



Social Development and State Building in Afghanistan during the Soviet Period, 1979-1989

Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This Technical Memorandum provides an overview of the major social and state building policies implemented by the Soviets and the pro-Soviet Afghan regime in Afghanistan during the period 1979-1989. Its objective is to inform the current NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan about the lessons learned from the Soviet social and state building experience. The research is based on Russian and English language sources. The study shows that the Soviets and the Afghan regime experienced difficulties operating at the district level, and that they failed to engage a sufficient number of people in these processes. Although they made significant efforts in the areas of social development and state building, traditional social divisions and values undermined the new socio-political model.

Résumé

Cette analyse technique donne un aperçu des grandes politiques de développement social et de state building appliquées en Afghanistan par les Soviétiques et le régime afghan prosoviétique de 1979 à 1989. Elle vise à informer la mission FIAS OTAN en Afghanistan des leçons à tirer de l'expérience soviétique de développement social et de state building. À partir de sources en langues russe et anglaise, l'étude montre que les Soviétiques et le régime afghan ont éprouvé des difficultés à agir au niveau des districts et qu'ils n'ont pas engagé assez de monde dans ces processus. Bien qu'ils aient consacré des efforts considérables au développement social et au state building, les divisions et les valeurs sociales traditionnelles ont sapé le nouveau modèle socio-politique.

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Executive summary

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Anton Minkov; Gregory Smolyne; DRDC CORA TM 2009-033; Defence R&D Canada – CORA; July 2009.

The Soviet experience in social development and state building in Afghanistan offers many lessons for the current NATO ISAF mission. During the course of their intervention in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the Soviets sought to transform the Afghan state and society along Soviet lines. Faced with an intractable insurgency and with changes in Soviet foreign policy that attended Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985, the Soviets moderated their strategic objectives in Afghanistan. Whereas in the early years of the intervention, the Soviets and their Afghan allies relied heavily on kinetic operations, in the second half of the decade they launched the policy of "National Reconciliation" and devoted massive resources to building Afghan state security forces. These changes in strategy facilitated the orderly withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 and the survival of the pro-Moscow Afghan regime until 1992 when the Russian Federation cut off all aid to Afghanistan following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

While the Soviets pursued ambitious programs to create a social base for the pro-Moscow Afghan government, including education reforms and the emancipation of women, Soviet social development and state-building plans faltered because they did not take full account of the history of the Afghan state, the political dynamics of relations between rural Afghans and the centre, Afghan cultural and religious traditions, and inter-ethnic rivalries in Afghanistan. Social development and state building efforts were limited especially by the inability of the Soviets and pro-Soviet Afghans to operate at the village and district levels in rural Afghanistan due to the insurgent threat.

The lessons of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan for the current NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan include the following:

- The Soviet experience in social development and state building demonstrates that attempts to alter traditional Afghan social structures and state-tribe relations may be met with stiff resistance if the new structures are perceived by Afghans as secular and non-traditional. This is likely to be the case regardless of whether a communist or liberal democratic ideology or state model is being developed in Afghanistan.
- The implementation of a political model, in this case communist, that is not in tune with local cultural and historical conditions will not work. Soviet initiatives collided with traditional Afghan and Islamic values and undermined state legitimacy in the countryside.
- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement. However, such an approach risks perpetuating local power centers that could eventually challenge central authority.
- The Soviets enjoyed qualified success co-opting different groups. Those who were left out of power or were disenfranchised tended toward insurgency. The lesson from this experience is that efforts to co-opt or to enfranchise groups may have the effect of quelling

insurgency while those left out of power or effectively disenfranchised may well actively oppose the Afghan government.

- The policy of “National Reconciliation” was more successful in the short term than military operations for the Soviets. The lesson of this experience is that the Government of Afghanistan should enhance non-military (or non-kinetic) efforts to quell the insurgency.
- Building Afghan security forces was a viable exit strategy for the Soviets. The lesson for NATO ISAF is that security sector reform should be stepped up with increased establishments for the Afghan National Army and Police and adequate NATO ISAF training capacity devoted to the effort.

Sommaire

Social Development and State Building in Afghanistan during the Soviet Period, 1979-1989: Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

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L'expérience soviétique de développement social et de state building en Afghanistan est riche d'enseignements pour l'actuelle mission FIAS OTAN. Durant leur intervention en Afghanistan (1979-1989), les Soviétiques cherchent à transformer l'État afghan et sa société dans le sens de leurs propres principes. Face à une insurrection irréductible et aux changements de politique étrangère qui accompagneront l'ascension au pouvoir de Mikhail Gorbatchev en 1985, les Soviétiques modéreront leurs objectifs stratégiques en Afghanistan. Alors que, dans les premières années de leur intervention, les Soviétiques et leurs alliés afghans misaient beaucoup sur les opérations cinétiques, dans la seconde moitié de la décennie, ils instaurent une politique de « réconciliation nationale » et consacrent des ressources massives au développement des forces de sécurité de l'État afghan. Ces changements de stratégie facilitent le retrait ordonné des forces soviétiques en 1989 et la survie du régime afghan promoscovite jusqu'en 1992, date à laquelle la Fédération de Russie coupe toute aide à l'Afghanistan, au lendemain de l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique.

Bien que les Soviétiques s'efforcent par des programmes ambitieux de créer une base sociale pour le gouvernement afghan promoscovite, notamment la réforme de l'éducation et l'émancipation des femmes, leurs plans de développement social et de state-building échouent parce qu'ils ne tiennent pas suffisamment compte de l'histoire de l'État afghan, des dynamiques des relations entre les Afghans des campagnes et le centre, des traditions culturelles et religieuses afghanes, et des rivalités interethniques. Les efforts de développement social et de state building auront été limités particulièrement par l'incapacité des Soviétiques et des Afghans prosoviétiques à agir au niveau des villages et des districts de l'Afghanistan rural en raison de la menace posée par l'insurrection.

On peut tirer de l'expérience soviétique en Afghanistan les enseignements suivants pour la mission FIAS OTAN :

- L'expérience soviétique de développement social et de state building montre que les efforts accomplis pour modifier les structures sociales afghanes et les relations entre l'État et les tribus peuvent se heurter à une résistance farouche si les Afghans perçoivent les nouvelles structures comme laïques et non traditionnelles. Il en sera sans doute toujours ainsi, que l'idéologie ou modèle d'État défini en Afghanistan soit communiste ou libéral-démocrate.
- L'application d'un modèle politique, communiste en l'occurrence, qui n'est pas en harmonie avec les conditions culturelles et historiques locales ne peut pas réussir. Les initiatives soviétiques ont heurté les valeurs traditionnelles afghanes et musulmanes et sapé la légitimité de l'État dans les campagnes.

- Pour faire bouger les choses en Afghanistan, il faut impliquer les dirigeants locaux. Or, cette façon de faire risque de perpétuer des centres de pouvoirs locaux qui pourront à terme défier le pouvoir central.
- Les Soviétiques ont réussi jusqu'à un certain point à coopter des groupes différents. Ceux qui étaient écartés du pouvoir ou dépouillés de leurs droits tendaient à se rallier à l'insurrection. La leçon à tirer de cette expérience, c'est que les efforts accomplis pour coopter ou habiliter des groupes peuvent avoir l'effet d'étouffer l'insurrection, mais il est fort possible que ceux qui sont écartés du pouvoir ou privés de leurs droits s'opposent activement au gouvernement afghan.
- La politique de « réconciliation nationale » a eu plus de succès à court terme pour les Soviétiques que les opérations militaires. La leçon à tirer de cette expérience est que le gouvernement de l'Afghanistan devrait renforcer ses efforts non militaires (ou non cinétiques) pour réprimer l'insurrection.
- Le développement des forces de sécurité afghanes a été une stratégie de sortie viable pour les Soviétiques. Pour la FIAS OTAN, on peut en conclure qu'il faut intensifier la réforme du secteur de la sécurité en augmentant les effectifs de l'armée et de la police nationale afghanes et que la FIAS OTAN doit consacrer des ressources suffisantes à leur instruction.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

After an unexpected pro-communist coup took place in April 1978, the new government of Afghanistan appeared poised to bring the country into the Soviet bloc. By the end of 1979, however, a popular uprising against the government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) threatened to reverse the “revolution.” Even worse, from the Soviet point of view, an internal coup brought the US educated Hafizullah Amin to the Afghan presidency. Fearing a shift in Afghanistan’s foreign policy, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in December 1979 to effect a regime change and set the conditions for continued implementation of the April Revolution’s principles.

The invasion was executed with precision and speed on the eve of December 25th. Soviet troops neutralized any resistance offered by the Afghan army around Kabul, captured the presidential palace and installed Babrak Karmal as a new party leader and president. Within two weeks, government institutions, critical infrastructure and the larger Afghan cities were under the control of the Red Army and the new regime. What the Soviet leaders had not anticipated was that such a strategy, which worked quite well in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, was ill suited for Afghanistan. Traditional divisions between countryside and urban centers, state institutions and tribal society ensured that the insurgency remained unaffected by the Soviet operation. In some ways, the intervention even produced the opposite results. On one side it undermined the legitimacy of the new regime, while on the other it allowed insurgents to invoke the Islamic principle of jihad—a defensive action against invading infidel forces—and provided ideological legitimacy to the insurgents.

Although the operation was anticipated only as a brief exercise of military power, it turned into a prolonged effort to stabilize the regime. In a few months, it became obvious to the Soviet leaders that a demonstration of military might was not sufficient and that securing the regime’s stability required the continuous presence of Soviet troops and direct engagement in the internal and external affairs of Afghanistan. The Soviets, who had initially imagined that the Red Army might be home in time for the Moscow Olympics, found themselves at war in Afghanistan for over nine years. The Red Army withdrew from the territory of Afghanistan only in February 1989, following the ascent of Mikhail Gorbachev to leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the introduction of changes in the Soviet foreign policy in 1985.

Most scholarship on the Soviet experience in Afghanistan has focused on the military engagements between the Red Army and the mujahidin.¹ Nevertheless, a significant amount of social and economic development, as well as state capacity building also took place during that period.² In fact, according to estimates made by the last commander of the Soviet Army in

¹ Mujahidin is the term usually used to denote the Afghan resistance fighters in the 1980s. The word is the Indian Muslims’ adaptation of “mujāhidūn,” the Arabic plural form of “mujāhid.” The latter is the active participle of the verb “jahāda” (to strive) and it is related to the noun “jihād” (striving for the faith), thereby acquiring the technical meaning of “someone who participates in jihad,” “someone who fights for the faith,” or “someone who wages a war on the unbelievers”. C.E. Bosworth and J.J.G. Jansen, “Mudjahid,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Brill Online, 2008).

² Soviet economic development experience in Afghanistan during the 1980s is analyzed by the authors in a separate paper. See A. Minkov, G. Smolyneec, “Economic Development in Afghanistan during the Soviet

Afghanistan, Gen. Boris Gromov, the military operations constituted only 40 percent of the overall Soviet effort in the country.³

1.2 Research Objectives

The Soviet leaders and strategists had to deal with and adapt to Afghanistan's unique social and cultural environment. During their almost decade-long direct presence, the Soviets tried different strategies and approaches with different degrees of success. Although the objectives of NATO ISAF are different from Soviet aims, both the Soviets and NATO ISAF set strategic objectives that were ambitious and sought to transform the Afghan state and society. A study of the Soviet successes and failures in approaching Afghan social development, state building and governance, therefore, could be beneficial in informing current development efforts.

1.3 Note on Sources

The most important sources to study Afghan social development and state building during the Soviet period remain those by Antonio Giustozzi and Barnett R. Rubin, which are based on significant primary research and data.⁴ The chapters on society and politics in the Afghanistan country study produced by the American University, Washington, D.C, also contain valuable information.⁵ Oliver Roy published a short, but very useful, article on Soviet strategies in 1989.⁶ Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby deal with the spread of Soviet ideology in Afghanistan.⁷ Important primary sources about Soviet decision-making and the evolution of Soviet strategic thinking are the Soviet Politburo Central Committee's minutes dealing with Afghanistan. Most of them are available in Russian in Alexander Lyakhovskiy, *Tragedia i doblest Afgana*⁸ and in English on the National Security Archive's website.⁹ Among the Russian authors, M. F. Slinkin provides the most data relevant to the topic under consideration.¹⁰ An interesting source of information, albeit presenting the official Soviet point of view, is V.M. Vinogradov's compilation

Period, 1979-1989: Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan," DRDC CORA TM 2007-35 (August 2007).

³ "B. Gromov: Afganskaya voyna—nepopravimaya politicheskaya oshibka rukovodstva SSSR [B. Gromov: The Afghan War—a Fatal Political Mistake by USSR's Leadership]," an interview available in Russian at www.afghanistan.ru.

⁴ Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2000); For a recent analysis of the history of state formation in Afghanistan see Antonio Giustozzi, "Afghanistan: Transition Without End: An Analytical Narrative on State-Making," *Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers*, Working Paper 40 (November 2008); Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵ Richard F. Nyrop and Donald M. Seekins, eds., *Afghanistan: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Area Studies, American University, 1986), Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment, pp. 74-138; Chapter 4: Government and Politics, pp. 208-284.

⁶ Oliver Roy, "The Sovietization of Afghanistan," in Milan Hauner and Robert L. Canfield, eds., *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union: Collision and Transformation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 48-58

⁷ Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

⁸ Alexander Lyakhovskiy, *Tragedia i doblest Afgana* [The Tragedy and Valour of the Afghan Veteran], (Moscow, 1995).

⁹ "The Soviet Experience in Afghanistan: Russian Documents and Memoirs," edited by Svetlana Savranskaya (October 9, 2001)—<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/soviet.html>.

¹⁰ M. F. Slinkin, *Afganistan. Stranitsi istorii (80-90-e gg. XX v.)* (80s-90s of the 20th century)] (Simferopol, 2003).

of Soviet media coverage of the situation in Afghanistan in the 1980s.¹¹ Additional Russian language sources held in Russian archives and libraries as well as Dari language sources which provide an Afghan perspective on this period were inaccessible to the authors.¹²

¹¹ V. M. Vinogradov, *Afganistan: 10 let glazami SMI* [Afghanistan: 10 years through the eyes of the Mass Media] (available in Russian at www.rsva.ru).

¹² For instance, Mohammad Nabi Azimi, *Ordu va Siyasat Dar Seh Daheh Akheer-e Afghanistan* (“*Army and Politics in the Last Three Decades in Afghanistan.*”).

2 Relevance of the Soviet Experience

While the Soviet Union tried to impose a socialist, totalitarian type of governance and state institutions, there are many similarities between the challenges that Soviet strategists and their puppet Afghan regime faced with respect to state building and social development, and those confronting the NATO ISAF forces in Afghanistan.

2.1 Ethnic, religious and social divisions

First, ethnic, religious and social divisions in Afghan society are persistent. Afghanistan is divided into ten main ethnic groups, which are further subdivided into tribes and clans (Figure 1). The majority Pushtun live largely in the south, while the larger minorities of Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens are mostly situated in the north. Persian speaking minorities can be found on the western border with Iran.¹³ Rivalry exists not only between Pushtun tribes as a whole and the northern, non-Pushtun ethnic groups but between Pushtun tribes as well.¹⁴ Social structures remain rigid and are to a large extent, a product of established tribal customs. Religious divisions include the majority Sunni population versus the minority Shia Hazara population. There are significant social cleavages between urban and rural populations as well. In fact, the social cleavages, which existed prior to the Soviet invasion, have been aggravated by prolonged warfare and are much deeper now. The rural communities have survived the three decades of almost continuous conflict by relying on the traditional social and cultural institutions.¹⁵ Thus, ethnic and religious sub-national identities have been strengthened over the last three decades and pose an even greater challenge to the current nation-building effort in Afghanistan than they were for the Soviets.

2.2 State legitimacy

Social cleavages in Afghanistan have made it difficult for the idea of the modern nation-state to take hold, and have created an environment where the very existence of state and state institutions remain problematic. The elusiveness of state legitimacy is actually a major challenge on its own. The Afghan state is a nation-state enclave, insulated from the traditional society, in which state institutions and the state as a whole never became stable or deeply rooted.¹⁶ According to Rubin, the state remains not the trustee of the common interest for most people in Afghanistan, but another particular interest like a tribe or clan.¹⁷ For many Afghans, the state can be reckoned with, negotiated with but is not seen as sovereign. Universal values are imposed by religion and tribal codes, not by the state. The traditional weakness of state authority in the countryside was one of the challenges the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul faced in the 1980s, and this is a situation which

¹³ Historically, modern Afghanistan has been the area of contact between the three major civilizations in the region—Iranian, Turko-Mongol and Indian. The three empires, which dominated the region since the sixteenth century—the Safavids, Shaybanids and Mughals, have had, however, Turko-Mongol dynasties. The identities of most of the current ethnic groups in Afghanistan have been shaped as a result of their service relations to one of these empires.

¹⁴ Accidentally, in order to integrate the Pashtun tribes, the Safavids imposed on them a Turkic style of tribal structure. See Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 29.

¹⁵ Richard S. Newell, "Post-Soviet Afghanistan: The Position of the Minorities," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 29, No. 11, 1989, p. 1091.

¹⁶ Barnett Rubin, "Lineages of the State in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 11, 1988, p. 1189.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

continues to exist today. In fact, according to Giustozzi, the success of the neo-Taliban insurgency since 2001 has been due primarily to the intrinsic weakness to the Afghan state.¹⁸



Figure 1: Ethnolinguistic Groups in Afghanistan¹⁹

2.3 Foreign military presence

As in the case of the Soviet Army in 1979, US-led military forces entered in Afghanistan in 2001, in order to eliminate a national security threat and implement a regime change. There was no intention for protracted military presence in the country or even involvement in combat

¹⁸ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 7.

¹⁹ Source: University of Texas, Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection

operations against an insurgency.²⁰ In both situations, however, military and political strategists underestimated the culture of resistance combined with the ideology of jihad.²¹ Soviet leaders believed that the mere show of Soviet military would quell the insurgency. Western commanders and policy makers, too, thought in 2002 that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda had been decisively defeated. In both instances these assumptions proved not to be the case, and an extensive military presence was needed to provide security to the new regime.

The presence of foreign, primarily non-Muslim,²² military forces, nevertheless, has its own challenges for Afghan state building and social development. First, it undermines the legitimacy of the new regime in the eyes of many Afghans. Support by foreign troops is seen as a proof of the new administration being a puppet government, which promotes foreign interests. Second, the military presence opens the opportunity for justifying the insurgency on the religious grounds of defending Islam. Invoking the concept of jihad, considered as one of the main pillars in Islam, is a much more potent rallying ideology than defence of ethnic or tribal interests. The prolonged Soviet and western military presence in Afghanistan, therefore, had overall negative effects on the establishment of new state structures and institution as they were perceived as imposed by forces alien to Islam and as an expression of foreign interests.

2.4 Balancing military operations with civil affairs

Historically, any attempts to alter the traditional structure and status quo in Afghanistan have been met with stiff resistance, regardless of the ideological forms they take or of the state model being imposed.²³ Such a situation made Soviet efforts to balance military operations to defeat the insurgency with civil affairs very challenging. On one side, defeating the insurgency requires strong state institutions and social cohesion, but on the other, the imposition of a new order only perpetuates the insurgency. Furthermore, the lack of direct government control in the countryside, that is, the lack of an ability to communicate and influence the population, which was the case during the Soviet period and still is, in the case of the NATO-led mission, makes the military solution the most attractive. However, such a solution is exactly what the insurgent forces desire because it preserves the social status quo. A primarily military approach, especially one leading to many civilian casualties, alienates the local population, strengthens religious and ethnic cleavages, and thus makes the introduction of any changes in the Afghan countryside very difficult. Soviet and DRA troops were quite indiscriminate in using force, especially air power, against Afghan civilians in offensive or punitive actions.²⁴

²⁰ See Lyakhovsky, *Tragedia i doblest*, pp. 176-177.

²¹ Jihad is a fundamental obligation in Islam to foster expansion of the faith, both spiritually and politically. Historically, more important has been the understanding of jihad as military action with the object of expanding or defending Islam. Jihad, in the latter sense, is considered a means, which, although evil by nature, is legitimate and necessary, if the objective is to overcome a greater evil. See E. Tyan, "Djihad," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill Online, 2008).

²² Soviet troops included large number of conscripts from the Central Asian republics, nominally Muslim, while the NATO forces include contingents from Muslim countries such as Turkey.

²³ An earlier example of resistance to modern state building was the reign of king Amanullah (1901-1919). See Rubin, "Lineages," pp. 1195-1199.

²⁴ In the May 10, 1988 letter, the Soviet leaders also admitted that they have mistakenly placed their bets on the military solution to defeat the insurgency—Lyakhovsky, *Tragedia i Doblest*, Appendix 8; Savranskaya, "Russian Documents and Memoirs: Document 21."

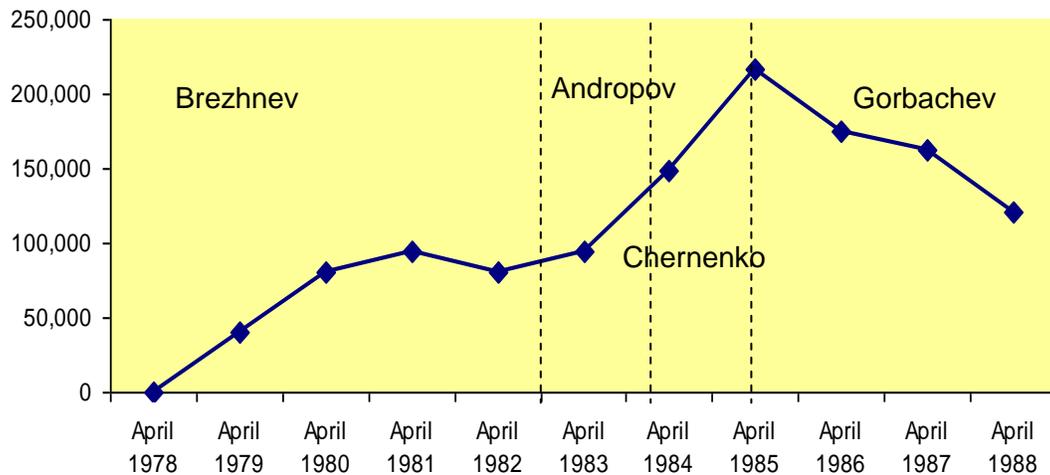


Figure 2: Afghan Civilian Deaths and Soviet General Secretary Mandates²⁵

It is estimated that around 1.25 million Afghans were killed from 1978 to 1989²⁶ (Figure 2) and that 5 million Afghans were driven to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran.²⁷ Correspondingly, although not on the same scale, the reliance on air power and the resulting high number of civilian casualties since 2001 again seem to be one of the primary drivers behind the growth of the insurgency in Afghanistan.²⁸

²⁵ The numbers in the graph are based on data (percent of deaths per year) by Marek Sliwinski, "Afghanistan: The Decimation of a People," *Orbis* (Winter 1989), p. 41, and the mean of the estimated Afghan population at the time (between 12 and 15 million).

²⁶ Sliwinski, "The Decimation of a People," p. 39. It should be pointed out, however, that this estimate is not based on an actual death count, but on a 1987 Gallup survey of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Other researchers have come up with different estimates. Giustozzi (*War, Politics and Society*, p. 191) estimates the Afghan deaths, from 1978 to 1988, in the government's controlled territory, at 157,000, and those as a result of Soviet/DRA reprisals, at two to three times greater, i.e., between 450,000 and 600,000 all together. This figure is less than half the one provided by Sliwinski. The latter's reliance on refugee population only to estimate the death toll may also be misleading. Rubin, for example, has observed a much higher impact of the war among Afghans that left the country than among those that stayed—see Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 228. Having in mind the difficulty to establish the actual number of civilian casualties in a modern conflict such as the one in Iraq since the 2003 US invasion, (estimates range from less than 100,000 (Iraq Body Count) to 1.2 million (Opinion Research Business (ORB), a British polling agency), it would be very difficult to agree on a figure with respect to Afghanistan during the 1980s. It should be pointed out that ORB used the same methodology as Sliwinski and estimates that its margin of error is a minimum of 733,158 to a maximum of 1,446,063. See OBR, "More than 1,000,000 Iraqis murdered," News Release, September 2007, and the survey data breakdown at the ORB website—http://www.opinion.co.uk/Newsroom_details.aspx?NewsId=78. Nevertheless, Sliwinski's estimate is the most quoted and it is thus accepted here as the most authoritative.

²⁷ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 1.

²⁸ See "Air Strikes and Drug Eradication," *The Globe and Mail* (March 14, 2008), part of *The Globe and Mail's* series "Talking to the Taliban;" "Errant Afghan Civilian Deaths Surge," *The Los Angeles Times* (July 6, 2007); and "Karzai: Stop the Air Strikes," *CBS News* (October 28, 2007).

3 State Building

3.1 State Building Strategy

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) recognized its Afghan counterpart—the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)—as a fellow Marxist party shortly after the April coup of 1978. Although this, in Soviet eyes, enabled them to lay an ideological claim to Afghanistan,²⁹ the Soviet political leaders were quite aware of Afghanistan’s state of social development. As a result, Afghanistan was classified as a “socialist-oriented” country, that is, not a full member of the community of socialist states.³⁰ According to Soviet ideologists, a “socialist-oriented” country usually emerged in underdeveloped societies. In such countries tribal divisions and institutions are still persistent and participation in mass politics is minimal. Power is held by a union of “democratic” forces, which works towards social transformation. The latter would eventually stimulate the growth of a strong working class and the emergence of a working-class party. This vision implies moderation and gradual implementation of changes, and a long-term approach to establishing socialism in the country.³¹ Therefore, the objective was to transform Afghan society through the export of Soviet institutions, political models and ideology—a process usually referred to as “sovietization.”³² It should be pointed out, however, that sovietization could take different forms, depending on the state of development of the country being sovietized and local conditions.³³

In the case of Afghanistan, the Soviet framework (Figure 3) envisioned establishing a strong communist party and affiliated mass organizations, which would control all state institutions, including the Afghan army, the police and the security intelligence services. The Afghan security forces, together with the Red Army, would apply pressure on the insurgency and expand government control in the countryside. PDPA officials would then establish local party cells and appoint state representatives. Together they would enforce the social reforms initiated by the regime. A crucial aspect of the sovietization process in Afghanistan was working with the youth, educating a new generation according to Soviet curricula.³⁴ The combination of gradual expansion of government control, implementation of social and economic reforms, as well as securing the support of the future generation, under the leadership of PDPA, was supposed to expand the social base of the regime and ultimately deny support for the insurgency.

²⁹ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 234.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³¹ The disapproval of the radical approach of PDPA leadership to implementing social changes, which is a clear deviation from the socialist-oriented country model, may have been one of the reasons for the intervention. See *Ibid.*, p. 236.

³² Roy, “Sovietization,” p. 48.

³³ For instance, the sovietization of Eastern European countries varied. Poland’s agriculture was not collectivized whereas agriculture elsewhere was.

³⁴ Roy, “Sovietization,” p. 48.

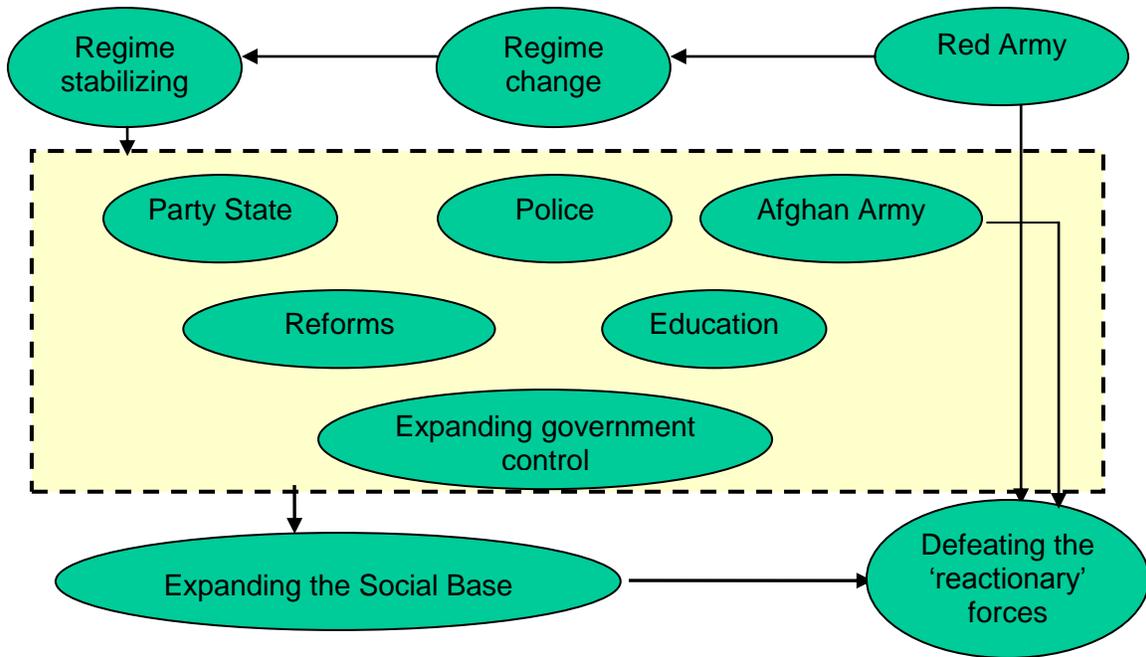


Figure 3: Soviet State Building Strategy in Afghanistan

3.2 PDPA and the “Party State”

In the Soviet system, there was a close overlap between party and state institutions and thus, the Soviet style of governance is commonly referred to as the “party-state.” The strength of the Communist Party was considered crucial and indicative of the strength of the state institutions over which it had control. Nevertheless, at the end of 1979, when the Soviet 40th Army entered Afghanistan, the situation was exactly the opposite—the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan was badly divided with inter-factional fighting taking place; and it was losing its grip on the government, the army and the security situation in the countryside.

It should be pointed out that the PDPA’s factionalism was not a new problem. Soon after its creation in 1965, PDPA had split into two factions—Khalq (People) and Parcham (Banner), only to reunite under pressure from the Soviet Union in 1977.³⁵ The differences between the two factions were primarily ethnically based. They did not disappear and came to the surface again after the 1978 revolution. Real power after the April Revolution rested with the leadership of the Khalq faction, which was dominated by non-Durani Pushtuns of rural origins.³⁶ The Parcham faction, which was strongly influenced by Pushtuns and Tajiks born in Kabul and educated in elite schools³⁷ was repressed.³⁸ When PDPA took power in 1978, its membership was around

³⁵ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 226. It is ironic that the KGB may have encouraged the original split in order to have more control over the PDPA. See John Barron, *KGB Today: The Hidden Hand* (New York: Reader’s Digest Book, 1983).

³⁶ These represented 62 percent of the Khalq members in the PDPA’s high echelons. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 92.

³⁷ Among the Parcham top-ranking members 48 percent were Kabulis (i.e., born in Kabul) and 52 percent of them were educated in the elite schools (as opposed to only 2 percent of the Khalq leadership). Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 94.

18,000.³⁹ Although membership quickly grew, it was estimated that by the end of 1979, 16-17,000 PDPA members had been killed, purged or had left the party.⁴⁰ This situation not only affected the party's morale but also that of the army, which was the institution with the largest number of PDPA members.⁴¹ A large number of desertions further weakened the army. Most importantly, the Khalq regime lost internal legitimacy, that is, the support of the state bureaucracy.⁴² Since at the time of the invasion, the insurgency was not yet in the position to pose any threat to the existence of the government,⁴³ there is no doubt that the level of disintegration of the state and the party in 1979 was one of the main reasons for the Soviet intervention.⁴⁴ It is not a surprise then that reconstruction of the PDPA and its integration with the Afghan state institutions was the main priority for the Soviets.

The structure of PDPA was modeled after the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the executive comprised of a Central Committee and a Politburo, the latter led by a Secretary General (Figure 3). These were, in theory, elected from the Party Congress. The Congress also nominated the party leaders at the provincial, district and sub-district levels. The state structure paralleled the party one with a Cabinet, Revolutionary Council, and a Presidium, led by a President.⁴⁵ The Secretary General, who also held the post of President, and many other party functionaries, occupying positions in the corresponding state level, ensured the dominance of the PDPA. For example, among the first two PDPA governments (1978-1979) there were no non-PDPA members of the cabinet, while there were only three during the Babrak Karmal years (1980-1985).⁴⁶ On a regional level, party control was to be exercised by the governors and the district and sub-district commissioners, who were party members as well.

The control of the party over state institutions was, however, undermined by the continued factionalism within the party and the difficult security situation in most of the countryside. The performance of both party and state structures was affected by rivalry between Khalq and Parcham.⁴⁷ Members of the two factions fought to secure dominance in the different organizational units, which often prevented them from functioning properly. In 1980, for example, the interior minister was a Khalqi. He was in control of the police forces, while the defence minister and the Chief of Staff were Parchamis.⁴⁸ Party factionalism may have been even greater than usually recognized since there were at least three sub-factions among the Khalqis⁴⁹ and two among the Parchamis, formed around different party leaders. Furthermore, as many as

³⁸ Perhaps as many as 2,000 Parchamis were killed by Khalq supporters. See Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4. Western observers believed it to be much smaller with estimates varying between 3,000 and 5,000. See Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 4.

⁴¹ Sixty, out of sixty-two cadre generals, were killed, arrested or forced to retire. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 114.

⁴² Ibid., p. 121

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ For an overview of different interpretations for the causes of Soviet intervention see Nyrop, Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, pp. 243-248. Ultimately the decision to invade was made by only three members of the Soviet Politburo. See Oleg Grinevsky, "Comparing Soviet and Russian Decision-Making in Afghanistan and Chechnya," *Contemporary Caucasus Newsletter*, No. 6 (Fall 1998).

⁴⁵ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, pp. 259-60; Roy, "Sovietization," p. 49.

⁴⁶ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 114.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 260.

⁴⁸ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 131.

⁴⁹ Ludwig W. Adamec, *Historical Dictionary of Afghan Wars, Revolutions, and Insurgencies*, Second Edition (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), p. 255.

seventeen smaller factions broke away from the PDPA from 1976 to 1987, thereby further weakening the party.⁵⁰

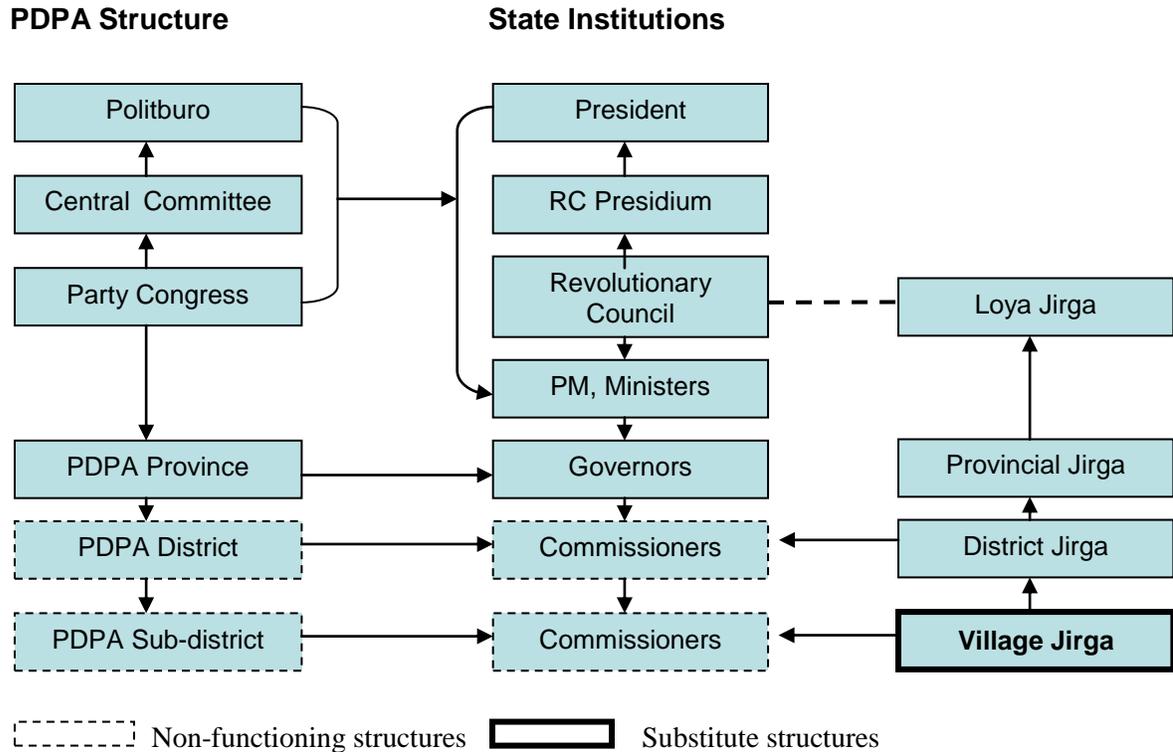


Figure 4: The Afghan Party-State

The security situation was an additional factor that prevented the party from establishing its structures in the provinces below governor level. By 1986 only two of the provincial party secretaries actually lived in their respective provinces.⁵¹ District and sub-district commissioners, if appointed, had very few opportunities to visit their jurisdictions.⁵² The number of party cells in villages grew from 277 in 1983 to 1,160 in 1987⁵³ but these numbers only represented 0.9 percent and 3.9 percent respectively of the total number of Afghan villages.⁵⁴ Moreover, often the existence of party organizations in villages was short-lived as the mujahidin usually quickly moved to destroy them. In other words, the effective functioning of the party-state, and thus the imposition of Soviet type of governance on the countryside, was virtually impossible.

In terms of membership, the PDPA grew significantly after 1979, and in 1988 it stood at 205,000. The Party's youth organization—the Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan (DYOA)—which corresponded to the Soviet Komsomol, had a similar membership in 1986 (Figure 5).⁵⁵ Together PDPA and DYOA membership constituted 3 percent of the Afghan population at the

⁵⁰ Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 253.

⁵¹ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 128.

⁵² Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 257

⁵⁴ Based on the rough estimate that 35,000 villages exist in Afghanistan. See I. Shchedrov, "Letter to the CC CPSU on the Situation in Afghanistan," *Pravda* (November 12, 1981).

⁵⁵ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, pp. 252-53.

time.⁵⁶ Although this figure may not look significant, it is consistent with the size of other Leninist parties. They were supposed to be a vanguard, the elite of the working class, and not mass organizations. The quality of the party members was a different story. Most of them were opportunists and very few were ideologically motivated. Several party purges, supposedly to cleanse the party of non-committed members, took place throughout the decade. A factor that affected the party growth was the heavy war casualties since some 60 percent of the PDPA members were serving in the army.⁵⁷

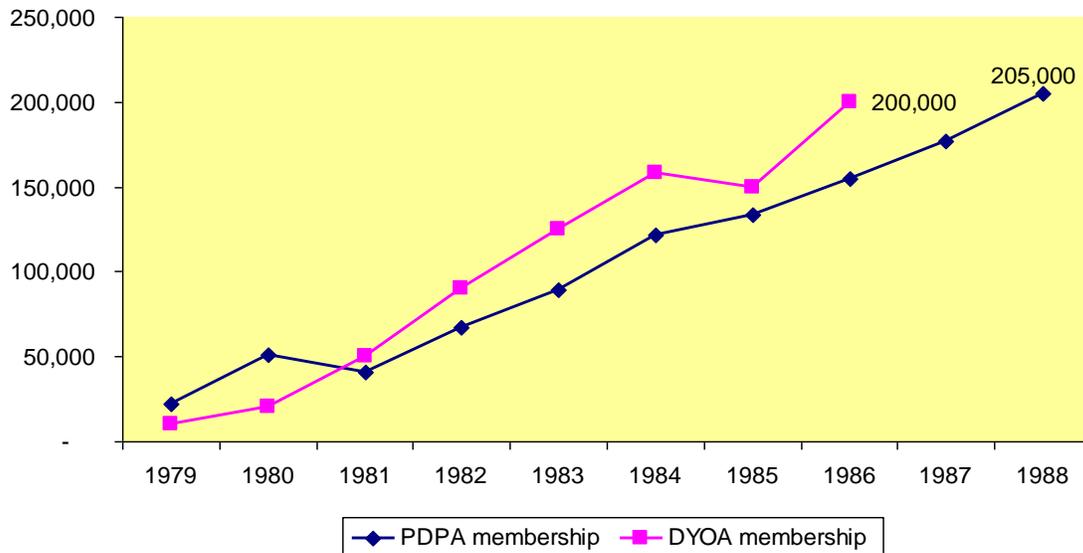


Figure 5: Growth of PDPA and DYOA membership

Ethnic divisions were another factor that undermined the party strength. Although Pushtuns controlled the PDPA leadership to a significant degree (Figure 6), among the regular party cadre, Tajiks, Uzbeks and the other non-Pushtun groups gradually became a majority. For example, the proportion of Pushtuns in the party membership declined from 56 percent in 1980 to 37.7 percent in 1988/89, while that of Tajiks increased from 35 percent to 47.1 percent in the same period (Figure 7).⁵⁸ In addition to PDPA's ethnic policies (see Ethnic Politics section below), the overrepresentation of non-Pushtuns in PDPA, reflected the fact that the government controlled the urbanized areas of northern Afghanistan to a greater degree than it did Pushtun areas and thus these non-Pushtun areas were more accessible for party recruitment. Nevertheless, this situation resulted in ethnic animosity within the PDPA. In addition to their ideological and religious differences, ethnic differences also exacerbated the conflict between the PDPA and the opposition parties based in Pakistan, which were predominantly Pushtun,⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Based on the mean number of the estimated Afghan population at the time, i.e., between 12 and 15 million people. See Sliwinski, "The Decimation of a People," p. 40.

⁵⁷ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, pp. 34-36, 251; Roy, "Sovietization," pp. 50-51.

⁵⁸ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, pp. 256-257.

⁵⁹ Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns in Afghanistan," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXV, No. 7, July 1995, p. 50.

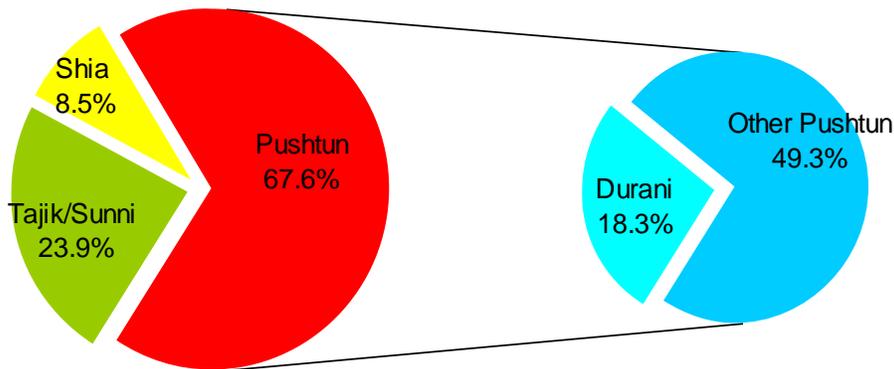


Figure 6: Ethnic Distribution of PDPA Leadership

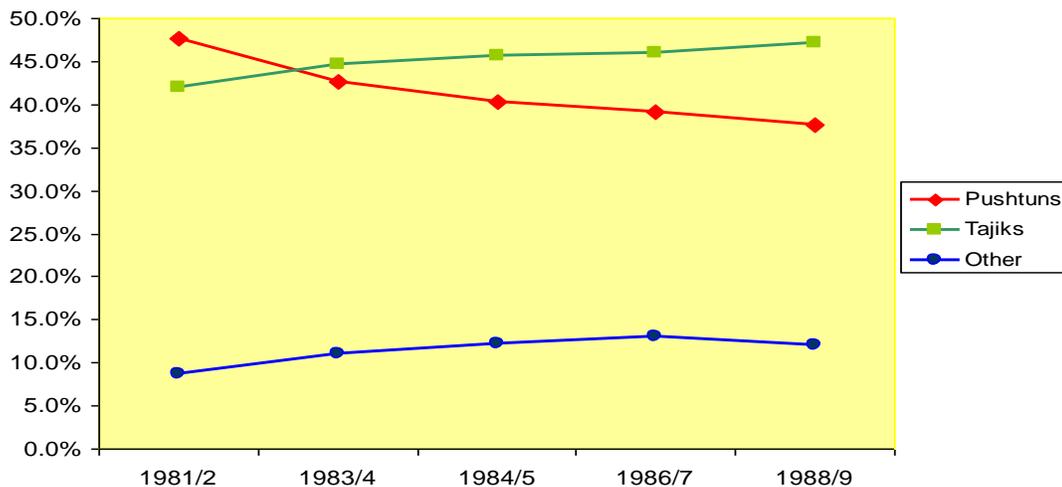


Figure 7: Ethnic Divisions in PDPA, 1981-1989

Despite Soviet efforts to eliminate the party factionalism, the PDPA remained disunited and weak. In 1987, in a letter to the Soviet Defence Minister, Colonel Tsagolov, one of the Soviet advisors in Afghanistan, compared the PDPA to a “circulation system without blood,” and characterized it as a “party of membership cards.” According to Tsagolov, the party was moving toward its political death.⁶⁰ Indeed, in July 1990, the PDPA completely changed course by renouncing its Marxist character and by renaming itself the Fatherland Party. The only requirements for its members was that they be good Muslims and accept the National Reconciliation policy (see National Reconciliation policy section below).⁶¹

⁶⁰ K. Tsagolov, “Letter to Dmitry Yazov, USSR Minister of Defence,” (August 13, 1987)—in Lyakhovskiy, *Tragedia i Doblest*, pp. 344-348; Savranskaya, “Russian Documents and Memoirs: Document 20.”

⁶¹ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 158.

3.3 Integration of Traditional Institutions

In addition to building the “party-state” structures, Soviet social strategy also included working with the traditional leaders in the countryside (from whose ranks mujahidin commanders usually came), playing off tribal divisions to their advantage, and co-opting the religious scholars—the *ulama*. This approach was known as the pacification process or pacification policy. What is important to note here, is that the pacification process reinforced the traditional society and thus it was directly at odds with the sovietization process. Pacification was Soviets’ short-term strategy in dealing with the challenges posed by Afghan diversity and the insurgency. To bridge the two approaches, an attempt was made to reconcile the traditional social structure and institutions with the new party-state structure and institutions.

As early as 1980, the PDPA’s Central Committee agreed on a policy of peace and cooperation with the Afghan tribes. Tribal traditions would be respected and economic help was promised. The Loya Jirga (the Grand Assembly of tribal chiefs, notables and religious leaders) was established as a state institution, convened by the Revolutionary Council.⁶² The Loya Jirga was designated as the ultimate organ of power in the state.⁶³ As state institutions and the state’s ability to provide economic help and to exercise police and military power were gradually rebuilt, many tribal chiefs decided to acquiesce to the state’s authority. The Ministry of Tribal and Frontier Affairs played an important role in interactions with the tribes and in 1983, its minister claimed that he had ensured the support of 5,000 tribal notables.⁶⁴

The PDPA’s inability to establish party cells and state administration structures at village, subdistrict and district levels left the local Jirgas (a traditional Afghan council of elders) as the only alternative for the state to administer the provinces at the local level (Figure 4). Thus, an effort was made to ensure that members of the Jirgas were sympathetic to the government. The PDPA had the right to nominate candidates for the local Jirga while the population would then elect them through a vote. The process of forming the local Jirgas culminated with the convention of two Loya Jirgas—April and September 1985. Almost 5,500 tribal notables, religious leaders and militia commanders participated in them. The legitimacy of the Jirgas was, however, suspect as the PDPA bribed many of the elders to attend.⁶⁵

3.4 Mass Organizations

To engage the population, numerous mass organizations such as the Afghan Women’s Democratic Organization (AWDO) were created. The largest mass organization was the National Fatherland Front (NFF), which claimed to have more than one million members.⁶⁶ Different professional organizations and syndicates were formed to extend the Party’s control among the working and professional classes. In 1983, the Soviet Press reported that 163,000 employees of state companies were members of twenty-nine professional organizations.⁶⁷ All these organizations were controlled by Party members and to a large degree were comprised of PDPA members as well. In other words, the seemingly large mass participation in the new social structures was misleading because of the overlap with the PDPA membership. Reportedly, many

⁶² Ibid., p. 130.

⁶³ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 269.

⁶⁴ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 137-138.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 142-143.

⁶⁷ G. Nadejdina, “Rasted rol profsoyuzov [The Role of the Labour Unions is Rising],” *Frunzevetz* (June 1, 1983). Published in Russian in Vinogradov, 10 let glazami SMI, at <http://www.rsva.ru>.

rural communities were enticed *en bloc* into membership of the NFF by promises that their villages would not be bombed.⁶⁸

3.5 Developing the Security Forces

The most successful Soviet strategy for ensuring the continuity of a pro-Soviet government in Kabul was in the realm of security sector reform. In addition to party and state institutions, the Soviet strategy of state building relied to a great extent on the state security forces (Figure 8). These included the regular army, gendarmerie (Tsarandoy) and secret intelligence police (KhaD/WAD). Their role was as much to participate in the war against the resistance as to control the population and ensure the regime's hold over the means of violence.

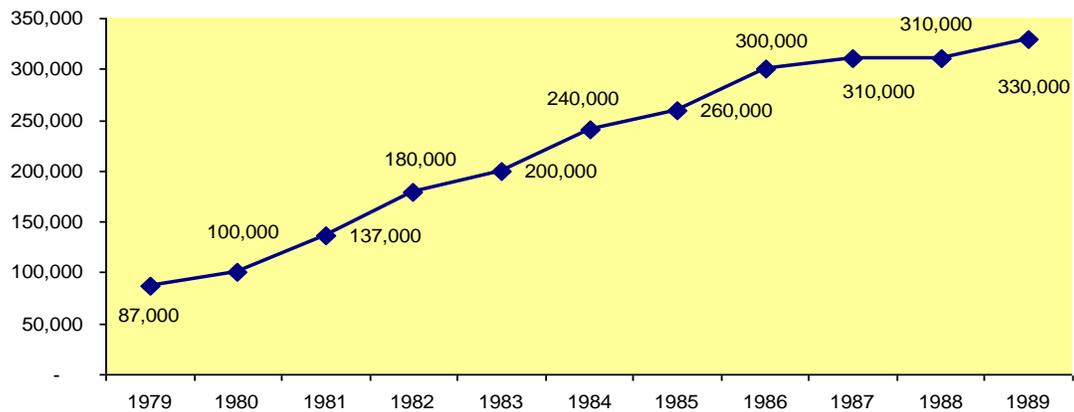


Figure 8: Growth of DRA Forces⁶⁹

The regular army forces were significantly weakened by the insurgency and the Soviet invasion in 1979 but were gradually rebuilt and in 1988 stood at 90,000 troops. Border guards were considered a separate force and in 1988 their strength reached 42,000. The gendarmerie and the secret intelligence services, modeled after the Soviet KGB, were also heavily armed and organized alongside military lines. The former had 92,000 personnel in 1988 and the latter 68,000. In fact, units of the Tsarandoy and KhaD regularly participated in military operations against the mujahidin and often were more effective than the army. With the addition of Special Guards units, which were the elite units guarding the regime in Kabul, total security forces available to the government in 1988 numbered almost 310,000. One of the most significant challenges in building the security forces was the very high desertion rate. Throughout the decade, desertion numbers ran in the tens of thousands, peaking at 42,544 in 1983 (Figure 9).

⁶⁸ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 145.

⁶⁹ Based on data from Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 266.

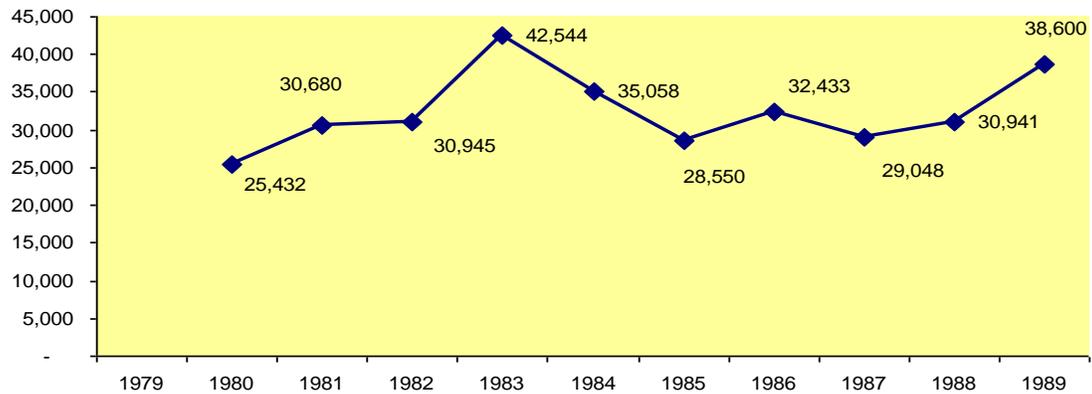


Figure 9: *DRA Army Desertion Rates*⁷⁰

As the DRA security forces grew, however, the impact of the desertions lessened. Compared to the overall strength of the forces, until the middle of the 1980s desertion rates were in excess of 20 percent but by the end of the decade this rate stabilized at around 10 percent (Figure 10).

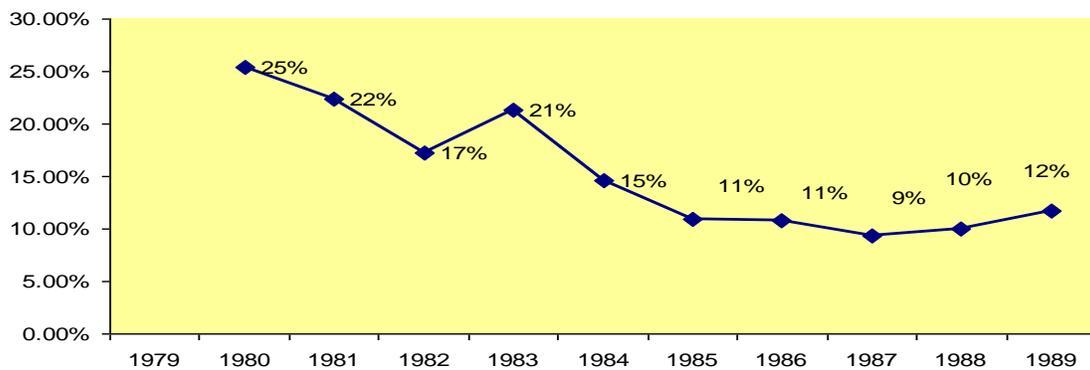


Figure 10: *DRA Army Desertion Rates, in Percentage*

It should be pointed out that desertions and absences without leave were not only motivated by reluctance to serve on the side of the regime and by the conscript system, which often used press gangs to round up youths from the streets, but also by the reluctance of Afghan men to work away from home.⁷¹ To a large extent the high desertion rates can be attributed to soldiers leaving their bases to bring their salaries to their families. In most of the cases, they would later return and even demand back pay.

Soviet strategists and the Kabul regime realized that in order to defeat the mujahidin they had to engage them on their own ground and to use their methods. In 1983, a Jirga in Kabul sanctioned the use of tribal militias to complement the state security forces. The objective was to create a structure based on the traditional principles of state defence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, since these troops were recruited from the local inhabitants, the tribal units engaged sectors of the rural population, which would have refused to serve in the regular army. On the negative side, the

⁷⁰ Based on data from Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 260.

⁷¹ M. A. Gareev, *Afganskaya Strada* (Moscow, 1999), p. 167.

central government had difficulty controlling the militias. By the end of the decade the tribal militia became one of the main instruments for engaging rebel groups. In 1988, these irregular troops, comprised of tribal militia, self-defence units at the village level and the so-called Groups for Defence of the Revolution (GDR) numbered 150,000. The growth of the militias resulted in a change in the role of the army. With the militias taking on an increased role in counter-insurgent activities, the army increasingly served as a reserve force and was used principally in large-scale operations and for protecting strategic points. In other words, in 1988, the Kabul regime had at its disposal 460,000 armed forces, including state security forces and militias. Combined with the Soviet 40th Army, more than half a million men were fighting on the side of the regime.⁷² After 1985 the Red Army increasingly ceded combat responsibilities to the Afghan army. An indicator of this trend is that from 1986 Afghan army combat deaths increased exponentially while at the same time the Soviet deaths decreased (Figure 11).

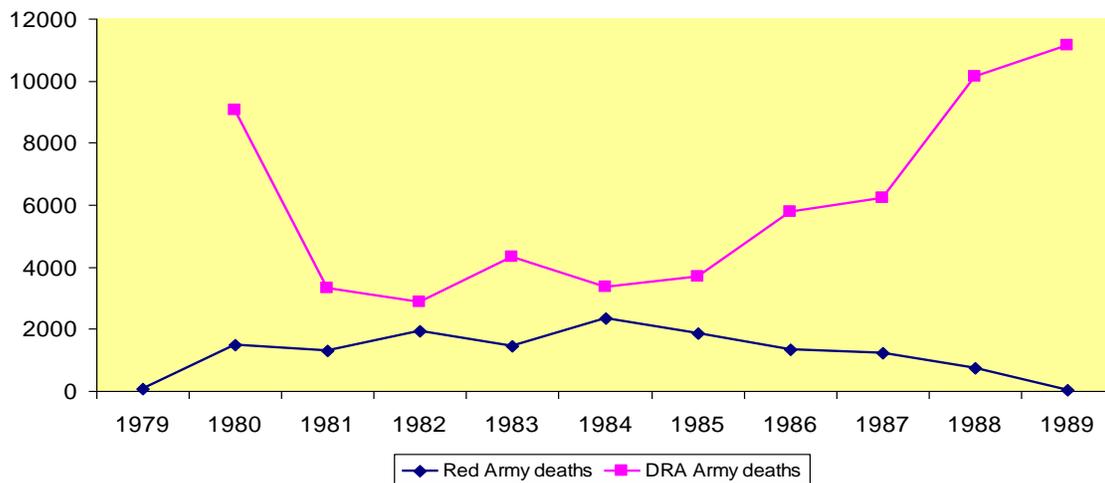


Figure 11: Soviet and DRA Army Deaths⁷³

⁷² In comparison, Soviet strategists estimated that the resistance had a pool of 900,000 potential fighters in the late 1980s. However, no more than 400,000 were actually armed and only one third of them ever fired a shot against the Soviet or the DRA army. It is believed that no more than 40-60,000 mujahidin were active at any one time. See Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 188.

⁷³ Based on data from Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 271 and Gareev, *Afganskaya strada*, p. 328

Another indicator of this trend can be found in the data on border-sealing activities, such as organizing ambushes and intercepting mujahidin caravans. At the beginning of the war, the Red Army undertook all such activities. By 1985, these activities were conducted as joint operations with the Afghan army, and, by 1989; border-sealing activities were performed either exclusively by the Afghan forces or with minimal participation of Soviet troops (Figure 12).

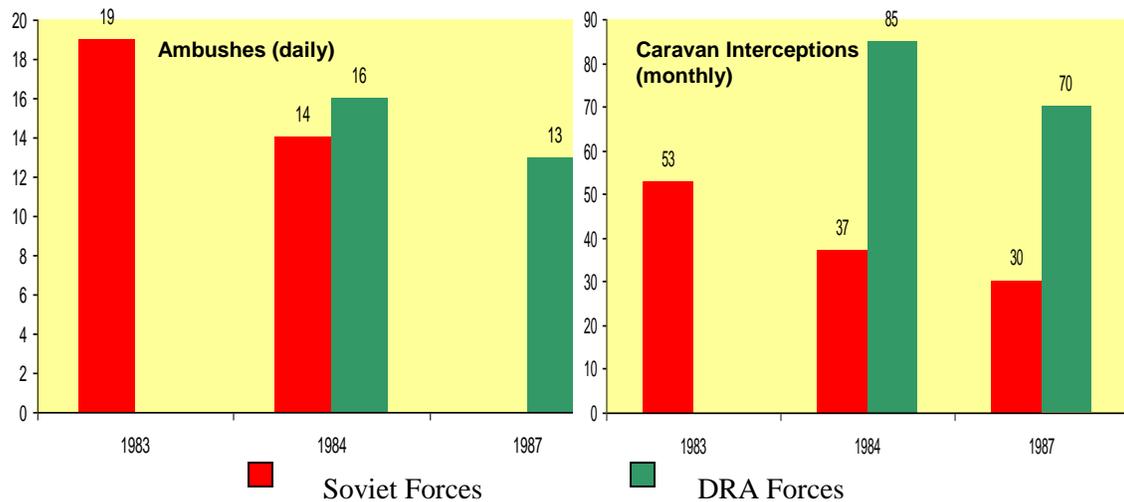


Figure 12: *Border Sealing Activities, 1983-87*⁷⁴

By 1989 the Soviet leadership believed that Afghan forces could ensure the continuity of the pro-Moscow regime on their own. Nine years after the invasion, the Soviets negotiated a ceasefire with the insurgents to allow the withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan. The last column of Soviet troops crossed the Amu Darya River back into the Soviet Union on 15 February 1989.⁷⁵ Despite questionable levels of preparedness and motivation,⁷⁶ the DRA army was able to hold its ground, and even achieved important victories defeating mujahidin offensives against Jelalabad and Kabul during 1989 and 1990.⁷⁷

3.6 National Reconciliation

After five years of military operations and state-building efforts, the Soviets and their Afghan allies faced a very difficult set of military, governance and developmental problems. The Soviet and PDPA policies were not succeeding nor were the Soviet counter-insurgency efforts. It was at this point in time that Mikail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and launched his program of Reconstruction and Openness (Perestroika and Glasnost) that dramatically changed Soviet society and foreign policy. By 1986, Soviet leaders realized that the policy of overt sovietization and brutal counter-insurgent operations would not

⁷⁴ Based on data from Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 271

⁷⁵ For a detailed account of Soviet planning and tactical execution of the withdrawal see Lester W. Grau, "Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2, April-June 2007, pp. 235-261.

⁷⁶ See the rather critical analysis of Gareev, who was one of the Soviet advisors left in Afghanistan after the Red Army withdrawal. Gareev, *Afganskaya strada*, pp. 166-178.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-211.

the defeat of the resistance anytime soon. Consequently, the Soviets decided to change their strategic objectives. Following a decision by the Soviet Politburo in November 1986, Muhammad Najibullah, formerly in charge of the intelligence service, replaced Babrak Karmal.⁷⁸ The new leader launched the policy of National Reconciliation in December of the same year with the objective of reducing the military confrontation by negotiating a political compromise with the opposition and thus allowing the Red Army to disengage. The pre-invasion Soviet objective of making Afghanistan a socialist country was replaced with the more modest goal of simply keeping Afghanistan a non-aligned state and thus potentially preventing the country from serving as a base for US forces.⁷⁹

The main elements of the National Reconciliation policy included restoring the peace in Afghanistan; opening the channels of communication with the mujahidin commanders, resistance parties and former political figures; negotiating deals with the tribal chiefs and other local notables; and the creation of a coalition government with participation of all political groups. To win support from the population in the countryside, the National Reconciliation called for more investment in the rural economy in order to improve the farmers' standard of living.⁸⁰ As a first step, the government declared a unilateral ceasefire (effective January 15, 1987) and general amnesty (January 24, 1987).⁸¹ Limited liberalization was signalled through the release of all political prisoners and the encouragement of public criticism. The right to alternative parties was recognized, although they were supposed to support the constitution and have their headquarters in Kabul, thus effectively excluding the resistance parties in Pakistan.⁸² The opposition leaders in Peshawar unanimously rejected the National Reconciliation policy.⁸³ Nevertheless, the government and local administration became more inclusive by offering positions to non-party members and even mujahidin commanders. By the end of 1987, 11 out of 30 governors were non-party members—former politicians or local notables, while former mujahidin commanders were appointed in 14 districts and 4 provinces as governors.⁸⁴ The first non-PDPA Prime Minister since 1978 was appointed in 1988.⁸⁵

Despite the failure to achieve a compromise with the opposition parties, successes were registered in accommodating the tribal leaders and mujahidin commanders. This was accomplished through offering concessions for more local autonomy and material support. Those willing to cooperate with the government were offered what amounted to effective self-rule. The controversial reforms were first amended to the point of being irrelevant and later completely abandoned. Former mujahidin were allowed to enrol in the militias and given large salaries and landholdings. These two developments signalled to many mujahidin commanders and tribal leaders that the government had corrected its mistakes and had recognized the limits of its authority. From the point of view of the mujahidin and the tribal chiefs, it simply paid better than the cooperation

⁷⁸ See "Minutes from the CC CPSU Politburo meeting of November 13, 1986," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issues 8-9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 178-181. Available in English in Savranskaya, "Russian Documents and Memoirs: Document 20."

⁷⁹ "CC CPSU Politburo meeting," p. 178.

⁸⁰ As a result of the Soviet counterinsurgency strategies, by 1986 the agriculture, the main sector of the rural economy was severely damaged. See for discussion of this subject Minkov, Smolyneec, "Economic Development in Afghanistan during the Soviet Period, pp. 11-14.

⁸¹ Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 71.

⁸² Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 168.

⁸³ Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 73.

⁸⁴ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, 173.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

with the opposition parties. From the population's point of view, changing sides to the government was not surrender but rather a return of the power and the autonomy to the tribe.⁸⁶

As a result of National Reconciliation, by 1989, 70-80 percent of mujahidin commanders had ceased military operations against the government. By the end of the war, 25 percent of all non-government armed units had signed "reconciliation" agreements while 40 percent had ceasefire agreements with the government (Figure 13). It is estimated that only 12 percent of the mujahidin rejected any deals⁸⁷. As already mentioned, the number of government-controlled villages almost doubled in the period 1986-1989.

These tactics led to improvement of the overall security situation in the country. In 1986 and 1987, according to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) reports, the number of civilian deaths was down 65-70 percent, compared to 1985.⁸⁸

The National Reconciliation was very similar to the "pacification" policy previously pursued. The difference was that while the latter was deemed a short-term strategy and an auxiliary to the main thrust of sovietization, the former was now considered the main policy of receiving legitimacy. In fact, National Reconciliation signalled the end of the sovietization process in Afghanistan. The November 1986 meeting of the Soviet Politburo had decided that the Soviet strategy would now aim for Afghan neutrality rather than sovietization.⁸⁹ Marxist propaganda and promotion of Afghan-Soviet friendship was gradually discontinued while English replaced the study of Russian. Religious instruction in schools was reintroduced. In November 1987, a Loya Jirga accepted a new constitution which removed the word Democratic from the name of the country.⁹⁰ In 1990 it was changed once more to become the Islamic State of Afghanistan.⁹¹ In addition to its focus on peace and inclusiveness in the country, National Reconciliation had a foreign policy aspect as well. The Najibullah regime sought to acquire international support for the policy, and thereby a greater legitimacy for itself, from international organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and the United Nations. With the exception of an OIC invitation to Afghan journalists, no significant international support was received, however.⁹²

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

⁸⁸ The number of civilian deaths decreased from 37,000 in 1985 to 10-12,000 in 1986 and 14,000 in 1987. See United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Prepared by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Felix Ermacora, in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1986/40*, E/CN.4/1987/22 (19 February 1987), p. 11; and United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan, Prepared by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Felix Ermacora, in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1987/58*, E/CN.4/1988/25 (26 February 1988), p. 8. It should be pointed out that the UNCHR casualty figures are in the range of 5-10 times lower than these estimated by Sliwinski for the same period.

⁸⁹ "Minutes from the CC CPSU Politburo meeting of November 13, 1986," p. 179.

⁹⁰ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 109

⁹¹ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 159.

⁹² Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 74.

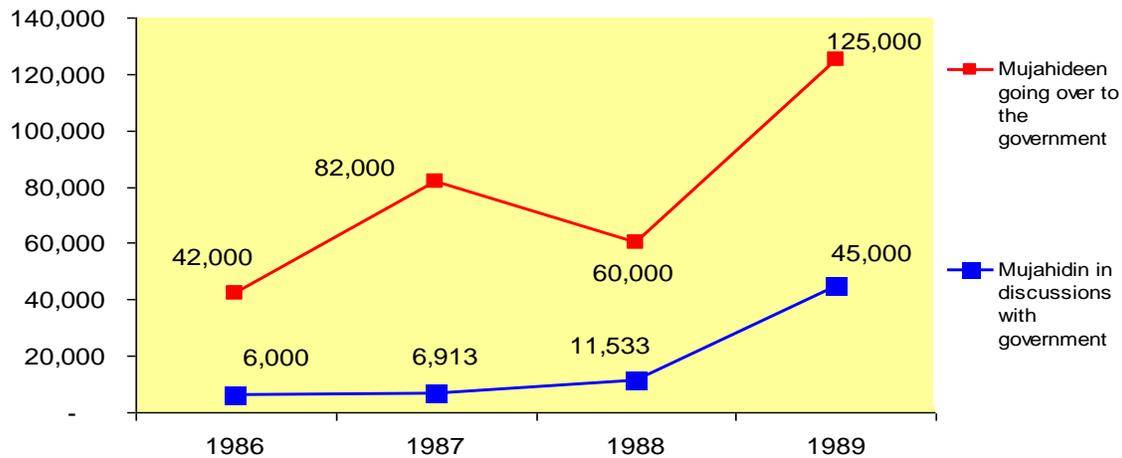


Figure 13: *National Reconciliation Process, 1986-89*⁹³

Ultimately, the policy of National Reconciliation was carried out on the strength of Najibullah's perseverance and the infusion of Soviet financial aid to offset the costs of buying off tribal leaders and mujahidin commanders.⁹⁴ Besides being rejected immediately by the Pakistan-based opposition parties, the policy was not embraced wholeheartedly by the members of the Parcham faction, who still supported the former leader Babrak Karmal and often sabotaged the initiatives associated with National Reconciliation.⁹⁵

3.7 Expansion of Government Control

Soviet strategists envisioned that building the Party and the state institutions, and the strength of the security forces, combined with the social restructuring of the Afghan society and educating the new elite would secure a social base for the regime. The relative autonomy of the state from the rural society, however, meant that until such time when institutions for mediating between two were developed, the only means available to the state to impose its program in the countryside, at least at the beginning, were military. Indeed, by having a huge military advantage, the combined Soviet and DRA forces had no problem of preventing the resistance from making any significant territorial gains. Despite that, it was equally difficult for the government and Soviet troops to make gains.

Indeed, the degree of government control over the countryside was quite limited. The government's presence in the provinces varied from 10 percent to 60 percent in the north and northeast regions but in the central, south and southwest regions it was barely visible.⁹⁶ The central government's presence outside major cities was largely in the form of Afghan army bases dispersed throughout the country (Figure 14). However, the data show that control was gradually

⁹³ Based on data from: Guistozi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 282.

⁹⁴ In the period 1986-88, the state deficit doubled and Soviet financial aid increased 1.5 times. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Table 5.1, p. 113.

⁹⁵ Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 73.

⁹⁶ Guistozi, *War, Politics and Society*, 291.

being wrestled from the resistance. Notably, until 1986, when most of the expansion was accomplished through military means, the gains were very gradual and disproportionate to the number of villages “freed” from mujahidin control. From 1983 until 1987, Soviet and DRA forces conducted as much as 1,819 “clean and sweep” operations per year (in 1985) to drive mujahidin from Afghan villages. Nevertheless, out of the thousands of “freed” villages, the regime was able to keep, on average, less than 300 villages per year in its sphere of influence (Figure 15).

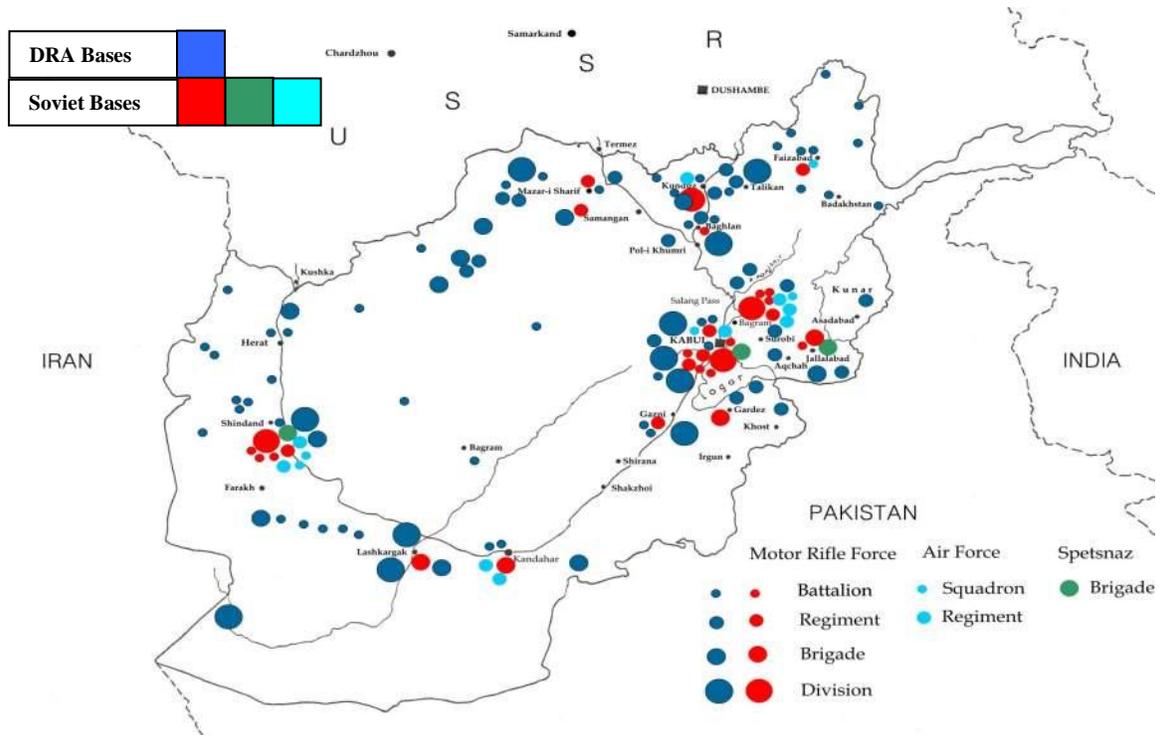


Figure 14: Soviet and DRA Army Bases⁹⁷

A telling story is the village of Khushi, which in 1983 made the headlines in the Soviet press. According to the stories, the Afghan government had taken control of the village and this was represented as a great success for the new administration.⁹⁸ Only ten days after the publication, however, mujahidin overran the village and the new governance structures were destroyed.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Source: Created by Anton Minkov, based on data by Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 314-316 and Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, 292.

⁹⁸ A. Ahmedzyanov, “Ljudi Khushi [The People of Khushi],” *Izvestiya* (May 19, 1983). See Annex A, Part I.

⁹⁹ Dimitrii Babkin, “Afghanistan” at http://artofwar.ru/b/babkin_d/1.shtml. See Annex A, Part II.

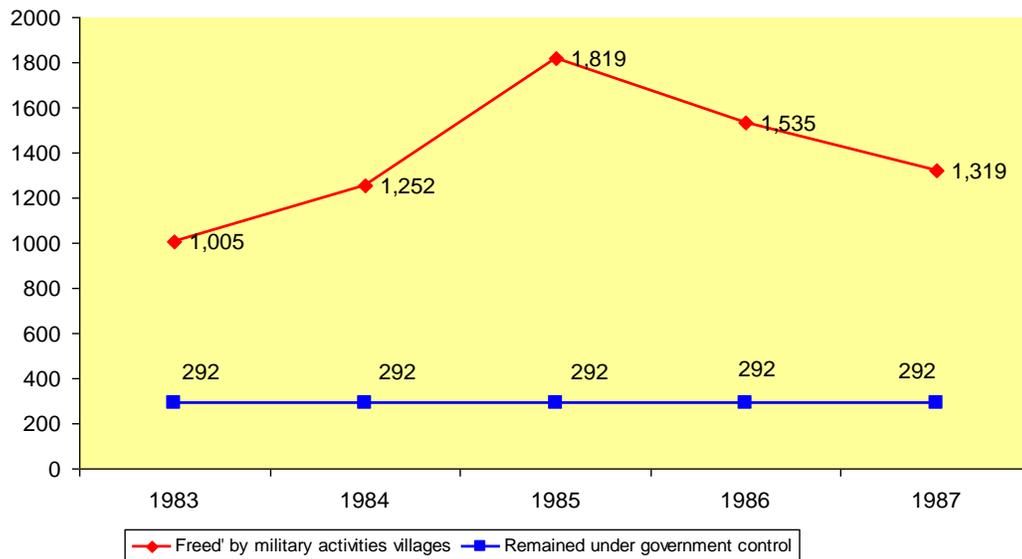


Figure 15: “Sweep and Clear” Operations and Villages Remaining in Government Control, 1983-1987¹⁰⁰

Among other objectives, the introduction of the National Reconciliation policy was also an attempt to expand the area of government control without resorting to military actions. According to the available data, this approach was a much more successful than military operations. From 1980 until 1986 the expansion of government control over Afghan villages was taking place at an average of 5 percent per year and only 6,970 villages, out of the 35,000, were in the regime’s sphere of influence. From the introduction of National Reconciliation until the end of 1988, however, the number of villages on the government side increased to 11,265, which is almost double the pre-1986 situation. Furthermore, the regime claimed that it had a temporary control of additional 5,000 villages, which brought its area of control to almost half of the population living in the countryside (Figure 16). The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1988-89 had a profound impact on the regime’s sway in the countryside. The number of villages under government control declined by almost 50 percent from the beginning of the withdrawal to its completion, and in 1989 stood at 6,100 (Figure 16)—less than the number at the beginning of the National Reconciliation process.

¹⁰⁰ Based on data from Guistozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, pp. 193-94. The number of villages in remaining in government control between 1983 and 1987 is the average per year.

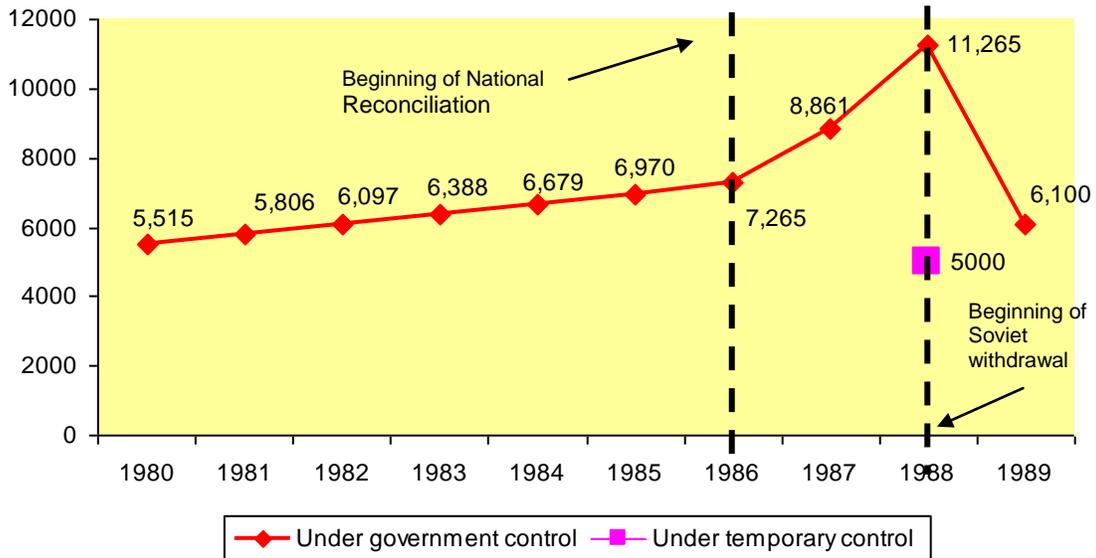


Figure 16: *Number of Afghan Villages under Government Control, 1980-1989*¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ The growth of number of villages under government control between 1981 and 1986 is estimated, based on data from Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, pp. 193-94.

4 Social Development

4.1 Social Base of the Regime

Given the difficulty of establishing government authority in the countryside, it was not a surprise that the social base of the regime was primarily in the cities, which were easier to control. In 1986, out of a population of 5 million living in state controlled territories, 3 million lived in cities.¹⁰² Originally a party of intellectuals, the PDPA attracted people mostly from the army, the professional class, bureaucrats, students and women. In 1987, 46 percent of the party members worked for the state apparatus and 50 percent were in the army.¹⁰³ The strategy for ensuring the support of the urban population was to make it dependent on the government. For example, most of the imported wheat was distributed through a coupon system that benefited those loyal to the regime or those living in government-controlled territories. It was estimated that 80 percent of Kabul's population received such coupons. The question of food supply was so important that the government created a commission on food supply as part of the Homeland High Defence Council.¹⁰⁴ PDPA also controlled the population through patronage. In 1988, 700,000 people, or 20 percent of the workforce under government control, were receiving salaries, coupons or other incentives from the state.¹⁰⁵

Workers and peasants were originally underrepresented in PDPA but their number in the party membership grew from 5 percent at the start of the revolution to about 35 percent by 1987.¹⁰⁶ The participation of workers and peasants in the state and party institutions increased as well. The influence of the party and the regime in the countryside was maintained by a limited number of party cells in the villages and through the state farms and the cooperatives. The creation of the Groups for Defence of the Revolution (GDR), in essence a party militia, was aimed at spreading party influence among the masses.¹⁰⁷ Although around 450,000 peasants were affected by the land reforms, it was estimated that only 150,000 or 12 percent of all peasants under DRA control supported the regime.¹⁰⁸ The PDPA never became a proletarian or a peasant party.

4.2 Reforms

Within months of coming to power, the PDPA regime promulgated a series of decrees aimed at transforming Afghan society and expanding the social base of the regime. The three reforms which had the most profound impact were aimed at reducing social inequality in the countryside by redistributing land, cancelling land related debts and limiting the burdening payments to the bride's family required from the grooms in marital arrangements. The poor execution of the reforms, the corruption associated with them, and the brutality of their enforcement, greatly antagonized the rural population. According to anthropologists, the restriction on the bride price was the principal cause of the insurgency in rural areas.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 170.

¹⁰⁵ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 46, 258.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Tapper, "Causes and Consequences of the Abolition of Brideprice in Afghanistan," in M. Nazif Shahrani, Robert L. Canfield, ed. *Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley International and Area Studies, 1984), p. 291.

The land reforms introduced in 1978 antagonized farmers and landlords and limited state control of the agricultural sector. The first reform—cancelling the agricultural loans—did not eliminate the farmer’s need for credit. By failing to establish an alternative,¹¹⁰ this reform actually led to a worsening of the farmers’ financial conditions. The second initiative, aimed at reforming the agricultural sector, involved an imposition of ceilings on land ownership and the redistribution of the excess land to small owners or landless peasants. This met various practical difficulties as well, such as scarcity of cultivable land overall, lack of information on ownership and lack of compensation for the expropriated land.¹¹¹ The reform disturbed the social structure in agricultural areas and further fuelled the opposition to the regime. Because of the sanctity of ownership in Islamic law, the peasants who received it did not cultivate a large amount of expropriated land. This contributed to the general decline in agriculture.¹¹²

Efforts to create cooperatives and state farms, following the Soviet model, received a disproportionate amount of development effort and money. However, the grandiose plans to create thousands of cooperatives could not be fulfilled. In 1982, their number stood at 1,217 and only grew to 1,274 in 1984. According to the data gathered by Giustozzi, the creation of new farms declined sharply in 1986, and again after 1988.¹¹³ In 1989, cooperatives only generated one percent of all agricultural produce.¹¹⁴

4.3 Emancipation of Women

The Soviet vision of social change also included the emancipation of women and increased education. Women were given more opportunities for education and work. From 1978 to 1986, the number of employed women increased from 5,000 to 270,000. In the government sector women comprised almost 20 percent of the workforce. Some 13,000 women were present in different military and militia units.¹¹⁵ The locus of most of these emancipatory measures was the cities. It is doubtful whether the government had much success in rural areas in implementing reforms pertaining to women’s rights. As was the case of the bride-price reform, the increased rights acquired by women in Afghanistan was perceived as contrary to the traditional values and established customs and most likely provided additional stimulus to the insurgency in the countryside.

4.4 Education

Significant developments also occurred in the field of education. In 1978, the Afghan population, especially women, was mostly illiterate.¹¹⁶ In addition, the emigration of a large part of the Afghan professional class after the coup and the Soviet invasion created a serious void in different areas requiring highly educated people. To remedy this situation, the regime launched massive literacy campaigns and by 1985, it claimed that more than one million people had

¹¹⁰ See for discussion Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 185. Giustozzi, however, reports that state credit was offered to farmers on a large scale from 1982 on. See Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-188.

¹¹² According to a government survey only 53 percent of the peasants who received land, actually cultivated it. See *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 294,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21

¹¹⁶ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 130.

graduated from these classes and that almost a half a million were enrolled in literacy courses.¹¹⁷ Special, shorter degree and diploma granting programs were instituted to create technical and professional personnel faster. According to some observers, however, illiteracy increased in the provinces because of the wartime destruction, while the shorter programs decreased the quality of the professionals.

For the Soviet strategists, education was very important not just for addressing the skill shortages but also in their long-term strategy for bringing the country firmly into the Soviet sphere of influence. The imposition of Soviet model state institutions was not sufficient to change the minds of the Afghans who were connected in some way with these institutions. In fact, institutional change had minimal impact on changing Afghans' perceptions and values.¹¹⁸ Educating a new generation in the Soviet way of life, therefore, was crucial for the formation of a new elite and the continued survival of the regime. To achieve this goal, the educational system was restructured to conform to the Soviet one, while the curriculum and the textbooks were amended and fashioned to include dialectic materialism and scientific communism. The Russian language was introduced from middle school to university.¹¹⁹ Numerous educational agreements were signed and tens of thousands of young people were sent to the Soviet Union or eastern European countries for short or prolonged periods of education.¹²⁰ In 1989, 10,000 Afghan youth were enrolled in long-term studies in the USSR and 15,000 made short-term training visits.¹²¹ The Afghan government guaranteed that they would be employed upon their return. It was anticipated that these graduates would become staunch supporters of the regime. Although there were reports of coercion in some cases, again, as in the case of urban women, who took advantage of the emancipation, many young people took advantage of the opportunity for a better education and willingly went to study in the USSR.¹²² Many Afghan military officers also received training in the Soviet Union—usually for 6 to 12 months.¹²³

The mujahidin also realized the importance of education for the expansion the social base of the regime. As a result, schools, especially those in rural areas, and teachers were their prime targets. In 1982, the mujahidin destroyed 1,812 primary schools, representing 86 percent of all schools in the countryside.¹²⁴ In the period January 1980-July 1982, the number of assassinated teachers and students in six Afghan provinces was double the number of assassinated government officials.¹²⁵

The Afghan Deputy Minister of Defence Ahmad Yusuf Nuristani attested to the success of the Soviets in enhancing education in Afghanistan during a visit to Canada in 2007. Most of the literate middle and senior Afghan army officers today, Nuristani said, were educated during the Soviet period in government programs while those coming from a mujahidin background were largely illiterate. In fact, according to observations of westerners who have worked in Afghanistan since 2002, the word “communist” was sometimes used by Afghans to refer to “an educated individual.”¹²⁶

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Roy, *Sovietization*, p. 52.

¹¹⁹ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 140; Roy, *Sovietization*, p. 54

¹²⁰ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 130; Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 141, Roy, *Sovietization*, p. 56.

¹²¹ Roy, *Sovietization*, p. 56

¹²² Ibid., p. 54. The authors have even met Pakistani Pushtuns who immigrated to Afghanistan with the goal of obtaining an education in the Soviet Union.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 56.

¹²⁴ Slinkin, *Stranitsi istorii*, p. 33.

¹²⁵ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 253.

¹²⁶ Communicated in personal conversations with the authors.

4.5 Cultural Imposition

Sovietization was also enforced through the culture and the media. The Soviet way of life was promoted as the only path to modernization. Soviet dress and fashion was the norm, while Soviet movies and literature dominated the cultural sphere. Newspapers and the television were used extensively to promote the virtues of the new system. Official Soviet holidays, such as the October Revolution day, were celebrated in Afghanistan as well.¹²⁷

4.6 Integrating the Ulama

In addition to traditional and tribal structures, Soviet strategy included the integration of the Muslim spiritual leaders (*ulama*¹²⁸), who in many instances were as much or even more influential than the tribal notables. A similar approach in Soviet Central Asia had been a key measure in establishing the Soviet system there. There, the fostering of a “red” clergy elite helped to ensure control of the flock.¹²⁹ In Afghanistan, to institutionalize the otherwise informal religious networks, the regime established a Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments and a professional organization of the religious scholars—the Council of Ulama and Mullah. The Council was also a member organization of the NFF.¹³⁰ The government sponsored numerous conferences of religious leaders, rebuilt mosques and distributed grants to pilgrims to Mecca.¹³¹ The *ulama* that were supportive of the government were given special allowances and coupons for food and commodities. In 1987, 16,000 Islamic leaders received such benefits and their number increased to 20,000 one year later.¹³² The vast majority of the religious figures, however, remained outside the state religious system. The main reason was that religious authority in Afghanistan was more elusive and religious hierarchy much less developed than in Soviet Central Asia.

4.7 Agitprop

An innovative way to establish contact with the population outside the regime’s control and to increase the government’s visibility was the establishment of special “agitation and propaganda” units—called *Agitprop*.¹³³

Agitprop units were created from divisional, down to regimental levels of command. These units were joint Afghan—Soviet detachments and included both civil and military personnel. In addition to primarily Soviet soldiers, Agitprop was composed of doctors and nurses, entertainers and political activists, the latter mostly Afghans. Initiated by some Soviet advisers in 1981 as a pilot project, the military brass initially opposed the use of Agitprop units, but after demonstrating positive results, in 1982, these were officially constituted as part of the force structure.¹³⁴ Agitprop units toured villages and spread information about the work of the government, distributed declarations of the Loya Jirga, organized meetings, and concerts, and even projected

¹²⁷ Roy, *Sovietization*, pp. 54-55.

¹²⁸ Arabic, plural of ‘*ālim*, from the verb ‘*alima*— “to know of,” “to be aware of.” The term denotes scholars of the religious sciences and those who fulfil community functions that require some knowledge of religious matters. See Cl. Gilliot, R. C. Repp, K. A. Nizami, M. B. Hooker, Chang-Kuan Lin and J. O. Hunwick, “Ulamā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Brill Online, 2008).

¹²⁹ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 271.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 270, Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 59.

¹³¹ Nyrop and Seekins, *Afghanistan Country Study*, p. 270.

¹³² Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 62.

¹³³ From the Russian “*agitatsii i propaganda*”—agitation and propaganda.

¹³⁴ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 42.

movies in makeshift theatres.¹³⁵ According to Soviet military commanders, Agitprop proved also useful for reconnaissance and negotiations with tribal chiefs and even mujahidin commanders.¹³⁶ To win over the villagers, Agitprop provided medical help and distributed free fuel, medicine and food. In the period 1981-89, Agitprop units provided medical assistance to 400,000 people and distributed food and other supplies to 1,000,000.¹³⁷ Although these numbers look large, they represented only 12 to 15 percent of the rural population.

In 1986, Agitprop activities were taken to another level by coordinating them with military operations. The plan was that after a military offensive, an Agitprop unit would move in and prepare the ground for the creation of a local administrative bodies and militia. The final step was the stationing of a police battalion, which would then conduct a census of the population and distribute ID cards. A dedicated radio station supported agitprop activities in the field.¹³⁸ It was very crucial, however, that the military successes were followed very quickly with the other initiatives because the mujahidin were usually able to recover and would try to recapture the lost territory within 15-20 days. Agitprop activities were also hampered by corruption as some of the free aid to be distributed by them ended up in the hands of merchants who then sold it at their shops. The quality of the personnel working in the units was of critical importance as well. In some instances the population regarded the Agitprop activists as strangers and refused to accept the aid offered by the units. In others, Soviet officers, with Central Asian ethnic backgrounds, who knew the local customs and showed respect to the villagers, were quite successful. Overall, Agitprop was evaluated as quite beneficial because it reduced the hostility towards the regime in Kabul and even towards the Red Army.

4.8 Ethnic Politics

The Afghan state in the 18th and the 19th century was build around the uncontested political domination of the Pushtuns.¹³⁹ Modernization of Afghan state institutions after World War I, however, led to members of non-Pushtun groups—Tajiks, Uzbeks and others—entering the civil bureaucracy in greater numbers and to the gradual weakening of Pushtun control over the political system.¹⁴⁰ This situation eventually resulted in the Afghan governments pursuing a policy of establishing equality among the ethnic groups. In the 1964 Afghan Constitution, no ethnic minority was given more rights than any other.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the sense of rivalry between Pushtuns and non-Pushtuns persisted. This rivalry seems to have been an important factor in determining PDPA regime's ethnic relations and politics. As acknowledged earlier, the Khalq faction of PDPA, which provided the first two governments after the revolution, was dominated by non-Durani Pushtuns while the Parcham faction, which replaced it until the fall of PDPA regime, was dominated by urban Pushtuns who probably had weaker tribal identities than rural Pushtuns and urban Tajiks.

On the surface it looked as if the PDPA was committed to pursue a policy of equality among the ethnic groups. In fact, one of the stated goals of the 1978 revolution was to put an end to the

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

¹³⁶ Carey Schofield, *The Russian Elite: Inside Spetsnaz and the Airborne Forces* (London and Mechanicsburg: Greenhill Press, 1993), p. 110.

¹³⁷ Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 44.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³⁹ Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns," pp. 621-22.

¹⁴⁰ Newell, "Post-Soviet Afghanistan," p. 1101.

¹⁴¹ Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns," p. 622.

ethnic discrimination in Afghanistan.¹⁴² As part of the transformation towards a Soviet type of society, the first PDPA government adopted the Soviet nationality policy model, which was based on dividing the minorities according to ethno-linguistic affinity.¹⁴³ In November 1978, the PDPA government recognized Dari Persian, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch and Nuristani as official languages in addition to Pushtu.¹⁴⁴ As part of the policy, it also announced that ethnic language schools would be created and each child would have an opportunity to study in their own mother tongue. In reality, the objective of the Pushtun-dominated Khalq faction was to undermine the importance of Dari, which until then was the language of the central administration. It was expected that by reducing the use of Dari, on the part of the other ethnic minorities, Pushtu would displace it as a lingua franca among the Afghans in one or two generations.¹⁴⁵ The favouring of Pushtu is evident in the fact that all public addresses by the two Khalq leaders—Taraki and Amin—were given in Pushtu.¹⁴⁶ The new ethnic policy, combined with the brutal attitude of the Khalqis towards the opposition, may have created the perception that the new regime in Kabul was an attempt by the Pushtuns to regain pre-eminence in the political life among the Dari and Farsi speaking minorities. It may not be a coincidence that the first wave of uprisings in the spring of 1979 against the Khalq regime were in Tajik and Farsiwan areas. The rural Pushtuns in the South were last to rise in rebellion.¹⁴⁷

As the insurgency grew, however, the role of the Pushtuns in the insurgency became most prominent, while, on the other hand, the role of minorities in the PDPA increased (see section PDPA and the Party-state). The larger participation of Pushtuns in the insurgency was primarily due to the change in the Soviet counterinsurgency strategy in the period 1983-85, which aimed at interdicting the supply routes from Pakistan. Pushtun villages, as a result, had to endure the heaviest fighting of the conflict. It could be argued, however, that the Pushtun rebellion was also compounded by the PDPA change of course in ethnic nationality policy in favour of non-Pushtun minority groups.

On the one side, the PDPA governments that came to power after the Soviet invasion were from the Parcham faction, which included a large number of Tajiks. The greater non-Pushtun influence in the faction is reflected in the fact that the first Parcham leader, Babrak Karmal, was a Pushtun, but used Dari in his public communications.¹⁴⁸ Karmal sought to improve the regime's relations with the non-Pushtun minorities and allowed a large number of them, especially Tajiks, to enter the army and the bureaucracy as well as into important government positions. There were several important reasons that forced the new PDPA government to change its ethnic strategy. First, the Karmal government believed that it was primarily the south Pushtuns behind the insurgency. To stabilize its regime, he exploited the Pushtun ethnic rivalry with non-Pushtun minorities and began to attract the support of the latter.

Another factor that influenced the shift was that although the Khalq faction was no longer in power, its members were still dominant in the security apparatus. The increase of the number of non-Pushtuns in the army was, therefore, aimed at weakening the internal opposition. As a result a significant transformation in the ethnic composition of the army indeed took place (Figure 17).

¹⁴² Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society*, p. 117.

¹⁴³ Eden Naby, "The Ethnic Factor in Soviet-Afghan Relations," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 3, March 1980, p. 238.

¹⁴⁴ Naby, "The Ethnic Factor," 238 and Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns," p. 622.

¹⁴⁵ Naby, "The Ethnic Factor," p. 242.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁴⁷ Newell, "Post-Soviet Afghanistan," p. 1102.

¹⁴⁸ Naby, "The Ethnic Factor," p. 246.

In 1978, 70 percent of the senior officers and 60 percent of the troops in the army were Pushtuns. By 1987-88 the ethnic representation in the army seems to have been moving in the favour of the non-Pushtun minorities and especially to that of the Tajiks. At that time, the number of Pushtuns among senior officer ranks had decreased to 55 percent and that among the troops to less than 50 percent.¹⁴⁹ If we were to judge from the enrolment in military schools in 1985 (48 percent Tajiks and 45 percent Pushtun), the trend was moving towards a clear Tajik majority in the army. The Pushtuns lost their positions in the army even further when in 1990 an unsuccessful coup against the Najibullah government led to the dismissal of a large number of Pushtun officers (mostly Khalqis).¹⁵⁰ An additional, external factor for the policy shift may have been the presence of a large number of Soviet advisors from Tajik and Uzbek backgrounds who favoured Afghans from the same ethnic groups.¹⁵¹

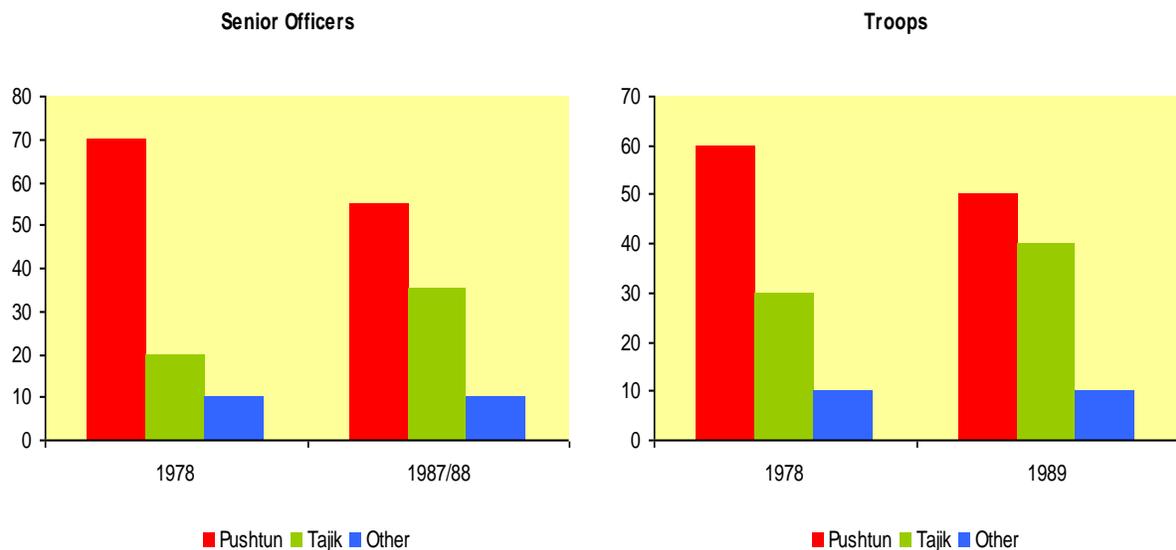


Figure 17: *Ethnic Composition of the Afghan Army, 1978-1989*¹⁵²

The ethnic tensions within the regime were further aggravated during the period of National Reconciliation as one of the strategies to draw mujahidin commanders on the side of the government was to encourage alliances between non-Pushtun commanders and non-Pushtun officers, much to the resentment of the Pushtun generals. So significant was the impact of the Karmal regime's ethnic policy that some analysts believe that, at least on an elite level, the conflict was transformed from an ideological to an ethnic one.¹⁵³

Policies that favoured non-Pushtuns may have altered the balance of power so much that ultimately, their privileged status may have been one of the reasons for the fall of the PDPA regime. After all, it was the refusal to follow the orders from Kabul on the part of the Uzbek

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

¹⁵⁰ Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns," p. 625.

¹⁵¹ Naby, "The Ethnic Factor," pp. 249-252.

¹⁵² Based on data by Giustozzi, *War Politics and Society*, p. 276.

¹⁵³ Ahady, "The Decline of Pashtuns," p. 625.

general Dosum and the Tajik general Abdul Momen that was the immediate cause for Najibullah's stepping down.

5 Conclusion and Lessons Learned

Initially, the Soviets had the limited objective of regime change in Afghanistan. This was supplanted by putting in place very ambitious policy objectives: unification of the fractious PDPA, defeat of the insurgency, and incorporation of Afghanistan within the Soviet bloc. The Soviet Union tried to accomplish these goals by imposing its ideology and political model on Afghanistan. This approach was presented as the path to modernization for the Afghan state and society. The Soviet model, ideological considerations aside, with its emphasis on strong state institutions, universal education, ethnic equality and women's emancipation, indeed, raised the prospects of enhancing the traditionally weak status of the central government in Kabul, overcoming the fractured structure of Afghan society and integrating the closed rural society.

Despite these extremely ambitious goals, the USSR did not commit and, most importantly, did not sustain levels of resources—troops and money—that were in line with their goals. The Soviet leaders' belief in their own superiority prevented them from taking into account the weak state of development of Afghan society and state institutions, the incompatibility between the strong Islamic values of the Afghans and the secular communist ideology, and historical factors such as intolerance towards the presence of foreign troops in the country. The ethnic-based factionalism within the PDPA party made the regime intrinsically fragile, while ethnic favoritism, under the guise of ethnic equality, and the heavy-handed response to the PDPA's opponents alienated much of the population. Especially damaging were the regime's land reforms and efforts to collectivize the farmers. Both initiatives collided with traditional Afghan values. In addition, the presence of Soviet troops and their counter-insurgency methods, which led to an enormous number of civilian deaths and effectively destroyed the Afghan agricultural sector, undermined the regime's legitimacy to a great degree.

The Afghan puppet governments were able to attract some support primarily among the urban, and more educated strata of the society, but, on the whole, remained isolated from the rural masses. The inability to engage a significant number of people in the state building process seriously undermined the Sovietization strategy.

The realization of this failure forced the Soviets to adapt to the local conditions and modify their initially rigid policies. The policy of National Reconciliation, which aimed at binding regional groups to the state, proved to be more successful than military operations in expanding government influence over the countryside. The concessions to these groups, however, eliminated any previous success in state building and in effect meant a return to the status quo ante when the state had accepted its limited power over the rural society. In fact, the National Reconciliation policy resulted in a situation where regional power centers enjoyed unprecedented autonomy. Instead of ensuring the stability of the regime, the National Reconciliation policy and the tribal policies only perpetuated the power of local centers as alternatives to the state. The connection between countryside and government under the banner of National Reconciliation was an artificial one, which could persist only as long as the central government was able to re-distribute the resources coming mostly from foreign aid. There was no cohesion even inside the regime as the policy to appease different power groups and include their representatives in the government was only superficial. In reality, most of the political power within the national government was held by one faction dominated by a group of people with a similar social background.

The Soviet recognition of the uniqueness of Afghan society led to the incorporation of traditional institutions and social structures into the new regime. However, that too only reinforced these traditional structures and relations and resulted in the rejection of the new institutions and social norms. On the other hand, Soviet efforts to build the Afghan armed forces as an alternative to the Red Army in providing security to the regime, to raise literacy levels among Afghans, and to enfranchise Afghan women could be qualified as relatively successful.

Ultimately, the Soviet decision to disengage from Afghanistan was a political decision that was based on changes in Soviet foreign policy that accompanied *Perestroika* and on the belief that the Kabul regime would be able to survive on its own. However, the underlying political, social and economic conditions, remaining after the Soviet withdrawal, were not conducive to long-term stability in the absence of continuous massive foreign aid. On the contrary, the Soviet state building and social development efforts further sharpened Afghan social cleavages and set the conditions for the subsequent civil war and the rise of Taliban.

The lessons of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan for the current NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan include the following:

- The Soviet experience in social development and state building demonstrates that attempts to alter traditional Afghan social structures and state-tribe relations may be met with stiff resistance if the new structures are perceived by Afghans as secular and non-traditional. This is likely to be the case regardless of whether a communist or liberal democratic ideology or state model is being developed in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁴
- The implementation of a political model, in this case communist, that is not in tune with local cultural and historical conditions will not work. Soviet initiatives collided with traditional Afghan and Islamic values and undermined state legitimacy in the countryside.
- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement. However, such an approach risks perpetuating local power centers that could eventually challenge central authority.
- The Soviets enjoyed qualified success co-opting different groups. Those who were left out of power or were disenfranchised tended toward insurgency. The lesson from this experience is that efforts to co-opt or to enfranchise groups may have the effect of quelling insurgency while those left out of power or effectively disenfranchised may well actively oppose the Afghan government.
- The policy of “National Reconciliation” was more successful in the short term than military operations for the Soviets. The lesson of this experience is that the Government of Afghanistan should enhance non-military (or non-kinetic) efforts to quell the insurgency.
- Building Afghan security forces was a viable exit strategy for the Soviets. The lesson for NATO ISAF is that security sector reform should be stepped up with increased establishments for the Afghan National Army and Police and adequate NATO ISAF training capacity devoted to the effort.

¹⁵⁴ The former mujahidin and current insurgent leader Hekmatyar is reported to have said that “liberal democracy and communism are the twin blades of a pair of scissors aimed at cutting the roots of Islam.”

Annex A The People of Khushi

Part I

A. Ahmedzyanov, "Ljudi Khushi," *Izvestiya*, May 19, 1983. From the collection of articles of now defunct Soviet publications by B. M. Vinogradov, "10 Years through the Eyes of the Mass Media," available at: http://www.rsva.ru/biblio/prose_af/10_let/index.shtml.

(Translation from Russian by Anton Minkov)

In Dari, the word "khushi" means "happy". This is also the name of a large village in the province of Logar, Eastern Afghanistan, whose inhabitants have created their own self-defence command and bravely resist the bandit attacks of the groups coming from Pakistan. Today, in early morning, we boarded the powerful and ironclad BTR¹⁵⁵ and went to this village.

After we turned from the highway coming from Kabul through the province of Logar in Paktria, we went on a snow-covered mountain that was filling the horizon. There were many villages alongside the road. We went through Pajhel, Bala-Kala, and Kale-Pazir. We saw an unusual picture – the fields were cultivated only within the village boundaries while more distant and surrounding fields had grown weeds.

"The gangs have scared the peasants and don't allow them to work in fields outside the houses," explained comrade Hamkor, the secretary of PDPA's provincial committee. Landlords, from whom the peasants rented land only 5 years ago, lead the gangs. Because of this not too distant dependence, the peasants were confused and could not create their self-defence commands.

Yusef Dehati, the head of the provincial security service joined our discussion.

"And now in Khushi – he said – the inhabitants found their own leaders. The school principal, Mohammad Nasr, is a member of PDPA. There are three other local people, also members of PDPA. They created the local party organization, which became the core of the new government in the village. Following the example of Khushi, we are going to create such organizations in other villages, but not every village has PDPA members. Therefore it is necessary to send party activists to other places as well."

To appoint the appropriate people to lead of the local administration is a difficult task. The tribal differences and the traditional closeness of the community make the work of the pioneers difficult. It is even more so in Logar, where bandits, who receive military and ideological preparation from instructors in the American and Egyptian training camps, easily infiltrate from the top of the mountain. These gangs, with the help of the local reactionary forces, eliminate the pioneers of the new administration. However, these bandit incursions do not go unpunished. The peoples' power was established in Khushi after a major counter-revolutionary group was destroyed in the town of Barakibarak, from where they terrorized the surrounding villages.

At this moment, through the snow, in the distance we saw some dwellings. This was Khushi.

Nobody was waiting for us, but only after 10 minutes we were surrounded by a thick circle of children and adults. Their faces exhibited hospitality. The people smiled and waved at us with

¹⁵⁵ Armoured personnel carrier.

hands. Soon, Mohammad Nasr and the elder of the village came. They introduced us to the head of the village jirgah—an experienced man over 70. His name was Nadjab Ali. From somewhere an old table appeared. A teapot, kishmish, nuts and kuraga were placed on it. Then there was a discussion with the people, people that trust each other and expect from each other only good intentions.

“Do you see where do we live?”—Nadjab Ali began, pointing with his hand to the wide mountainous side, where the gardens, plantations and hats were situated. “Our land is little—he continued. On the other hand, the abundance of sun, water and fertile soil has made our predecessors name their village Khushi—happiness. Until recently, however, this was only a hope for happiness, because during these times, few families have experienced it. As the population grew, the amount of land didn’t. On the other side of the mountain there are no fields because there is no water. Families could only survive on the basis of very hard work. They made their living from selling foodstuffs on the markets of Ghazni and Kabul. Wheat was bought from the wealthier villages. After the harvest was completed, most men would go to work in the cities, again, mostly in Ghazni and Kabul. Such seasonal work for many families has become the chief source of living. In fact, we have for a long time been workers. When the revolution happened, we all supported its program.”

“Three years ago—continued the elder—the government offered us a loan of 65,000 afghani to strengthen the state farm, which we created after the revolution. After that the government built a mektab-school, and a small hospital, which had a doctor. And all that was free of charge. We realized that this was our peoples’ rule. To defend the revolution we sent 500 young men in the army. With the help of the government we began re-building our lives. We even began to believe that happiness was finally coming to Khushi. But our happiness was premature—the bandits came. They spoke about “defending Islam”, but they killed the mullah and torched the *mesjid*,¹⁵⁶ destroyed the school and the hospital, and liquidated the state farm. For three years the children could not go to school. The bandits levied all peasants with high taxes, robbed our houses and took the last food we had... Then we decided to fight them. Under the leadership of the school principal M. Nasr, we started to arm ourselves. The government again came to our help. The Afghan army cleared out Khushi from the bandits.

“But the gangs could come back—intervened the school principal M. Nasr—and then we created the self-defence command, a committee for the defence of revolution and peoples’ militia – Tsarandoy. Currently, in our village we have 60 volunteers under arms. Under the PDPA party group, we also created a democratic youth organization’s primary cell. It is already five months that the power in the village is in the hands of the local administration. During that time the bandits tried to attack Khushi many times, and each time we were able to resist them. But still, we anticipate that there will be more problems in the future. Soon, the high passes would be cleared from the snow and then new groups of trained by the Americans and armed by them - bandits of Hekmatiyar and Rabbani will come to us. But let them try!”

Decisions about common, village related, economic and administrative matters are taken in a joint council of the local administration and members of the jirgah, which consists of the most respected people of the village. “What questions did you discuss on the jirgah?”—we asked.

“On the last council—said Nadjab Ali—we established the salary of those who joined the police, supplied them with arms and uniforms, and created a list of the young men, whose time has come to serve in the army. Rebuilding security and the fight against the counter-revolution—this is our

¹⁵⁶ A small mosque.

primary goal. Recently we called the whole village for a “hashar”—work for the common good, and repaired the school and the hospital. There are already 80 students who are going to school.

The people of Khushi speak with with great pride that for these three months they have re-established the state farm and already have repaid the loan of 65,000 afghani, which they took from the government three years ago. They have decided to ask the government to send several tractors, as well as fuel and quality seeds. “And all this we are going to pay for—said Nadjab Ali—we don’t want to live on the back of the government.”

... Our discussion with the residents of the village went on for a long time. When the time to say goodbye came, comrade Hamkor, holding the hands of Najab Ali and M. Nasr, said:

“Khushi—this is a village which is looking firmly into the future. With people like you, the peoples’ power in Afghanistan is undefeatable.”

Part II

The following is an excerpt from “Afghanistan”—a series of short episodes posted by Dimitrii Babkin, served in Afghanistan 1982-1984, on the website The Art of War (http://artofwar.ru/b/babkin_d/1.shtml).

(Translation from Russian – Anton Minkov)

On the east side [of the base camp], beyond the road and the river, one could see a large valley. Somewhere there, under the shadow of barely visible mountain peaks, was hidden the border with Pakistan. There again, dozens of hostile settlements were situated, the closer of which we could keep under control only by artillery and rocket fire. Attempts to establish administrative control over this territory through military operations were made with remarkable persistence every year. Regardless of the success or failure of each individual operation, Logar remained an insurgent province. Even if it was possible to establish Kabul’s authority in one of these villages, it was impossible to keep it for very long. The most telling example the case of the rather large settlement Khushi. It became known that a journalist from Moscow visited it with a helicopter, and soon after that a large article titled “The People of Khushi” appeared on the third column in a thick special insert of [the newspaper] “Izvestiya.” The article spoke about the difficult, but gradual establishment of the new authority. About ten days after the publication, under the sounds of distant artillery fire, our battalion was deployed on emergency basis. But the help was late. The authority in Khushi has changed. We did not even engage in a meaningless fight, we simply collected the surviving party activists and Tsarandoy, and returned.

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List of acronyms

AWDO	Afghan Women’s Democratic Organization
CORA	Centre for Operational Research and Assistance
CC CPSU	Central Committee of CPSU
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
DRDC	Defence Research and Development Canada
DYOA	Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan
GDP	Groups for the Defence of the Revolution
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopastnosti [The Committee for State Security]
KhaD	Khedamat-i Ettela’at-i Daulati [State Information Service]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFF	National Fatherland Front
PDPA	People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan
UNCHR	United Nations Commission on Human Rights
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WAD	Wizarat-i Ettela’at-i Daulati [Ministry of State Security]

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This Technical Memorandum provides an overview of the major social and state building policies implemented by the Soviets and the pro-Soviet Afghan regime in Afghanistan during the period 1979-1989. Its objective is to inform the current NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan about the lessons learned from the Soviet social and state building experience. The research is based on Russian and English language sources. The study shows that the Soviets and the Afghan regime experienced difficulties operating at the district level, and that they failed to engage a sufficient number of people in these processes. Although they made significant efforts in the areas of social development and state building, traditional social divisions and values undermined the new socio-political model.

Cette analyse technique donne un aperçu des grandes politiques de développement social et de state building appliquées en Afghanistan par les Soviétiques et le régime afghan prosoviétique de 1979 à 1989. Elle vise à informer la mission FIAS OTAN en Afghanistan des leçons à tirer de l'expérience soviétique de développement social et de state building. À partir de sources en langues russe et anglaise, l'étude montre que les Soviétiques et le régime afghan ont éprouvé des difficultés à agir au niveau des districts et qu'ils n'ont pas engagé assez de monde dans ces processus. Bien qu'ils aient consacré des efforts considérables au développement social et au state building, les divisions et les valeurs sociales traditionnelles ont sapé le nouveau modèle socio-politique.

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