afghanistan to this time, and therefore the war continues.
- The civil war in Afghanistan is above all the result of global rivalries between the super-power states and conflicting political systems. Had there not been interference from abroad, it would not have had such an extensive, harsh, and total character. Obviously, the war would have had a much lesser duration.
- In Afghanistan, the Soviets faced conflict-ridden confrontations between several civilizations and cultures. Looking at Afghan society, its socio-economic structure is patriarchal, its spiritual-religious aspect is traditional, built upon a system of tribal and gentile relations – elders and religious communities. The Islam that lies at the heart of the religiousness of many Afghans is not classical, but rather everyday Islam, to some extent half-pagan. And the Afghans could not comprehend very many things that the members of the PDPA tried to proclaim and put into practice with Soviet help. From the standpoint of European civilization, many of the processes going on in Afghanistan are logically inexplicable and, thus, the recommendations that were elaborated frequently had an abstract nature and could not be put into practice. A type of democratic regime existed in that country for centuries, which had enabled the nation to preserve itself. The people took in with their mother's milk a spirit of freedom and did not wish relinquish it. The East has its own ways, its own sacred things, to everything its value...
- The goals that the leaders of the DRA set for themselves were, in themselves, to a certain degree progressive, since the result of the projected transformations was conceived of as an improvement in the lives of the Afghans. However, there did not exist any objective conditions, neither a social nor economic basis, nor mass support, for the proclaimed slogans and for the political decisions to bring about radical socialist transformations. The replacing of old institutions with new ones is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. Thus, before initiating changes it is essential to take into account the active opposition of those forces that are content with the old institutions and the inertia of those who like the new ones, for usually people do not believe in what is new until it is made certain through lengthy experiment. Adherents of the old institutions make ruthless attacks, while at the same time partisans

- of the new institutions, as a rule, act sluggishly. The nature of people is not constant, and if it is easy to convert them to one's faith, to hold them to it is difficult. If there are no positive changes, then the people's faith rapidly dries up. The attempt to introduce the Afghan people to a new ideology (civilization) through force ended in complete failure.
- The political actions of the leaders of the PDPA, especially in carrying out water and land reforms, were effected through voluntaristic and coercive means, without regard for the realities accumulated in the country and the interests of broad sections of the populace, with devastation of natural regularities and destruction of age-old systems of management and local self-government. The PDPA regime could not resolve social problems and secure a better life for the broad masses of the population – the peasants, and without their support, the government could not hold out.
 - The leadership of Afghanistan did not follow imperative procedures, which might have enabled the party to maintain its rule over the country. For the sake of avoiding civil war, first of all it would have been necessary to achieve unity among the leaders of the party and of the DRA government, and also to devise a flexible internal policy, based on traditional forms and methods of management that would have helped secure implementation of vital gradual changes in the key spheres of the economy and of the political super-structure, helped attract a greater part of the country's population to the side of the PDPA and, thus, reduce the social base for the opposition.
 - The decision of the Soviet leadership to deploy troops in the DRA was made without proper analyses of the situation and predictions on the development of the state of affairs, without appraisals of the causes, character, dimensions, and forms of the conflict, and also without a clear statement of the general political and strategic aims. The Soviet leadership succumbed to an obvious over-estimation of its own strength and to an under-estimation of the Afghan ability to oppose them, of the general situation in the region and especially of the external factor. Analyses of US actions before the entry of Soviet troops in Afghanistan gives reason to believe that the leaders of the Soviet Union became "victims" of strategic misinformation, skillfully put into effect by American intelligence agencies. Deployment of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was very advantageous to the United States, since it enabled the latter to solve many problems, both in the region and in relations with the USSR. An attempt to solve an equation from higher mathematics with the help of arithmetic led to the conclusion that Afghanistan became a "quagmire" for the Soviet Union, just as Vietnam had been for the USA. The Soviet lead-

- ers had a hazy notion on the strategy and the end result of troop deployment.
- Intervention in the civil war in Afghanistan by a third force (Soviet troops) brought with it escalation and polarization of the opposing sides; it was conducive to drawing formerly neutral forces into the fight against “marionette figures”, and also brought about internationalization of the internal Afghan conflict. In late 1979 there was no overriding need to send Soviet troops to the DRA. No objective circumstances necessitated it. The decisive element turned out to be the subjective, “personal” factor. The troops entered Afghanistan officially with peace-making goals – to secure the territorial integrity of that country and to support peace – yet they brought war. It is very important to consider this fact when making decisions on implementing peace-making operations and activities aimed at forcing conflicting parties to make peace, including those under the aegis of the UN and NATO. After all, the entry into combat zones even of multinational peace-making troops often plays the role of a detonator, provoking escalation of the conflict, and proving ineffective if they do not have sufficient strength and do not undertake decisive action.
 - It is essential to strive, using all possible means, to avert the outbreak of war, to look for a peaceful solution to this or that conflict. It is necessary to seek out any compromise and make maximum permissible concessions, to preserve peace. Before deciding on war, all other solutions must be attempted. Recourse to war should be taken only when there are no longer any other options. Lawlessness, however, should not be tolerated as a way to prevent war, for then one cannot avoid war and loses the advantage. And if a decision to initiate combat operations is already taken, then one must not entertain illusions that all will pass with minimal sacrifices. History has shown more than once that one cannot play at war, and if it is commenced, it must be fought properly. As the great Chinese military leader Sun Zi (Sun Tzu) said: “War is a great affair for a state, it is the foundation of life and death, the way of survival or downfall.”²
 - The tasks the political leadership of the USSR set were set down in detail, but the forces provided to accomplish them were insufficient. A relatively small number of troops, an extremely short time for planning operations, inadequate training of men and officers for anti-guerrilla warfare, all this and more prevented the Soviet Union from realizing its set goals. Hence, the conclusion – a politician makes an error worthy of condemnation when he does not consider his options and strives to reach set goals, not taking into account all given possibilities.

Modern small caliber arms make it possible to effectively conduct combat operations against a regular army even with armed formations that are significantly inferior to it in total military potential. Hence, it is necessary to create a powerful troop concentration, capable of securing real control over the entire territory of the hypothetical opponent and destroy its fighting units in a short period. Moreover, such troops must be trained in advance and with consideration of the specific aspects of the military operation. Prior to commencing operations it is necessary to complete thorough reconnaissance and assessment of the opponent's fighting potential, make forestalling concentrated bombings and artillery strikes against his most important installations, paralyze his control over armed units, and also put into effect a wide-range intelligence operations, as well as sabotage and special measures. Only afterwards can troops be introduced, preferably from different directions, and immediately in all the key regions of the country, in effect to establish their control in them. From the very beginning, it is necessary to conduct active combat operations, not permitting the opponent to recuperate and organize, until his full defeat or surrender. It is also necessary to take measures to cut all supply routes of arms and ammunition to the enemy.

- In a local war troops must act decisively and quickly. After inflicting maximum losses on the enemy and fulfilling political goals, they must withdraw from the country as soon as possible, leaving resolution of issues regarding the establishment of authority to the political bodies of allies. A prolonged war is a disaster for a state. If there is not a quick victory, then a long war is worse than defeat. As even the ancients said: "If a war drags out, it is unfavorable. War is like a flame: if you do not blow it out on time, you yourself will burn in it" (Cao Gong).³

It is essential even in peacetime to maintain a certain number of divisions and brigades in constant combat readiness, fully manned and trained for conducting anti-guerrilla warfare in diverse climatic conditions.

- Against armed units acting with guerrilla methods one needs to apply non-traditional tactics and strategies for conducting combat operations. In this case, generally accepted methods of waging war should be applied only exceptionally. Traditional tactics for carrying out military actions in regions with local conflicts, as shown by experience, frequently turn out unfavorable. Here there is no solid front-line. Guerrilla units evade direct clashes; they inflict sudden strikes against individual installations, small garrisons and obstruct communications, as well as conducting destabilizing, terrorist and

subversive activities. In combat operations a maneuverable quality prevails, in combination with tough positional defense on the level of platoons, companies and more rarely battalions. Therefore, the types and methods of combat operations, developed by Soviet troops in the course of the war in Afghanistan, should be applied.

The most effect method of combat operations in these conditions was encirclement of the enemy and cutting off escape routes, with successive destruction or capture.

The success of combat operations depends on a well-organized system of intelligence, extensive use of commandos and airborne assault actions, effective use of diverse types of maneuvers (side-sweeps, outflanking and their variations), in combination with air and high-precision gunnery strikes. When annihilating the enemy in fortified strongholds, to achieve the set goals with the least loses, it is essential to block in the defenders in due time, seize and hold commanding heights, effectively hit exposed weaponry with air strikes, artillery, tank fire and other firing means, and simultaneously attack from all sides with the engagement of the maximum number of troops.

In order to route small mobile irregular armed detachments of combatants in a (local) civil war, especially in mountains and forests, one must engage a much larger number of troops and equipment than is needed in conducting traditional combat operations against a regular army, since insurgents avoid direct battle clashes; they are dispersed over a large area and they make use of guerrilla forms and methods of fighting.

In order to control territory, it is necessary to create a complex security system, containing well fortified troop garrisons, a network of pickets and outposts, regime-controlled zones around airports and vitally important installations, maneuverable on-duty sub-units, continuous watch by reconnaissance and strike aircraft over the land and sky, and on-duty assault landing or mobile airborne sub-units. For the purpose of excluding attacks on equipment convoys, blockade-posts (pickets) must be set up along transport routes near places convenient for making ambushes, and when the convoys pass through gorges commanding heights must be held. But the blockade-posts must be strong and well fortified, or else they will become targets of attack for the fighters. Each convoy must have direct protection, for which special road-commandeer units must be created. A major role is played by an efficient and effective system for receiving intelligence on the enemy near the convoys travel routes, and also by engineering reconnaissance and continuous air coverage of the convoys.

- It is impossible to definitely defeat the opponent as long as it receives reinforcements from fighter training camps and there is an uninterrupted supply of military equipment, arms and ammunition for his units. It is essential to take maximum feasible measures to securely close the channels through which aid arrives from allies. In Afghanistan, the opposition received military aid through the entire duration of the war. The efforts of the Soviet military command to restrain it turned out futile.
- Without creating the proper conditions and eliminating the causes that had given rise to the war, appeals and slogans of peace will never stop it. In order to achieve national conciliation, there must be a sincere mutual willingness among the parties in conflict to arrive at a constructive compromise. Negotiations with an enemy who still has potential will not lead to the establishment of peace, but rather only play into its hands, allowing him to gain time and regroup his forces. They give him the possibility of prolonging armed conflict and of signing a peace accord under favorable terms. Therefore, damage must be inflicted on the opponent to such a degree that afterwards it cannot conduct wide-scale combat operations.
In Afghanistan, the opposition had combat-ready armed units and all the requirements for seizing power in the country, and therefore it rejected a peaceful settlement of the conflict; the policy of national reconciliation proved highly ineffective.
- Civil war may continue until a time when the central authorities achieve decisive superiority in the balance of power. Otherwise it takes on a permanent nature, as is observable at this moment in Afghanistan. In such a situation, an external force is needed, capable of exerting decisive influence on the peace process. Such a force is an international peace-making force, operating under the aegis of the UN, OIC, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the OSCE or NATO. All the same, the air strikes put into practice in recent times by NATO forces, for example in Iraq or in Yugoslavia, in the absence of corresponding decisions in the UN Security Council, lead to a break-down of the peaceful world order that has been built-up so far and may lead to a resumption of the “Cold War,” or even to the Third World War.
- The war in Afghanistan destabilized the situation in the Middle East. New regions are being pulled into its orbit. The efforts of Afghan Islamic radicals and extremists to spread the spirit of “jihad” to neighboring states, including territories populated by Muslims in the CIS, with the aim of spreading Islamic fundamentalism by force, conceal in themselves a real danger for Central Asian countries and for Russia. The appetites of the Islamists are also spreading to Europe.

- However, one must bear in mind that Islam is an element of major importance to culture and lifestyle, a pillar of internal peace, a criterion of morality and law for millions of people; clearly in such a delicate situation it is necessary to act in a detached manner, proceeding from principles, for to avoid harm is more important than to reap benefits. This was proven by the sorrowful experience of the “Afghan War”; to forget this would be to ignore the tragic lessons of history, which inevitably leads to new wars, new bloodshed, new suffering, and new tragedies. This applies even more, since practically all international and internal conflicts are dispersed along the “arc of crisis” – from North Africa to Central Asia, the main section of which runs along the line of contact between the Islamic world and the post-Socialist area (the former Yugoslavia and the former USSR).
- There is the danger that Russia may be transformed into a buffer between Christian and Islamic civilization. It is important to avert antagonism with the Islamic factor in the expanses of Eurasia, not allowing a clash between Orthodoxy and Islam (the Orthodox against True Believers).

NOTES

1. Department of State cable 0621, August 1979.
2. Н.И. Конрад. «Суны-цзы. Трактат о военном искусстве», Издательство Академии наук СССР, 1950 г., с. 137.
3. Н.И. Конрад. «Суны-цзы. Трактат о военном искусстве», Издательство Академии наук СССР, 1950 г., с. 85.