

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SOVIET
INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN:
IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIAN DEFENSE REFORM**

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New developments have forced military experts to examine problems that have traditionally been the sphere of historians and cultural anthropologists. Solutions to these problems can only be found through innovative research. Analyzing Soviet military experiences in Afghanistan offers an example of this new approach.

The present work is based on Soviet and Russian studies of the military experience of the Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan, including the author's own military service. The work explores some aspects of the new problems facing military establishments and the lessons learned that are applicable to Russian defence reform.

The study is divided into five parts. The first part focuses on the Soviet armed forces and their capacity to conduct asymmetric warfare against irregular forces in Afghanistan. The Soviet lack of preparation for such warfare limited the ability of the armed forces to achieve political goals, but there were another significant factors indigenous to Afghanistan.

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The Soviet armed forces were structured, equipped, and trained to conduct chemical, nuclear, and high intensity conventional war on the northern plains of Europe. Owing to the earlier successful Soviet military interventions in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), and Czechoslovakia (1968), military power seemed to Soviet leaders to be an irresistible political instrument. During the Afghan war the Soviet armed forces had to adapt to local conditions and a new type of enemy in their attempts to achieve their operational objectives. The origins of this process as well as Soviet innovations in tactics, structure and equipment are examined in the study.

In the second part, the various stages of the military operations and the basic transition tendencies in the internal Afghan conflict are identified and explained. The Soviet troops were deployed in Afghanistan at a time when the internal Afghan conflict had reached a sensitive state of development. During the deployment of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan (1979-1989), the internal Afghan conflict never stopped; and it moved from one stage (social conflict) to others (ideological and national conflicts). In the same period, the armed groups opposing Soviet troops had to adapt themselves to new circumstances as well. These changes are directly linked to the difficulties faced by the Soviet armed forces in identifying the enemy, understanding its fighting capabilities, and forecasting combat scenarios.

In the third part, the analysis focuses on the classification of the numerous oppositional Afghan armed groups and the specific peculiarities of these groups, which experienced noteworthy internal adaptations in accordance with the different stages of the conflict.

The fourth part provides an analysis of the ethnic and religious factors in Afghanistan. Most of the Afghan oppositional forces fought under the Muslim banner. Afghanistan's multi-ethnic population and the influence of Islam on the formation of armed groups, as well as the geographic zones of their activities, are of great importance. The work includes a brief account of the spread of Islam in Afghanistan among different ethnic groups.

The fifth part reviews the lessons learned from the Soviet military operations and offers recommendations that could contribute to the success of Russian defence reform. Moreover, the last part of this work discusses similar problems facing NATO today. Despite Afghanistan's many unique features and regional specificities, the results of the present research work could be useful in the analysis of similar problems in other regions.