

Russia's War in Afghanistan



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VOLSTAD

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Russia's War in Afghanistan

The Land and the People

No one since Alexander the Great has conquered Afghanistan. No conqueror could ever extract enough advantage from its occupation, either strategically or economically, to make it worth having to defeat the Afghans. There were about 15.5 million Afghans before the 1979 invasion. The population is divided between the Pashto-speaking Pathans of the east and south (42 per cent of the population) and the Dari-speaking Tadjiks of the north and west (23 per cent), as well as Mongol-descended Hazaras, Kuchi and Aimaq nomads, Persians, Baluchis, Turkic-speaking Uzbeks and Turkomen, many of them refugees or children of refugees from Stalin's Russia, and the Nuristanis—an ancient people of unknown origin.

While these peoples have cultures many centuries old, Afghanistan as a nation is young, established in the capital of Kabul only in 1747 by the first Pathan king, Ahmad Shah Durrani. Yet Afghanistan was always politically decentralised, due both to its predominantly mountainous or desert terrain, poor communications (in 1979, there were no railroads and a limited paved road network), and to the wishes of its people. Traditional authority—decision-making by meeting (*jirga*), and the local *khan*, *malik*, or *mullah* (headman, chief, or religious teacher)—remains strong outside the cities.

Religion is the great unifying factor of this diverse nation; Afghanistan is Moslem in religion, culture, and everyday life. The Afghans are devout; but an old proverb states 'Each Afghan has *his* God and *his* gun', and he usually resents anyone other than his own kith and kin telling him what he must do with either faith or firearm. Predominantly Sunni, with some Ismailis and a 15–20 per cent Shia minority among the Hazaras, Persians, and some Pathan tribes, Afghanistan has never had a strong, central religious leader.

The Afghan's homeland is green and pleasant only in the memory of exiles. Summers are hot and dry and winters bitter, especially in the high country, and from November to mid-March snow makes travel difficult. The rains, when they come, fall from December to February. The countryside is largely mountain and desert. The Hindu Kush slices across the country, east to west, cresting in the

Yefretor—private first class—of Soviet Air Assault troops posing with carefully drilled local children for photo which no doubt appeared over a caption extolling his dedication to his 'internationalist duty'. He wears shined buttons; shoulder boards, collar patches and beret of VDV light blue; the *desantnik's* striped naval-style undershirt; the Soviet Army cypher and single yellow bar of this rank on his shoulders; and—just visible—the white collar lining which the Soviet soldier has to sew into his tunics at regular intervals. The weapon is the 5.45mm AKS.





Pamir Mountains of the Wakhan Corridor. North of the Hindu Kush are yet more mountains, fading northwards into the arid steppes of Central Asia. In the west, the Iranian plateau extends to the cities of Herat and Shindand before rising to merge with the fastness of the Hindu Kush, ringing like ramparts the central Hazara Jat area—land of the Hazaras. The south and south-east are largely desolate, rocky deserts. The north and west are mountainous, curving from the Pamirs down to the fringe of the

Registan deserts. Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Afghan people, but it requires intensive irrigation to grow anything. Less than 15 per cent of the land was arable even in peacetime, and this was concentrated in the river valleys, as were the cities. Even in the days of peace, Afghanistan was one of the world's 20 poorest nations.

Intrigue and Invasion

The roots of the war go back to the early 19th century, when two expanding empires arrived on the borders of Afghanistan—the British and the Russian. For over a century Afghanistan was more than a buffer state, it was the main playing field for the 'Great Game'—the competition between Britain and Russia for domination of southern Asia and, beyond that, the Gulf. The game was one of bluff, diplomacy and deterrence, but war was part of it as well. Three times the British went to war with the Afghans, largely to ensure that the government in Kabul was not pro-Russian. The three Afghan Wars of 1839-42, 1978-80, and 1919 could all be interpreted as British victories of sorts, but all were won at the cost of bloody battlefield setbacks.

The Great Game became more serious with the Bolshevik Revolution. Afghanistan became the first neighbouring country to recognise Lenin's regime, and treaties were signed in 1920 and 1926. The relationship soured with the brutal Soviet campaigns of the 1920s-30s against the peoples of Central Asia, which succeeded only after several Soviet incursions into Afghanistan forced the Afghan government to stop aiding their fellow Moslems.

The British left India and Pakistan, and thus the borders of Afghanistan, in 1947, and by the 1950s

the country was considered to be in the Soviet sphere of influence. The government, especially the military, was penetrated by the Soviets and their sympathisers. Soviet aid poured in: the Soviets built roads (generously stressing the bridges for 50-ton loads) and airfields. The Afghan Army was trained and re-equipped on Soviet lines. The move from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy started in the 1950s, and political change followed. Two rival underground Communist parties, the *Khalq* and the *Parchim*, were formed (to be united only on paper as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan).

A coup on 17 July 1973 made Prince Mohammed Daoud prime minister and ended the Afghan monarchy, King Mohammed Zahir being sent into exile. Daoud came to power with the help of the leftist and Communist parties, but he eventually re-asserted traditional Afghan balance-of-power neutrality. To the Soviets and the few (7,000) Afghan Communists, this was not good enough. On 24 April 1978 Daoud was overthrown and killed by a left-wing coup—probably organised by the Soviets, and certainly executed with their knowledge—which left between 1,000 and 2,000 dead. The *Khalq* party, which took over in a post-coup power

Soviet VDV paratroopers man a roadblock near Kabul soon after the invasion of 27 December 1979, supported by a BMD-1 airborne infantry fighting vehicle. Even in this blurred photo they can be seen to wear their leather jump helmets and the fur-collared winter version of their khaki combat uniform—cf. Plate D3. (US Information Agency)



struggle, received the full support of the Soviets, and a treaty was signed that December. President and Prime Minister Nur Mohammed Taraki set about turning Afghanistan into a model of Stalinist Russia. Every facet of Islamic and Afghan life was to be forced into line with Marxism-Leninism.

To the Afghans, each with his God and his gun, such initiatives launched by a regime that now appeared to be a tool of foreign infidels could have but one result. By early 1979 there was armed resistance in 25 of Afghanistan's 28 provinces. The resistance fighters called themselves *mujahideen* ('fighters for the faith') and their struggle a *jihad* ('war for the faith'). Open war followed; an anti-Communist uprising in Herat on 21 March 1979 left 5,000 dead. Deputy Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin now became the strong man of the Kabul regime. Soviet equipment and advisors arrived in increasing numbers, and the first Mi-24 *Hind* attack helicopter units went into action, albeit in Afghan markings. The Afghan Army was starting to mutiny or melt away (with its arms and equipment) in the summer of 1979. Refugees started to stream into Pakistan; and 1979 saw pitched battles between the Soviet-advised DRA Army and the guerrillas, including the first Communist use of chemical weapons. Repression and purges continued: over 17,000 Afghans were executed, many in Kabul's notorious Pul-e-Charki prison. The non-Communist intelligentsia were systematically massacred. The terror claimed Prime Minister Taraki himself—killed on 14 September as his deputy Amin seized power. In autumn 1979 Amin tried a combination of concessions and military offensives, but it was obvious that he could not control Afghanistan, or even Kabul. A Communist government was in danger of falling to its own anti-Soviet, Islamic people: for the Soviets, an intolerably dangerous precedent. The Soviets realised that helicopters and advisors were not enough, as a series of high-level visits revealed a deteriorating situation. Deputy Minister of Defence Gen. A. A. Yepishev's July visit coincided with substantial guerrilla victories in battle. On Yepishev's return, the die was cast for invasion: by October 1979 Russia was mobilising.

Elements of the 105th Guards Airborne Division had started to fly into Kabul airport in mid-December, joining Soviet Air Force units already

there. On 27 December the Soviets struck. The airlift increased and the paratroopers, reinforced to more than divisional strength, moved out from the airport perimeter to seize the capital. The Afghan Army stayed in its barracks, its tanks immobilised by its Soviet advisors. *Spetsnaz* special forces took headquarters, airfields, communications centres, the Salang Pass tunnel, and other key points. A two-battalion attack by BMD-mounted paratroopers took the Duralamin Palace, and Amin was executed by his erstwhile allies. The Parchimite Babrak Karmal was flown in from East Germany as the new quisling prime minister. Two motor rifle divisions moved across the border, one on each of the two main routes—Kushka—Herat-Shindand, and Termez-Kabul-Khandahar, through the long and vital Salang Pass tunnel.

The War

The forces employed by the Soviets seemed to indicate that they envisioned an operation similar to Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968; but 1980 brought the Soviets to the first realisation that they were facing the biggest and most widespread national uprising of the 20th century. The Kabul regime's army, in one year, fell from 80,000 men to 20,000 through desertion alone. The reservists who made up the bulk of the Soviet motor rifle divisions proved to be inept troops: many of them were Moslems from Central Asia, who fraternised with their Afghan brothers. The guerrilla groups had now joined forces with political parties, some dating back to the early 1970s, which set up headquarters in Pakistan among the ever-increasing refugees. Despite Soviet machine-gunnings, popular strikes and demonstrations spread through the cities, especially Kabul, starting on 21 February 1980 with the anti-Soviet uprising of 'The Night of *Allah Akbar*' (the traditional Moslem warcry).

The original Soviet operational plan of securing the cities, airbases and roads, and then clearing out the guerrillas with a series of large sweeps by DRA units, did not work. The winter of 1979–80 was quiet, except in Badakhshan and Takhar; but intense resistance was encountered by offensives into Kunar province in March, May and

September 1980 and in Paktia in March. The Ghazni area was swept in May and June, and Wardak and Nangarhar in November. A Soviet tank regiment was decimated in fighting near Herat and Shindand. In June the Soviets started the systematic destruction of agriculture, beginning near Kabul. The first Soviet offensive into the Panjsher Valley followed in September—a previous (April) offensive used DRA Army troops only. 1980 also saw the Soviet invasion condemned by the United Nations General Assembly, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation of Islamic Nations. The Soviets increased the size of their forces, bringing in more motor rifle divisions.

1981 saw a Soviet shift away from the strategy of sweeps using unreliable DRA forces to one built around more frequent, smaller, and airmobile operations using Soviet forces. A drive against Paghman, north of Kabul, in July resulted in a guerrilla victory. The Panjsher III offensive, Panjsher IV in September, and the June offensive in Nangrahar, were all unsuccessful. At the end of the year, then-Deputy Defence Minister Marshal Sokolov went to Afghanistan to see what was happening on the ground. The Soviets sent in yet more troops.

In 1982 the Soviets reverted to the large-scale ground sweeps, combined with air raids and helicopter-mobile operations. The biggest offensives included Panjsher V (April-May) and Panjsher VI (September), when the Soviets failed to destroy this key guerrilla stronghold within striking range of both the Salang Pass and Bagram airfield.

A series of sweeps were aimed at destroying not so much the guerrillas themselves but rather the areas which could support guerrillas near Kabul or other high-value targets. Two offensives in June and October left Paghman desolate. Large-scale offensives were made in Wardak province, Parwan (January), the Logar Valley south of Kabul (June), the Laghman Valley east of Kabul (November), the Ghorband Valley north of Kabul (May), Ghazni (May), the foothills of Farah province (April), and Mazar-e-Sharif (April).

Guerrilla raids on Kabul and other targets continued throughout the year, cutting power supplies in December. An explosion, possibly accidental, in the Salang Pass tunnel in October caused hundreds of casualties. Combined guerrilla



Map showing eastern Afghanistan, including Kabul, the Salang Pass tunnel, the Panjsher Valley, and the Pakistani border with Nangarhar and Paktia provinces.

action planned by a Camberley-trained ex-DRA officer cut up a Kabul regime division in Paktia province in April. Fighting continued in the west.

In 1983 the Soviets adopted an 'air war' approach, with extensive bombing of villages depopulating vital areas, combined with heliborne operations and ground sweeps. A *de facto* truce was concluded between Soviet forces and the successful and elusive Panjsher Valley resistance in March. In April guerrillas seized much of Herat and the Soviets used heavy bombers as part of the effort to drive them out. Khandahar also saw bombers used, against guerrilla-held urban areas (March). Guerrilla raids on Kabul continued; and their increased tactical sophistication was evident. An Afghan offensive in Paktia and Paktika provinces in the summer and autumn scored victories over DRA forces at Jadji and Khost. The DRA fort at Urgun was besieged in December.

In 1984 the Soviets continued their 'air war' strategy. In January they relieved Urgun. A successful large-scale guerrilla ambush on the Salang Pass highway in March was followed, in April, by the Panjsher VII offensive, aimed at desolating the valley. The guerrillas withdrew ahead of a reinforced division-sized Soviet force and the valley was occupied until, after launching the



The Panjsher Valley, showing its narrow floor with the towering mountains of the Hindu Kush rising steeply on either side. The difficulty of sending a division-sized mechanised force up the Panjsher is obvious. The valley narrows still further up its length, and there are several side-valleys too narrow for tanks or helicopters to penetrate. (Committee for a Free Afghanistan)

Panjsher VIII offensive in September, DRA troops were left in strongpoints and Soviet forces withdrew. In June multi-division offensives were launched near Herat and Khandahar with heavy air support. In July-August the Logar and Shomali valleys were swept, followed by renewed fighting near Herat. In August–October Soviet forces relieved the besieged fort at Ali Khel in Paktia, and increased their efforts to seal the border with Pakistan. Paghman was destroyed by a Soviet offensive in late 1984. Despite Soviet offensives, the guerrillas continued to strike near Kabul, introducing 107mm and 122mm rockets to the war. Power lines were destroyed in August. SA-7S became rather more available to the resistance, but were still not supplied in adequate numbers.

In 1985 the 'air war' approach continued, with Soviet artillery and rocket launchers being used to a

greater extent to achieve depopulation through firepower—a sinister phrase indeed. Among the innovations was an increasing emphasis on interdiction: the Soviets continued to try to disrupt supplies coming in from Pakistan. An attempt by DRA units to relieve the besieged garrison at Barikot in Kunar was defeated in January-February, and a Panjsheri attack cut the Salang Pass highway in March; but a strong Soviet push on Barikot in May–June succeeded. An offensive near Herat in the summer may have been aimed at isolating that area from Iran. A Soviet offensive devastated the Helmand Valley in June. The Panjsher IX operation during the summer left the guerrilla commander Massoud in control of much of the main valley. A major Soviet offensive in Paktia province in August-September was sparked off by increased attacks on Khost, but the Soviets failed to raise the siege, though both sides lost heavily. In 1985 the resistance for the first time stood and fought the Soviets, rather than limiting itself to ambushes and hit-and-run tactics. Despite greatly strengthened Soviet defences, attacks on Kabul increased.

Soviet Forces

Soviet Strategic Aims

Why the Soviets are fighting in Afghanistan is known only to the men in the Kremlin. They obviously do not want a Moscow-approved Marxist-Leninist government to fall to Islamic guerrillas. This would not only create a hostile state on their border, but would set a bad precedent for their own Islamic population and for Marxist states world-wide (although the Soviets have never fully embraced the Kabul regime as a full 'socialist' state, thus leaving themselves some propaganda leeway). Afghanistan also gives them a base for possible future political leverage—most important—or military action against Pakistan, Iran (the key to the region, and another traditional Russian objective) and the Persian Gulf. The expansion of the airfields at Shindand and Khandahar in the south of Afghanistan in 1980-82 allows the Soviets to base missiles or strategic bombers within 400 air miles of the Straits of Hormuz. Another goal may be to show other countries that they cannot count on effective Western aid if they incur the wrath of the Soviet Union.

Command and Control

The General Staff in Moscow controls Southern

Theatre of Operations (TVD) headquarters, probably at Tashkent, commanded since mid-1985 by Gen. Mikhail Zaitsev. Under this comes the Turkestan Military District, commanded until 1985 by Army Gen. Yu. Maximov. This is controlling headquarters for the Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan—the Soviet operational command, of which the major component is the 40th Army under, in 1979-84, Lt. Gen. V. Mikhailov—and for forces inside the Soviet Union committed to the war. The General Staff in Moscow has direct input on the war, by-passing TVD level and dispatching high-level representatives to help direct operations, and using a *Lolos* satellite communications terminal in Kabul to pass direct orders.

Senior **DRA** Army officers congratulate **Soviet tank** crewmen. These wear khaki summer coveralls with the yellow Tank Troops badge on the right breast; only the NCO, left foreground, wears black service dress shoulderboards—the senior lieutenant at far right wears khaki drab field shoulderboards, and the others none at all. Standard issue belts with subdued buckles are worn, as are standard issue leather tankers' helmets, to which some, probably drivers, have added goggles. The DRA officers are in pale khaki drill summer shirtsleeve order; cap crowns are also pale khaki drill, with gold crown seam piping, gold cords, and red bands. The national insignia below one star, worn on red slides on the shoulder straps, indicates brigadier-general (centre).



Soviet Army and DRA Ground Forces

Equipment

(See the present authors *Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army*, London, 1981, for details. * = Soviet use only, ** = DRA use only.)

Main Battle Tanks: T-34/85**, T-54, T-55, T-62, T-72*¹. *Armoured Personnel Carriers*: BTR-152**, BTR-60PB, BTR-70*². *Abn. Assault Gun*: ASU-85. *Infantry Fighting Vehicles*: BMP-1, BMP-2*, BMD*². *Wheeled Fighting Vehicles*: BRDM-2 scout car; gun trucks*³.

122mm howitzers: M-30 (M-1938)⁵, D-30 (M-1963), 2S1 SP (M-1974)*⁴. *152mm howitzers*: 2S3 SP (M-1973)*⁴, 2S5SP (M-1977)*. *130mm guns*: M-46 (M-1954)*⁶. *MRLs*: 132mm BM-13**⁵, 122mm Grad-P and BM-21*⁴, 220mm BM-27*. *Rockets*: Frog-7*⁶. *Mortars*: 82mm M-1937 (incl. SP on BMD)*, 82mm Vasilesk (towed and SP)*, 120mm M-1943, 240mm SP M-1977*⁶. *Surface-to-air missiles*: SA-

2**, SA-3, SA-4*, SA-7, SA-9*, SA-13*, SA-6* or SA-8*. *Anti-aircraft artillery*: 23mm ZSU-23-4 SP³, 23mm ZU-23-2, 14.5mm ZPU-1, -2, -4, and 12.7mm DShKM AAA.

Anti-tank weapons: RPG-7 and RPG-16* rocket launcher; SPG-9 73mm AT gun; Sagger ATGM; 100mm T-12 AT gun*; 66 mm RPG-18 single-shot rocket launcher*; 85mm SD-44 AT gun.

Infantry weapons: 5.45mm weapons* (AKS, AK-74, AKD, AKSU assault rifles, and RPK-74 LMG.) 7.62mm weapons (AKM, AKMS, AK-47 assault rifles, RPK, RPD**, RP-46**, DTM**, LMGs, PKMS GPMG, SKS** carbine, PPSH SMG**. 7.7mm ZB-36 LMG** (pre-war Czech). *Grenade launchers*: 30mm AGS-17* (also vehicle- and helicopter-mounted versions), 40mm BG-15* (mounted under AK-74 barrel). *Mines*: PFM-1 air-dispensed, PMN anti-personnel, and others.

Notes:

¹Soviets began adding applique armour and smoke grenade launchers to tanks from 1983. T-72S remain rare; T-62S predominate in Soviet units, progressively replacing T-54 and T-55 during 1981-82, although the latter are still seen. DRA T-62S deployed mainly round Kabul: T-54s, T-55S serve in DRA armoured units, T-34/85S in infantry units.

²BTR-60PB and BTR-70 are standard vehicles of three motor rifle regiments per motor rifle division: BMPs are used by one regiment per motor rifle division; BMP-2 first used 1982, by 70th Motor Rifle Bde.; BMDs used by airborne units. Some BMPs have applique armour; BMPs. BTR-60s. BTR-70S have been up-gunned with 30mm grenade launchers. DRA units use BTR-60PB and BTR-152 to transport approx, one third of infantry forces when in field.

³Used for convoy escort. Guntrucks have 23mm AA guns on rear deck high elevation weapons can engage guerrillas on mountain crests.

⁴Standard Soviet divisional and regimental artillery pieces: some motor rifle divisions in Afghanistan still use M-30.

⁵Standard DRA artillery weapon.

⁶Heavy artillery was used in early 1980, and returned to action by 1984. Conventional *Frog* rockets first used 1985.

⁷Used to destroy stone houses.

The ground forces (see OB chart; are deployed in garrisons of varying sizes, from division down to companies—the chart shows only the HQ location. The units follow in standard Soviet tactical organisations.

The Troops

Many personnel are sent to their units after initial induction. Paratroopers are jump-trained in the USSR, and NCOs and specialists often go through three- to six-month courses in USSR-based training divisions. However, for much of the war, units in Afghanistan have trained most of their bi-annual intake of conscripts themselves before committing them to combat. When their two years' service is completed, they send them home. The paratroopers

all have complete pre-induction military training, so the airborne units in Afghanistan are in a higher state of readiness. The need to train their own troops is one reason why each Soviet regiment can normally field only a battalion-sized force for operations at any given moment, although at the end of each six-month training period and for special efforts the whole unit will be put into the field. In 1984-85 it was reported that the Soviets gave most combat troops being sent to Afghanistan more extensive training (six months or longer) in the Soviet Union before committing them to battle. Officers, warrant officers and career NCOs do two-year tours, although they may extend.

During the 1979 invasion and in early 1980 most of the men of the motor rifle divisions were recalled



reservists from the Turkestan and Central Asia Military Districts. Often poorly trained and never having been mobilised before as part of these divisions, most were of Moslem stock and had little enthusiasm for killing their brethren. By mid-1980 the reservists had all been replaced by serving conscripts. Aside from labour units—always heavily Asian—Soviet units in Afghanistan seem to have no ethnic group predominating.

The Russian soldier has always fought with great bravery, but in Afghanistan small-unit training and tactics, as well as the level of initiative and competence, has often proved wanting. The Soviets have improved since their early set-backs. The Afghans say the Soviets are becoming progressively more adept, especially since early 1984.

Service in the Soviet military is harsh whatever the posting, and Afghanistan is no exception, leading to serious morale and drug abuse problems, especially in non-combat units.

Operational Approach

The initial operational goal of the Soviet invasion was to seize the government and infrastructure of Afghanistan. Since then, they have been moving towards a long-term solution. They do not have to win the war this year, or even in five years. Thus, they are aiming to use as few troops as possible, to

Photographed early in the war, a 14-man combat group of Afghan guerrillas in training. They are well equipped by the standards of that period: each has a bolt-action rifle, either a Lee Enfield or a locally-made Mauser, apart from the second man from the foreground, who has some kind of Martini-action weapon. This group show a degree of tactical sophistication in having, at right, a separate four-man 'tank-killer' team with an RPG-7 and grenades. The commander is distinguished by perhaps the most important item of equipment—a bullhorn, with which he can invite DRA and Soviet Asian troops to lay down their arms—figuratively—and join their Moslem brethren in fighting the Communists. (US Information Agency)

suffer as few casualties as possible, and to keep Afghanistan at 'an acceptable level of violence'.

Tactics

The tactics the Soviets are using to accomplish these goals are: large scale depopulation and destruction of agriculture; maximum use of firepower (air and artillery) to accomplish this; emphasis on intelligence (aircraft, ground patrols, agents and informers) to target firepower effectively; use of both large scale combined-arms mechanised forces and smaller light forces, often heliborne.

The Soviets are not trying to occupy the countryside of Afghanistan. This is why their troop commitment is smaller than those of the USA in Vietnam or the French in Algeria. They are trying to hold the cities and airfields, and to keep the use of the roads. To prevent the Afghans from interfering with their hold on the infrastructure they are

depopulating large areas of countryside, near the roads, in food-producing areas, or along infiltration routes from Pakistan. Mao Tse-tung wrote that 'the guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea'; the Soviets are not trying to catch the fish one at a time—they are draining the ocean. In his 1864 campaign in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, US General Phillip Sheridan gave orders for destruction so thorough that 'a crow flying over this valley will have to carry his own rations'. The Soviets are aiming at the same destruction of the agricultural infrastructure. The aerial bombardments of agricultural areas combine with ground sweeps to burn fields, destroy irrigation systems and granaries, slaughter flocks, and drive farmers out of their fields. This had led to severe food shortages in parts of Afghanistan by the winter of 1984-85, and has the potential to undercut the Afghan ability to resist.

The process of depopulating the countryside has continued since mid-1980. Most villages between the paved roads and the first or second line of hills (almost all roads run in valleys except in the few flat

areas) and those within striking range of targets such as cities, airfields, garrisons, and pipelines, have now been destroyed. The area within a day's march of the roads and other targets is the target of most of the bombing and ground sweeps. While guerrillas still operate in these areas, they normally must stay concealed, frequently in caves, whenever they are not on the move. Agriculture is difficult, and most civilians have left. The country anywhere beyond a day's march from what the Soviets value is to them the hinterland, where they bomb and sweep in response to intelligence indications of guerrilla activity or food production.

In much of Afghanistan a visitor would not even be aware there is a war going on, since the Afghans continue to live in the way they always have. The Soviets and the DRA have no control over about 85 per cent of the country. Even the major cities are far from pacified. It should be emphasised that the Soviets do not care who occupies the countryside of Afghanistan, or what happens to its people, so long as they control the cities, roads, and airfields. In some remote, mountainous areas such as the Hazara Jat and Nuristan, there has been no attempt to re-impose Communist control since DRA forces were driven out in 1979. Instead, the Soviets try to buy off and divide Afghan groups in these places.

The Soviets are fighting the war 'on the cheap

Nuristan was one of the first places where organised resistance broke out after the 1978 coup. This DRA Mi-4 Hound helicopter was shot down there in March 1979. Although indistinct, the silhouettes of these Nuristani fighters show two tell-tale details of local winter dress: wrap-around coats worn in preference to the *pukhoor* blanket, and large red boots. (Wildenberg-Sipa)





Most DRA militia wear normal civilian dress—the foreground man with the slung 5.45mm AKS (which will probably be taken away again as soon as the photo session is over) wears the wrap-around coat commonly worn in the north-east of Afghanistan, with a DRA Army belt and the ubiquitous *puhtee* hat. Some urban militias have uniforms of a sort, e.g. greenish grey or blue denims in a variety of styles, **and** in some cases pale khaki badgeless **berets, usually worn flat on the head and pulled forward.**

and nasty'. In contrast to the massive US commitment to Vietnam, the US Defense Intelligence Agency has estimated that the Afghanistan War represents a commitment of only 6 per cent of Soviet divisions and 2 per cent of its total defence spending. Other estimates put the annual cost to the Soviets at \$2-4 billion. They appear willing to spend 20 years waiting for Afghanistan to be pacified.

On the battlefield, the Soviets have had great difficulty in adapting an army equipped, organised, and trained for mechanised, combined-arms combat in Western Europe or Manchuria to fight a guerrilla war in some of the roughest terrain in southern Asia. They have suffered a series of tactical reverses and frustrations. Until 1984 they were unable to take advantage of guerrilla inexperience, and seldom moved on the high ground or practised aggressive small unit tactics. Even allowing for recent Soviet tactical improvements, the majority of their forces—motorised infantry mounted in BTRs or BMPs—remain roadbound, with limited tactical flexibility, although they provide the bulk of the Soviet forces for large-scale ground sweeps and convoy escorts as well as defending key installations. While possessed of heavy firepower and armour protection, combined-arms forces cannot move fast enough to surprise guerrillas, and are dependent on the training level of their troops.

The Soviets have emphasised massive firepower



Posed photo of Soviet VDV *desantniki* wearing the standard camouflage overall in sand on green, and their pale blue berets. In actual combat they would wear either the steel helmet, the *pilotka* sidecap, or—depending on season—the khaki bush hat or the *ushanka* fur cap. They would also carry much more equipment—extra pouches for the AKD rifle, grenades, and possibly an RPG-18 light anti-tank weapon for use against houses and drystone *sangars*. If operating from a helicopter or BMD they would also probably wear body **armour, particularly** since 1984.

in conjunction with manoeuvre in Afghanistan—firepower supplied by helicopters, fighter-bombers, or artillery. Yet the overall tempo of combat is lower than in Vietnam, a war which showed that firepower alone is indecisive.

The use of heliborne forces has given the Soviets additional capabilities, but even these have shown limitations. In both the 1982 Panjsher V and 1984 Panjsher VII offensives, battalion-sized heliborne forces were badly cut up by the Afghans. The troops of the airborne regiments, the air assault brigade, and the one battalion per motor rifle division and brigade which have received special training, are frequently used for heliborne operations.

The Soviets have been increasing their use of unconventional warfare and light infantry forces. Extensively and effectively used in the 1979 invasion, they have since been committed to ambush patrols along Afghan infiltration routes and for extended dismounted operations into Afghan-controlled areas. They will sometimes dress in DRA uniforms or Afghan civilian clothes. In 1984–85 the Soviets made greater use of heliborne forces capable of extended dismounted operations. The emergence of specialised counter-insurgency infantry parallels Western experience. Heliborne or dismounted, smaller, faster reacting forces are more likely to maintain the element of surprise, and can operate independently or with other Soviet or DRA forces.



Some Soviet motor rifle units have been trained and equipped to some extent for mountain operations; by 1984-85 these troops were becoming notably more proficient. These mountain troops wear drab khaki coveralls with hoods and with sewn-in bands of elastic to keep the cloth from snagging; see also Plate B3, *Osprey Elite 5, Soviet Bloc Elite Forces*.

Fixed-Wing Air Operations

The Soviet Air Force fields a wide variety of fixed-wing assets as part of the Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan. The main in-country air bases are Bagram, Kabul, Shindand, Herat, and Khandahar, supplemented by aircraft operating from bases in the Soviet Union such as Mary, Termez, and Kushka. Other airfields include Ghurian, Farah, Zaranj, Ghazni, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kunduz, and Bazai Gumbaz in the Wakhan Corridor. Soviet fighters totalled, in 1985, about eight to ten 12-15-aircraft squadrons in Afghanistan, with an equal number based in the Soviet Union for supporting operations.

Soviet fighters include two or three squadrons of MiG-23 and MiG-27 *Floggers*, one or two squadrons of MiG-21 *Fishbeds*, and two squadrons each of Su-17 *Fitter-Ds*, and Su-25 *Frogfoots*. The MiG-21 *Fishbed* originally predominated in both air-to-air and air-to-ground roles; by 1984, these had largely been replaced by MiG-23 and MiG-27 *Flogger* fighter-bombers. SU-17 and SU-22 *Fitter* swing-wing fighter-bombers are also extensively used. The most effective fighter-bomber has been the Su-25

Frogfoot, although limited to one squadron until 1983-84.

Tu-16 *Badger* medium bombers and SU-24 *Fencer* attack aircraft are among the many machines based in the Soviet Union to bomb targets in Afghanistan. The *Badgers* have been in action since 1980, *Fencers* since 1982. *Badgers* heavily bombed Herat in 1983 and the Panjsher in 1984. Even An-12 *Cub* transports have been used as bombers, rolling bombs down the rear ramp.

Particularly vital to the Soviet 'air war' strategy of 1983-85 has been the use of sensor-equipped An-12 *Cubs* and An-26 *Curls*—four- and twin-engined turboprop transports—for reconnaissance and as 'master bombers'. In 1984 *Cub* and Il-76 *Mainstay* radar-equipped aircraft were used as airborne command posts. Airlift is provided by both military and Aeroflot aircraft.

Soviet fixed-wing airpower is mainly used to attack villages which could serve as guerrilla bases. Close air support—attacking guerrillas in battle with Communist ground troops—is limited, and almost always performed by helicopters rather than fighter-bombers. There is no sustained air interdiction campaign comparable to the US programme in Vietnam, although there have been repeated local efforts. Soviet fixed-wing airpower has suffered from being unresponsive to changing tactical situations and from inaccurate weapons delivery, although it has become markedly more efficient since early 1984. Its use against villages (especially after an ambush or guerrilla activity in an area) rather than against moving guerrilla forces means that fixed-wing airpower kills a lot of civilians.

Helicopter Operations

Helicopters are the most important single Soviet weapon in the war in Afghanistan. The Afghans hate and fear helicopters—especially the Mi-24 *Hind* attack helicopter—more than anything else. *Hinds*, which represent about a quarter of the Soviets' helicopter strength in Afghanistan, are used for close air support, for bombing villages, for convoy escort, and for patrolling and destroying whatever they find moving in most of Afghanistan. Flying by day and night, *Hinds* use their under-nose 12.7mm machine gun, 57mm rocket pods, HE, white phosphorus, and incendiary bombs, air-



dropped minelet pods, 'liquid fire' delayed-action incendiary pods, cluster bomb units, or chemical canisters—the same ordnance used by other helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The *Hind* is heavily armoured and is hard to destroy. While the *Hinds* have had to adapt to increased Afghan air defences, they have also refined their tactics and target acquisition means since they first entered combat in 1979.

The Mi-8/Mi-17 *Hip* series is the standard transport helicopter, and predominates in Afghanistan. They carry troops and equipment for Soviet heliborne operations. They can also be heavily armed—up to six rocket pods, plus machine guns and 30mm grenade launchers—although they lack the *Hind's* armour. *Hips* also act as 'masters of ceremonies' for *Hind* attacks. Mi-6 *Hook* and Mi-26 *Halo* machines provide heavy lift capabilities. Soviet helicopters total at least seven regiments each of 30 to 50 aircraft and several independent flights and squadrons, with 350-plus helicopters based in Afghanistan and probably half as many again in the Soviet Union.

The AGS-17 30mm automatic grenade launcher has seen extensive use in Afghanistan, often in the role posed here: providing a base of fire for an advancing platoon. Soviet troops in combat often, but by no means invariably, shed many of their distinctive insignia—the cap badge, shoulderboards, collar tabs **and** armshield.

Chemical Weapons

There is clear and convincing evidence of the Soviet use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan. These include older gases such as phosgene, CS and CN, as well as standard nerve agents, and new high-technology agents such as mycotoxins—the deadly 'Yellow Rain', an incapacitant—and 'the Flash', a fast-acting and highly lethal nerve gas. While there have been no confirmed reports of these newer gases being used since 1982, the older types remained in use at least until 1984. Delivery is normally by canister dropped from helicopters or fighter-bombers.

Other Armed Forces

In addition to the Army and the Air Force, the Soviets have reportedly committed units from the KGB Border Guards, MVD Ministry of the Interior Internal Security Troops, and KGB

Special Troops or '*Spetsnaz*' (who were used in the 1979 invasion and who also guard high-priority objectives).

Communist Casualties

By 1986 the Soviets were estimated to have lost 12-15,000 killed in action with three times as many wounded. Hepatitis and other diseases have led to further casualties. DRA losses are over three times higher; although this would include desertions, they have lost over 18,000 dead. More than 100 fixed-wing aircraft and 700 helicopters (35 per cent of them *Hinds*) had been lost in combat and in operational accidents, 25 per cent of these in 1985. The money cost may have exceeded \$17 billion.

Pre-war, the 103rd Guards Air Assault (i.e. Abn.) Div. was at Vitebsk, Byelorussian Military District; the 5th Guards Motor Rifle Div. was at Kizyi Arvat, Turkestan Military District; the 201st Motor Rifle Div. was at Frunze and/or Dushanbe, Central Asia Military District. The 375th Guards



Soviet air/ground co-operation: Mi-24 *Hind-D* attack helicopters circle low over a column of T-62 tanks somewhere in Afghanistan. See Plate B for typical colour finish. (*Jamiat Islami*)

Abn. Regt. was part of the 105th Guards Abn. Div., now disbanded, which was based in Fergana, Turkestan Military District. The 357th and 360th Motor Rifle Divs. (whose designations are not certain) may be in their prewar garrison positions in the Turkestan Military District, or they may have

Order of Battle, Soviet Army in Afghanistan, Summer 1985

| | | | |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------|
| HQ 40th Army | Termez, USSR | 866th Motor | |
| 40th Army | Kabul, Bala | Rifle Regt. | Feyzabad |
| Forward HQ . . . | Hisar Fort | 38th Air Assault | |
| 103rd Guards | Kabul, South- | Bde. | Gardez |
| Abn. Div. . . . | west Camp | 375th Guards | |
| 108th Motor | Kabul, North- | Abn. Regt. | Bagram |
| Rifle Div. . . . | east Camp | ? Special | |
| 201st Motor | | Ops. Bde. . . . | Khandahar |
| Rifle Div. . . . | Kunduz | ? Special | |
| 5th Guards Motor | | Ops. Bde. | Shindand |
| Rifle Div. . . . | Shindand | ? Special | |
| 357th Motor | | Ops. Bde. | Kabul |
| Rifle Div. | Kushka, USSR | 40th Airmobile | |
| 360th Motor | | Bn. | ? |
| Rifle Div. . . . | Termez, USSR | 40th Airfield | |
| 70th Motor | | Defence Bn. . . . | Bagram |
| Rifle Bde. . . . | Khandahar | 40th Artillery | |
| 66th Motor | | Bde. (Heavy) | Kabul? |
| Rifle Bde. . . . | Jalalabad | KGB Border Gds. | |
| 191st Motor | Ghazni | Mobile Gp. . . . | Kabul |
| Rifle Regt. | | KGB Border Gds. | |
| | | Mobile Gp. | Herat |

replaced units that have deployed into Afghanistan. The 108th Motor Rifle Div. may have been stationed before the war at Termez. In addition to the forces listed, regiments of the 104th Guards Abn. Div. fly in to participate in major offensives.

The airfield defences at Jalalabad and Kandahar were each, in 1984, reinforced by a Ranger (*Raydoviki*) battalion. These may be part of the Special Operations Brigades or they may be independent. The brigades are known as *Spetsnaz* forces in the Soviet Army.

The war in the northern provinces of Afghanistan is conducted by the divisions based inside the Soviet Union. In addition, many of the air and service support forces used in the fighting are based in the Soviet Union.

Total Soviet troop strengths are estimated as follows:

- 115,000 Army troops in Afghanistan
- 40,000 Army troops fighting in Afghanistan, based in USSR.
- 10,000 Air Force personnel in Afghanistan and in the USSR.
- 50,000 support troops in USSR.
- 2,000 advisors to Kabul regime.

In addition, substantial MVD and KGB forces are involved—probably an additional 5,000 troops in total, plus several thousand civilian advisors. In the early stages of the war there were over 100 Cuban advisors, civilian and military, though most of these were withdrawn by 1984-85. There were also over 100 East German police advisors in the early 1980s. Bulgarians, in uncertain numbers, have been involved; and there are persistent though unconfirmed reports of Cuban, Ethiopian, Vietnamese, South Yemeni and Syrian troops serving with Soviet forces.

Tactical organisation

Motor rifle platoon: Two-man HQ plus three squads each with one BTR-60/70 or BMP, each of nine men (two/three vehicle crew), one RPG-7/-16, one or two RPK-74, the rest with AKS assault rifles. Platoons normally have one sniper with an SVD rifle; in Afghanistan this is increased to three snipers. Platoons will carry RPG-18 weapons as well as rifles.

Motor rifle company: Six-man HQ with one BTR/BMP; three motorised rifle platoons, plus one



An exploded PFM-1 'Butterfly' mine. Dropped in vast quantities from helicopters, these surface anti-personnel mines are coloured drab green or sand for concealment, and remain active for months before finally exploding themselves. The charge is large enough to maim horribly—which is highly cost-effective, given the guerrillas' shortage of medical resources. (Author's photo)

weapons squad (seven men, one BTR/BMP, two AGS-17). Weapons squad may have an additional 13 men with a BTR, four *Spigot* ATGMs, and four 12.7mm machine guns in BTR-equipped units.

Motor rifle battalion:

Headquarters (12 men, one BTR or BMP)

Three motor rifle companies

One tank company (attached if required, three four-tank platoons plus one command tank).

One air defence platoon ten men, nine SA-7—probably not used in Afghanistan).

One mortar battery (eight 120mm mortars, towed by trucks, may be replaced by 82mm Vasilek mortars).

One anti-tank platoon (not in BMP-equipped battalions)—27 men, four BTR-60/70, two SPG-9, four *Sagger* or *Spigot* ATGM.

Batteries or battalions of 122mm howitzers, 122mm BM-21 rocket launchers, and 82mm Vasilek mortars are often attached to motor rifle battalions in Afghanistan.

DRA Armed Forces

High Level Command

The quisling Prime Minister, Babrak Karmal, presides over a government made up of both his own Parcham and the Khalq Communist parties, although the Soviets have effective control over all governmental actions. Unlike the Taraki regime, Karmal has made a show of respecting Islam and traditional institutions. His government retains its 'banana republic' quality, with intensive violence and in-fighting between different factions in the party and the armed forces. Even the pro-Soviet Afghans cannot achieve unity, although the Soviets dominate the DRA economically as well as politically, with natural gas and cotton being appropriated for Soviet use. The aim is to 'Sovietise' all aspects of the Afghan government.

The DRA Army has done the bulk of the fighting on the Communist side, being extensively involved in every Soviet offensive in 1979-82 and many of those since. The DRA Army is responsible for the entire war in the eastern provinces, along the Pakistan border, as the Soviets will use the puppet regime troops to garrison particularly those areas away from the cities, roads and airfields.

Command and Control

The Army's chain of command runs from Karmal to the Minister of Defence (Gen. Nazar Mohammed), the Chief of the General Staff (Lt. Gen. Shah Nawraz Tanay), and the three geographical corps commands and independent divisions and brigades. Real authority is in the hands of Soviet advisors, present from the highest to lowest levels in the DRA command structure.

The Troops

In 1978 the Afghan Army had a nominal strength of 110,000 and an actual strength of about 80,000; by the end of 1980, it was down to about 20,000. By 1986, the Army had an average strength of about 35,000 although there is probably an annual loss of about 10,000 men through desertion, demobilisation and casualties. Since 1981 the DRA has paid its officers and NCOs well by Afghan standards. They have attracted some committed Communists and a number of *badmashes* ('punks')



Hind-D making a low-level firing pass; this angle shows that it is finished overall in 'sand and spinach', including the belly, which bears the red star insignia. The outboard AT missile rails are empty; the inboard pylons carry two 57mm rocket pods and two canisters, probably containing bomblets but possibly poison gas. The radar for its 12.7mm rotary cannon is apparent in silhouette under the left side of the nose. See Plate B. (US Information Agency)

whose political reliability is their main qualification—many DRA junior officers are illiterate. Despite this, some DRA units will switch sides when given an opportunity. Conscripted by press-gang. Mutinies resulted when some conscript service was extended from three to four years in March 1984.

DRA units are all understrength: divisions are normally the size of weak brigades. The paper organisation of DRA units means little; although infantry divisions still retain their basically triangular structure of three three-battalion infantry regiments or brigades (one mechanised in APCs), an artillery regiment, and a tank battalion, the actual divisional strength is governed by the mission of each unit and the share of resources it can obtain.

One of the reasons the DRA Army is in such poor shape is that the Soviets are afraid of its turning against them *en masse*. Soviet actions and troop movements suggest that this was their prime concern in the December 1979 invasion. Currently most of the 103rd Gds. Abn. Div. is always kept literally as a 'palace guard' for the Soviet presence in Kabul (as well as, possibly, a power projection force for Gulf area contingencies). Because the DRA military includes many secret guerrilla sympathisers, the Soviets tell their allies little of planned operations. Despite this, the guerrillas have advanced notice of most major Communist offensives.

The DRA had a number of elite units—the 26th Airborne Battalion and the 444th, 37th and 38th Commando Brigades. The Airborne mutinied in 1980. The Commando Brigades were considered politically reliable and so were used as mobile strike forces until they suffered heavy losses. Since then, they have been broken down into independent battalions. DRA elite units have made combat parachute jumps.

Weapons

The DRA uses older Soviet equipment. Most RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launchers, SA-7 surface-to-air missiles, and anti-tank mines were reclaimed by the Soviets in 1980. They mainly retain their pre-war equipment and uniforms.

Tactics

DRA forces are frequently deployed in static defence missions. Garrisons range in size from division to company, often in old 'Foreign Legion'-style forts which are the target of many guerrilla raids and sieges. The DRA emerges from garrison for sweeps or convoy escort. Major offensives may include one or more divisions, either operating in

conjunction with Soviet units or acting independently.

DRA units are not mechanised in the Soviet way. DRA infantry normally marches, though it can be lifted by trucks or APCs, usually old BTR-152s. Tanks are dug into static defences, or used for infantry support or as convoy escorts. Armoured brigades have been used as complete formations.

The Soviets will use DRA units to defend vulnerable objectives and, on the offensive, to attack guerrilla positions, often with Soviet troops in Overwatch positions to prevent desertions and to minimise Soviet casualties—a prime objective of Soviet tactics.

Air and Air Defence Force

The DRA Air Force is equipped largely with export models of older Soviet aircraft, although some helicopter units have *Hind-Ds* and *Hip-Es*. The Soviets keep tight control over DRA aircraft, which

A typical scene of 'Afghan pastoral': 'Landscape, with *Hip*'. ... The Mi-8 transport helicopter is on final approach at the Communist outpost of Anawa in the Panjsher Valley in 1983. More recently, with the increased threat from SAMs, Soviet helicopters make their approaches in a steep spiral, dropping heat-decoy flares. (Tim Cooper, via AfghanAid)





A DRA Army lieutenant reads the news to his men—literacy is limited in Afghanistan at the best of times. See Plate E for these winter uniforms in grey drab. They are armed with 7.62mm Kalashnikovs, the middle man with link for his PK GPMG slung round him, where it can gather dirt and distorting knocks. Barely visible, but interesting, are the officer's black, painted or applied cloth insignia of rank on the shoulder strap; and the parachutist's badge on the chest of the man immediately right of the newspaper.

are co-located with Soviet units: all flights include at least one Soviet crew, Soviet-manned aircraft guard against defections, and some missions are flown by all-Soviet aircrew in DRA aircraft. DRA fighters and fighter-bombers number about ten ten- to 12-aircraft squadrons: four with about 50 MiG-17s, three with about 40 MiG-21s, three with about 36 Su-7s and SU-17s—some reports also mention 30 MiG-23s. In June 1985 DRAAF crews destroyed 20 of their own MiGs at Shindand. The helicopters number about six 12- to 15-aircraft squadrons, two of them with *Hinds*¹.

DRA SA-2 and SA-3 SAMs are deployed around Kabul and major airfields such as Bagram and Shindand.

Other Armed Forces

The Soviets have built up other local forces to 'shadow' the unreliable DRA Army as a system of checks and balances. These forces probably outnumber the Army in terms of forces in the field. Western experience is that effective indigenous forces are an essential part of successful counter-

insurgency operations. While many of these forces are ill-trained and unreliable, they have the potential to involve the population with the Kabul regime, and provide the DRA with forces that can move and act like the guerrillas, while DRA regulars remain largely tied to their forts and the roads.

Sarnadoy (Defenders of the Revolution)

Under the Khalqi-controlled Ministry of the Interior, as a counter to the Parchamite forces, this organisation is the successor to the former Gendarmerie. Made up of serving conscripts and organised in provincial regiments, reinforced by militia 'helpers'.

Police

Involved in counter-guerrilla and anti-Parchamite fighting, under the Ministry of the Interior.

KHAD (Khidamate Aetilaati Daulati—State Information Service)

The DRA secret police is an extension of the KGB, and runs an extensive net of agents and informers, plus assassins and torturers. Parchamite in sympathy, leading to clashes with pro-Khalqi police. KHAD para-military units operate in the field with the Army: effective intelligence is required for success in counter-insurgency conflict. KHAD has attempted to divide and infiltrate many guerrilla groups and has built up an intelligence net which the Soviets are trying to use to target their firepower successfully.

Frontier Troops

Transferred to Ministry of Tribes and Frontiers from Defence Ministry control in 1983. Linked to Soviet KGB Border Guards.

Tribal Militia

Under Ministry of Tribes and Frontiers Control, this consists mainly of Pathan tribesmen temporarily bought off to fight against the guerrillas. Can be tough fighters, but seldom pro-DRA for long. Other Militia organisations include armed PDPA cadres; so-called 'Revolution Defence Groups'; Pioneers; and Youth Wings of the Khalqi and Parchamite parties. Many militia groups function at night as anti-Soviet guerrillas.

Hearts and Minds

The Soviets and the DRA have tried to use the divisions in Afghan society to divide and conquer; they have been largely unsuccessful. The Kabul

¹A report of 12 November 1985 claims that a DRA Air Force MiG-21 was shot down on that date by *mujahideen* in Kandahar province, and that the pilot was a Soviet general officer serving as senior advisor to the DRAAF. He ejected, and his parachute was recovered, but he had not (at the time of writing) been located alive or dead, and may thus have fallen into the hands of the resistance.



These Motor Rifle troops armed with the 5.45mm AKS wear winter combat dress of steel helmet, overcoat with upturned collar, boots and gloves. The BMP-is are armed with 73mm cannon; they do not have their *Sagger* AT missiles mounted, although these have been used in Afghanistan to demolish stone houses. (US Navy)



A DRA conscript—the boy who does the dying for Karmal and the Russians. Note the shoddy quality of this grey uniform. The collar patches are light blue, and the left chest strips red. Photographed near Kabul, this combination of insignia is unexplained, but the collar patches have been tentatively identified to Air and Air Defence Force ground personnel.

regime's popularity and legitimacy remains low, even in the major cities. The war remains one against the Soviets, not a civil war. While tribal or local groups have been paid off by the Communists, these have frequently reverted to the guerrillas. Unofficial local truces between guerrillas and DRA garrisons are common, however. The most publicised truce was that between the Soviets (*not* the DRA) and Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces in the Panjsher Valley in one year, 1983-84. The Soviet attempt to get the Afghans to fight each other has only been a success in the Hazara Jat, where *Nasr* and Gulbuddin forces¹ fought other Hazaras until a truce was arranged in early 1985.

The Soviets publicise their civic action and *agitprop* activities, but these are undercut by the brutality of the Soviet forces. Any guerrilla war is, of

¹See list of major resistance groups and leaders below.

necessity, a hard and dirty one, but this one has been particularly bad. Massacres on the Lidice or Oradour-sur-Glane pattern are frequent and well documented: Kerala in Kunar (1979), Rauza, near Ghazni (1983), and Baraki Barak. Logar (1984), are among the better publicised massacres. The

Soviets have deported several thousand students, some as young as nine, to the Soviet Union for education and indoctrination as the ruling class of a new Afghanistan. This shows the possible time frame of Soviet planning.

Order of Battle, DRA Army

| <i>Unit</i> | <i>location</i> (27/12/79) | <i>location</i> (2/86) | <i>Unit</i> | <i>location</i> (27/12/79) | <i>location</i> (2/86) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Army GHQ | Kabul | Kabul | 444th Cdo Bde. | Kabul area | Panjsher |
| I Corps HQ | Kabul | Kabul | 666th Cdo Bde. ¹ | ? | Sharana, Paktia |
| II Corps HQ | Khandahar | Khandahar | GHQ Arty Bde. | Kabul area | Kabul? |
| III Corps HQ | Gardez | Gardez | 26th Abn. Bn. ¹³ | Kabul | not in OB |
| 4th Armd. Bde. | Pul-e-Charki | Pul-e-Charki | 99th SAM Regt. ¹³ | Kabul | Kabul |
| 7th Armd. Bde. | Khandahar | Khandahar | 1st Frontier Bde. ¹⁴ | not in OB | Jalalabad |
| 15th Armd. Bde. | Kabul | Kabul or Mazar-e-Sharif | 2nd Frnt. Bde. ¹⁴ | not in OB | Khost |
| 7th Inf. Div. ² | Kabul | Riskor, S. of Kabul | 3rd Frnt. Bde. ¹⁴ | not in OB | Badakhshan |
| 8th Inf. Div. ³ | Kabul | Kargha, near Bagram | 4th Frnt. Bde. ¹⁴ | not in OB | Nimruz |
| 9th Inf. Div. ⁴ | Assadabad, Kunar | Asadabad, Kunar | 5th Frnt. Bde. ¹⁴ | not in OB | Herat area |
| 11th Inf. Div. ⁵ | Jalalabad | Jalalabad | 24th <i>Tsarnadoy</i> Regt. ¹⁵ | not in OB | Badakhshan |
| 12th Inf. Div. ⁶ | Gardez | Gardez | <i>Notes:</i> | | |
| 14th Inf. Div. ⁷ | Ghazni | Ghazni | Non-divisional units include reconnaissance, engineer and artillery battalions. | | |
| 15th Inf. Div. ⁸ | Khandahar | Khandahar | ¹ Formed and commanded, pre-1973, by Col. Ramatullah Safi | | |
| 17th Inf. Div. ¹⁰ | Herat | Herat | ² Subordinate units include 65th Bde.; units deployed S. of Kabul around Khandahar/Ghazni highway. Mutinied 1984. | | |
| 18th Inf. Div. ⁹ | Mazar-e-Sharif | Mazar-e-Sharif | ³ Subordinate units include 4th Regt.; has some AFVs incl. BTR-60Pb. | | |
| 19th Inf. Div. | ? | Faizabad | ⁴ Subordinate units include 89th Bde., Assadabad. | | |
| 20th Inf. Div. ¹¹ | Nahrin, Baghlan | Nahrin, Baghlan | ⁵ Subordinate units include 32nd, 55th, 61st Bdes. | | |
| 25th Inf. Div. ¹² | Khost, Paktia | Khost, Paktia | ⁶ Subordinate units include 15th, 67th Bdes., 6th Regt. | | |
| 22nd Mountain Bde. ¹ | Kabul area | Paktia | ⁷ Subordinate units include 3rd Bde., 28th, 40th Regts., Paktia. | | |
| 37th Cdo Bde. ? | ? | Kabul | ⁸ Subordinate units include 36th Bde., Naray. | | |
| 38th Cdo Bde. ? | ? | Parwan | ⁹ Subordinate units include 62nd Regt. | | |

¹⁰Area of ops. Badghis, Ghowr; subordinate units include 2nd Regt., 28th Bde.; 1985 strength, 900–1,400.

¹¹Subordinate units include 20th, 23rd, 75th Regts.

¹²Hard-fighting, heavily *khalqi* division; includes 23rd, 19th, 59th, 6th (Arty.) Bdes. plus tank regiment.

¹³Subordinate to Air and Air Defence Force.

¹⁴Frontier Troops, not Army proper.

¹⁵Under Ministry of Interior command: there are a total of c. 30,000 *Tsarnadoy*, with—probably—provincial regiments in each Afghan province.

The Afghan Resistance

The Afghan resistance is not an army but rather a people in arms. Their strengths and weaknesses are those of Afghan society.

The fighting men range from 12-year-olds to greybeard veterans of the Third Afghan War. As in any guerrilla war, the active or passive participation of those who grow food, provide shelter, and pass information is vitally necessary; and the resistance has the support of the vast majority of the population. Because today's farmer is often tomorrow's guerrilla, and because there is no central Afghan command, a total count of Afghan forces is not possible. Estimates range from 90-120,000 (US sources, 1980-81) to 200,000-250,000 (Western analysis, 1983), to 250,000-330,000 (Afghan sources, 1981-82), to 744,000 (Afghan source, 1984). Total guerrilla manpower is probably equal to 10 per cent of the population remaining in Afghanistan outside the cities—seven to nine million in 1985. Not all of these

The parading DRA troops wear dark khaki service dress, white shirts, black ties, and both hat bands and collar patches of bright royal blue; the cap cords are mixed silver and black. This combination is tentatively identified with DRA Frontier Troops. Comparison of photos suggests that the soldier accompanying the Soviet private of Traffic Regulator troops at the Salang Pass tunnel is from the same branch of service; these guards seem to retain the blue-banded cap at all times, even with the grey winter battledress uniform. The Salang is one of the world's longest tunnels, and a key choke-point on the direct road between the USSR and Kabul through the Hindu Kush. Convoys are frequently ambushed on its approaches, known to Massoud's guerrillas as 'the Suez Canal'.



could be put into the field at once, but with more food, weapons, ammunition, and training a higher percentage could be fighting than is now the case.

Gerard Chaliand, a French expert who has been in the field with many guerrilla movements, wrote in 1981: 'The Afghan insurgents know little of modern revolutionary war—its efficiency or organisation or careful planning of time and work.' While the Afghans have greatly improved since then, it remains a largely pre-modern, pre-literate agrarian subsistence society, locked in a war of attrition with a superpower, and not receiving much outside aid, military or political. That is why Afghanistan is not the Soviet Union's Vietnam, even though the Afghan farmer can become as good or better a fighting man than the Vietnamese farmer. Yet the war is in some respects like Vietnam, minus the North Vietnamese Army or the Viet Cong main force. The Afghans have no divisions or brigades which can move from area to area. Regional guerrilla commanders have emerged who can deploy substantial forces, but they must often put together a 'coalition' for each operation. The Afghans respect traditional leadership, but a new generation of leaders has come forward in the resistance. While the lack of a central Afghan





A T-62A tank of the DRA Army takes part in a Revolution Day parade in Kabul; cf. Plate B for turret markings, and note the added Soviet parade strips on the trackguards. The DRA's T-62 force is normally based at Pul-e-Charki near Kabul; on 27 December 1979 they were coincidentally immobilised by Soviet advisors, who removed the batteries 'for winterisation'.

command hurts strategy, planning and use of resources, such a command headquarters would be of limited value if it did exist, because of the guerrillas' minimal long-range communications capabilities. It would also be vulnerable to Soviet attack or infiltration.

Major Resistance Groups

Mohaz Melli Islami The National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, led by Pir Sayid Ahmed Gailani. Pro-Western in outlook, NIFA is strongest around Khandahar and among the Pathans of the border areas, from Badakhshan down to Ghazni and west to Wardak and Kabul, based on the Pir's status as a Qadiriya Sufic religious leader. Pro-royalist, this group believes the return of the king (by 1986, an unlikely event) would provide needed unity.

Jebhe Milli Nejad The National Liberation Front of Sibghtullah Modjaddidi. Pathan and Naqshbandi Sufic, this traditionalist group, though the smallest of the major parties, is strong in the Jalalabad, Logar, and Khandahar areas. While the leadership was anti-royalist pre-war, there is pro-king sentiment among the rank and file.

Harakat-i-Inquilabi-i-Islami The Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi. Numerically strong, Harakat represents much of the spirit of traditional Afghanistan. Village-based, its leaders are local *mullahs*. It lacks the Sufi background of other traditionalist parties.

Strongest amongst Pathans and Uzbeks, with widespread support, especially in Ghazni, Wardak, Koh-i-Safi, Badakhshan and Kunar. Numbers declined in 1985.

Hezbi-i-Islami The Islamic Party of Younis Khalis. Khalis is a moderate fundamentalist, strongest among Pathans. He was formerly associated with the other *Hezb* party. Kabul, Nangarhar and Paktika provinces have a strong Khalis presence. Khalis himself regularly fights inside Afghanistan. Rapid growth in 1985; this party is known for hard and effective fighting.

Jamiat-i-Islami The Islamic Society of Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani. A moderate fundamentalist group, *Jamiat* is numerically large, and strongest among the Tadjiks, Uzbeks and Turkomen. Making use of the non-tribal nature of Tadjik society—unlike that of the Pathans—*Jamiat* has benefitted from having the most effective regional commanders in Dari-speaking areas. Anti-royalist, but not anti-Western in outlook, *Jamiat* has been attacked by more extreme fundamentalists, with Khalis being its closest ally. *Jamiat* has attracted Pathan supporters, especially in Paktia and the Jagdalak Valley of Nangarhar. Active throughout Dari-speaking Afghanistan; Herat Mazar-e-Sharif, Badakhshan, Takhar, Parwan, and Kapisa provinces have *Jamiat* strongholds.

Ittehad-e-Islami The Islamic Alliance of Prof. Abdul Rasoul Sayeff, who in 1982 became chairman of the Fundamentalist Alliance due largely to his access to money and weapons through his links with Moslem Brotherhood and Wahabi groups in the Arab world. He attracted many guerrillas in 1982-84; but because of his lack of a firm, traditional base of authority except in parts of his native Paghman region, many have left with their arms. He also has some influence in Kabul, Nangarhar, Paktika, and Paktia.

Hezb-i-Islami The Islamic Party of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The most controversial Peshawar-based party leader, Hekmatyar was one of the first to take up *jihad* and so had many adherents. He has since been accused of being more concerned with seizing power post-war and of co-operating with the Soviets. Certainly, Hekmatyar's forces blocked the supply routes to the Panjsher in 1982-84 and attacked Panjsheri forces in 1981, and almost every report of inter-Afghan fighting involves them. Yet

Soviet Forces:

1: Sergeant, Airborne Forces

2: Private, Engineers

3: Private, KGB Border Guards

4: Private, Motor Transport Troops

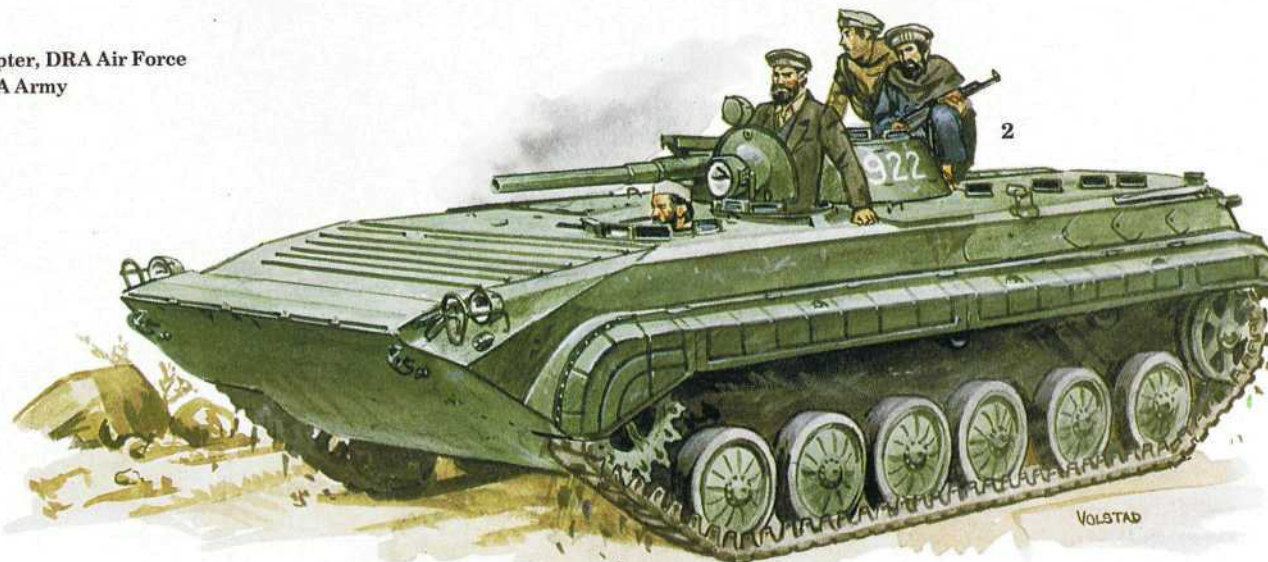




1: Mi-24 'Hind-D' attack helicopter
2: Soviet Army T-55 MBT
3: DRA Army tank markings



1: Mi-8 'Hip-C' helicopter, DRA Air Force
2: BMP-1 IFV, ex-DRA Army



Soviet Forces:

- 1: Captain, Tank Troops, winter dress**
- 2: Infantryman, NBC suit**
- 3: Paratrooper, winter dress**
- 4: Starshina, Motor Rifles, winter dress**



DRA Army:

1: Private, Security Troops

2: Infantryman, winter dress

3: Captain 2nd Class, infantry

4: Militiaman



DRA Army:

1: Major, service dress

2: Infantryman, summer dress

3, 4: Junior Lt. & radioman, Commandos



Mujahideen, Paktia province:

1: Col. Ramatullah Safi

2: Dr. Khalid Akram

3: NIFA guerilla



- 1: Ahmad Shah Massoud, Panjsher Valley
2: Hamid Walid, Wardak province
3: Guerrilla, Panjsher Valley



other Hekmatyar commanders fight hard against the Soviets. Hekmatyar has outside Moslem support, and is less tied to traditional Afghan values than any other party. Fundamentalist, mainly Pathan; widespread, but declining.

In the Hazara Jat there are two separate Shia parties. *Shura-i-Inqilabi* (Revolutionary Council) under Dr. Sayid Ahmed Beheshti, is the 'official' government of the Hazara Jat. *Sazmar-i-Nasr* (Organisation for Victory) is its Iranian-funded revolutionary opposition. This resulted in tension and some fighting until an agreement was reached in 1985. Nuristan includes an autonomous 'Islamic Republic'.

The division between 'traditionalist' and 'fundamentalist' or 'Islamicist' is not clear-cut. However, Islamic revolution and religious fanaticism are alien to Afghan traditions.

Resistance Leaders

Whatever the Afghans' political differences, the battlefield provides its own unity. Guerrilla groups affiliated to different parties often co-operate in combat; before each operation, a coalition would be

organised. This led to the rise of regional commanders, especially in Dari-speaking areas—Afghan leaders who can control guerrillas over a relatively wide area, including those of other parties. Guerrilla commanders are not appointed or elected, but have come to prominence by their own skill. The best known are:

Ahmad Shah Massoud Tadjik; *Jamiat*. Former engineering student. The most famous Afghan guerrilla's base is the Panjsher Valley, where he has organised and led forces which the Soviets have not defeated in eight offensives. His 1983–84 ceasefire was controversial, but Massoud's influence remains strong throughout Dari-speaking north-central Afghanistan. The 1984 offensives destroyed much of the valley.

Abdul Haq Pathan; *Hezb* (Khalis). Ex-student; operating around Kabul, his forces include urban guerrillas. His forces used SA-7S and Chinese-made

This DRA infantry squad came over to the resistance in the Panjsher Valley in spring 1985, bringing their DPM light machine gun. They wear the summer khaki uniform and a minimum of field equipment. (Mohammed Shuaib, *Jamiat Islami*)



107mm rocket launchers with good effect in 1984–85. A tough, intelligent, charismatic leader. *Sayid Jaglan Hazara*; *Shura*. Ex-major, DRA; Commander of *Shura* forces. Scored several victories in 1979–80, but has not operated outside Hazara

Zabioullah Tadjik; *Jamiat*. Ex-religious teacher. Killed in action, December 1984; was chief commander of resistance around Mazar-e-Sharif. Replaced by Mohammed Alim.

Ishmael Khan Tadjik; *Jamiat*. Ex-major, DRA; foremost commander of resistance in and around Herat.

Shabioullah Pathan; *Harakat*. Mullah; killed in action, April 1985. Had strong guerrilla forces in Koh-i-safi area north-east of Kabul.

Qari Tadj Mohammed Pathan; *Harakat*. Ex-lawyer; guerrilla leader, Ghazni area.

Jalulladin Haqani Pathan; *Hezbi* (Khalis). Religious teacher; guerrilla leader in south Paktia and Paktika provinces. Became foremost area commander, 1985.

Mohammed Amin Wardak Pathan; NIFA. Ex-Ministry of Tourism official; local commander, Wardak province.

Mohammed Anwar Pathan; *Jamiat*. Ex-student and athlete; local commander, Jagdalak area, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces.

Abdul Rahim Wardak Pathan; NIFA. Ex-colonel, DRA; staff officer and commander, border areas.

Ramatullah Safi Pathan; NIFA. Ex-colonel, Royal Afghan Army. Training and logistics, combat command in Paktia.

In 1980 there was an attempt—one of many dating to before 1978—to form a unity of all the major Peshawar-based parties. By 1982 this fell apart into two groupings: one of Gailani, Modjadidi, and Mohammedi; the other of Rabbani, Khalis, Sayeff, Hekmatyar, and three smaller splinter parties. These groupings were known to the West as the Moderate and Fundamentalist Unities, respectively, although neither label was strictly accurate. Neither grouping evolved a centralised military command or strong political leadership, and both suffered from internal dissension.

In May 1985 all the major groups joined in another alliance, with each party head being chairman in turn. Whether this will prove effective is uncertain. The fact remains that considerable

distrust and resentment towards the Peshawar-based leadership has emerged among the guerrillas inside Afghanistan who are actually doing the fighting, who say they need more support and have become angry at the shortage of outside aid. Despite this, most guerrilla groups remain affiliated to one of the major parties.

Weapons

The Afghan guerrillas are lightly armed, fighting the Soviet Army and Air Force with only infantry-weapons. The lack of adequate modern weapons and ammunition has been important in limiting the number of fighting men the Afghans can put into the field.

All Afghan boys learn to shoot, and the rifle occupies a cherished place in the Afghan heart. Yet the average Afghan did not make much use of firearms in peacetime, and they are by no means all natural marksmen. The Afghans are using a wide variety of rifles. While these range from percussion *jezails* and single-shot Martini-Henrys captured at Maiwand in 1880, the two most common weapons are .303 Lee Enfields in various versions and a wide range of 7.62mm Kalashnikov assault rifles. The first crop of Kalashnikovs came with the massive DRA Army desertions of 1979–80, and these have been supplemented by capture and outside aid. Lee Enfields remain common—prevalent, in many

The resistance use what weapons they can get, and do not despise even such museum pieces as this .455 cal. Martini-Henry; these simple, robust 19th-century weapons are treasured on the North-West Frontier, where their tremendous man-stopping qualities have been appreciated since the days of Queen Victoria. Its owner wears Western-style jacket and sweater over his pyjamas, and a customised bandolier, probably supporting cartridge boxes at the waist. (Ed Grazda via Committee for a Free Afghanistan)



areas—and the Afghans appreciate their robustness and long-range sniping capability. In many groups the older guerrillas use the Lee Enfields for long range fire, the younger men the Kalashnikovs at close range.

Other infantry weapons used include SKS 7.62mm rifles (Soviet- and Chinese-made); M1891 Moisin-Nagant 7.62mm (supplied on Lenin's orders in 1919!); 7.62mm G3 (ex-Iranian); 9mm Sten guns (often locally made); and a variety of light machine guns, although all are limited in numbers. The 7.62mm RPD and **RPK** are most common, although the 7.62mm PKM and older Czech-made ZB 36s of the pre-war army are also used.

To counter Soviet armour the Afghans **must rely** on RPG-7 anti-tank grenade launchers, and anti-tank mines. RPG-7s have been used effectively from the opening days of the war and **their numbers have** been increasing since late 1982. Afghan mine warfare skills were limited at the start of the war, but have improved; however, because the guerrillas control most of the countryside, mine use is limited to prevent civilian casualties.

Ask any Afghan man, woman, or child over the age of six what you can do to help, and the answer will be 'Get us weapons to destroy the helicopters.' The most common anti-aircraft weapons are the Soviet-designed DShK 12.7mm and 14.5mm KPV heavy machine guns, 'Dashika' and 'Ziqriat' respectively to the Afghans. These have always been available in limited numbers; since 1982 more weapons, especially Chinese-made versions, have become more common. The Panjsher Valley was defended by 13 heavy machine guns in 1982, by 200 to 250 two years later. They are of limited effectiveness against *Hinds* and fighter-bombers, although they have a surprisingly high number of kills and considerable deterrent value.

What the Afghans really need is more man-portable heat-seeking SA-7 *Grail* surface-to-air missiles. Small numbers have been in use since 1980: the DRA Army had SA-7s pre-war. Capture and a limited aid flow have provided additional weapons, especially since late 1982, but SA-7s remain few and far between. Those Afghans who receive them do not always use them accurately, for it is by no means a 'soldier-proof' weapon, and many of its components are poorly designed or manufactured and



A guerrilla of the *Jamiat Islami* from the Jagdalak Valley in Nangarhar province; this area has been depopulated by incessant Soviet air attacks, but guerrillas still operate there, with food brought in from Kabul. He carries an RPG-7, and wears 'ChiCom'-style green webbing pouches for Kalashnikov magazines. (Author's photo)

have a limited shelflife. Even an adequate supply of SA-7s would not sweep Afghan skies of Soviet helicopters—the Egyptians and Syrians fired 5,000 SA-7s in the 1973 war to destroy four and damage 28 Israeli aircraft. If a combination of hand-held SAMs and heavy machine guns could defeat Soviet airpower, NATO would not spend billions on sophisticated air defences. However, more SA-7s would make the Soviets less willing to use their airpower offensively, forcing them to attack less accurately from higher altitude and to use evasive action and countermeasures. By spring 1983, Soviet helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft were both routinely dropping decoy flares and altering their tactics as SA-7 countermeasures.



The author examining a 7.62mm AKMS folding-stock rifle while in the field with Afghan guerrillas. Note that the weapon is not set on 'safe'—an Afghan habit which disturbed the author's Western sensibilities. The author wears a mixture of Afghan and Western dress in an attempt to appear as simply another 6ft. 4in., 17 stone, blue-eyed Afghan... (Karen McKay)

Tactics

Early attempts at fighting pitched battles were successful against some DRA forces, but often disastrous against Soviet firepower. Afghan tactics have become those of guerrilla warfare. Ambushes are the standard method of both offensive and defensive combat; they are the Afghans' means of defence against ground sweeps—although by 1982 some commanders had learned to let mechanised forces roll through their areas, so that they could ambush the supply columns. Afghans will, if forced, fight a defensive battle around a village or other objective, but generally prefer to use ambush tactics.

In the border fighting of 1985, in the Soviet Kunar, Herat province, and Paktia offensives, the guerrillas demonstrated the impact of additional training and weapons by standing and fighting Soviet forces rather than engaging in their traditional hit-and-run tactics. They managed to

inflict heavy losses on the Soviets, at a high cost to themselves, particularly from air attack.

Ambushes are used also to interdict Soviet supply routes. Large convoys run along the major paved road network; although heavily escorted by armoured vehicles and helicopters, these convoys frequently have to fight their way through. Sometimes, the Afghans can inflict substantial losses: in March 1984 a convoy of fuel trucks suffered heavy losses—25 semi-trailers—to an Afghan ambush, causing a fuel shortage in Kabul. The most vulnerable targets for Afghan ambushes are small convoys, which has led to an increase in the Soviet reliance on helicopters and aircraft for re-supplying smaller outposts.

The small DRA outposts throughout the country are frequently attacked by the Afghans, and are sometimes taken by assault. Elsewhere, Afghan tactics are dictated by the requirements of their area of operations. Those in major cities operate as urban guerrillas in night-time raids. While the Afghans like to consider themselves natural marksmen, their overall standard of marksmanship is low. The eagle-eyed Pathans of Kiplingesque legend are largely limited to the high country of Paktia and Paktika—one of the reasons why the DRA has had little success in the border areas. Although the Afghans may not have come to grips with guerrilla war strategy and may not be able to use modern weaponry in the most effective way, they have a good grasp of basic guerrilla tactics; but while Afghan tactics have won ambushes, battles, and attacks, these victories cannot by themselves win the war.

Training

'More weapons without more training means only more martyrs,' said guerrilla leader Mohammed Amin Wardak. Yet the absence of military rear area support for the guerrillas means that training is limited. In some groups ex-DRA Army soldiers have trained their comrades. In the Panjsher Valley, Massoud set up training programmes for his troops and, starting in 1983, despatched mobile training teams throughout Dari-speaking Afghanistan. Since 1982–83 other groups have set up training camps in the border areas. As recently as 1984 a *Jamiat* official estimated that only five to ten per cent of the guerrillas' manpower has been

trained; the rest have had to learn how to fight by surviving in battle. Since then, this proportion has apparently increased enough to show an effect on the battlefield.

Outside Aid

While the Soviet justification for the invasion included the activities of hordes of CIA/Chinese/Pakistani/Israeli agents and mercenaries, the Afghans claim that they have received insufficient support from outside the country. There is obviously aid reaching the guerrillas—Chinese- and Egyptian-made weapons and ammunition are being used in action; but there is little evidence of much-needed training being provided. There have, however, been accusations that money and weapons intended for the guerrillas are being 'siphoned off', either going to Pakistan, being sold by Peshawar-based Afghan leaders, or being retained by some groups for post-war power struggles. Yet it appears that the aid flow did increase, starting in late 1982. The 1983 and 1984 fighting brought these weapons into use, including Chinese-built 107mm rocket launchers and Soviet-designed 82mm mortars. Press reports have put US aid in the first years of the war in the \$20-30 million annual range, with Islamic nations providing about the same. Reportedly US aid has increased to \$100 million in fiscal 1985 and to \$280 million in fiscal 1986.

A group of Afghans during a halt on the inarch in Paktia province. In the centre is Mohammed Gailani, the English-educated son of *Pir* Sayid Ahmad Gailani, head of NIFÄ; he wears a light field jacket and a leather bandolier over stone-grey pyjamas. Behind him, at right, filling a Kalashnikov magazine, is Wakil Akbarzai. Behind Gailani at left, in white clothing, is Dr. Khalid Akram. Other weapons visible here include a Lee Enfield, a shotgun and an SKS carbine. (Dr. Khalid Akram)



Pakistan, conscious of Soviet pressure, has not become the combination sanctuary and pipeline that successful guerrilla movements in the past have found indispensable. Pakistan officially denies that any military aid is coming into the resistance; and Pakistan-based aid is not decisive to the resistance, as is shown by the extensive guerrilla activity in the west of Afghanistan, which has limited contact with Pakistan. Iran has not provided much help to the Afghans, apparently rating attempts to enlist Soviet help for their war with Iraq over aiding fellow Moslems. Such aid as is given is directed to Shia groups, especially *Nasr*. Afghan refugees have been conscripted for the Iranian Army. The Ayatollah's Islamic Revolution is alien to the Afghans' way of thinking, and he tends to regard Moslems who do not recognise him as the true *imam* (spiritual leader) as worse than atheists or infidels.

Casualties

Estimates of Afghan dead range from 125,000 through 250,000 up to 500,000. Some even estimate 1,000,000 dead. The vast majority have been civilians.

The Future

In a guerrilla war, what happens on the battlefield does not always determine ultimate victory or defeat. The US in Vietnam, the Portuguese in Africa, the French in Algeria, and the Rhodesians were all winning militarily, but lost their wars. Thus, an understanding of what will happen in Afghanistan requires looking beyond the fighting men.

Refugees

The Afghans constitute the largest refugee population in the world. In 1985 there were 2.8–3.2 million in Pakistan, .8–1.7 million in Iran, 2–4 million elsewhere, and 1–2 million internal refugees. This constitutes half or more of the surviving pre-war population. In Pakistan, in 1983, 75 per cent of the refugees were women or children under 15. The shift of population to the cities may mean that urban insurgency may take on additional importance in the future.



Ahmad Shah Massoud, guerrilla leader of the Panjsher Valley, photographed in spring 1985 examining the AKS-74/BG-15 rifle/grenade launcher combination which has been increasingly introduced to Soviet elite units since 1983. See Plate H1. (Mohammed Shuaib, *Jamiat Islami*)

Famine

As early as 1982 30 per cent of farm land had been forced out of cultivation; by 1985 agricultural production was estimated at 25 per cent of pre-war level. In less fertile areas, such as the Hazara Jat and Badakhshan province, there were severe food shortages by 1984-85. If the rains fail or if the cumulative damage done by the Soviets mounts, the risk of mass starvation will increase. The Soviets know famine is an excellent counter-insurgency weapon; they make cheap grain available in the cities to encourage internal refugees away from areas where they could support guerrillas.

Pakistan

Political upheaval in Pakistan has, along with famine, the greatest potential for crippling the resistance within the next five years. Pakistan has been subjected to Soviet pressure since the start of the war; in 1984-85 the cross-border attacks and threats became more intense. Pakistan has substantial problems of its own, with strong separatist factions, and is in the throes of an attempt to move from military to parliamentary government. The

opposition is already well-armed by the Soviets and DRA. The Soviets could also try to re-ignite the insurgency in Baluchistan. Pakistan supports the Afghans, but remains vulnerable to a combination of external aggression and internal instability.

Negotiations

The indirect Geneva talks of 1982-86 between Pakistan and the DRA have not yielded a solution. They are unique among peace negotiations in that the two parties actually fighting—the Soviet Union and the Afghan guerrillas—are not represented. Between sessions of the Geneva talks the special representative of the UN Secretary General has shuttled between various capitals, without success.

The Soviets

The Soviets have withdrawn from countries they have occupied in the past—they withdrew from Austria and bases in Finland in the 1950s. Yet for them to withdraw, the costs of the war will have to be greater than the benefits. The benefits lie in political leverage and military bases against Iran (Russia has invaded Persia eleven times since the 18th century), Pakistan, and the Gulf; in combat training; and in showing the non-aligned nations that the West is not willing to stand up to support one of their number. There have been some costs, not only in troops and helicopters, but also in diplomatic relations with the non-aligned nations, especially those of the Islamic world, and in trade and contacts with the West. Only if the West moves, after over five years of war, to increase all these costs is the calculus likely to shift towards withdrawal.

The changes in Soviet leadership do not seem to have altered policies towards Afghanistan. The Soviet model for the future of Afghanistan appears to be Mongolia—nominally independent, but economically and politically completely Soviet controlled. The Soviets, however, always have the option of partition, dividing Afghanistan along the Hindu Kush and having the north hold a plebiscite and ask for admission as the 16th S.S.R. of the Soviet Union. Rumours of this have been current among Afghan groups since early in the war.

The Afghans

Afghanistan was, even in peacetime, one of the poorest countries on earth. Its people are now



engaged in a prolonged war of attrition. No one has ever won a war of attrition against Russia. But when the Afghans say they are going to fight on, regardless of what the rest of the world may do or say, they really mean it.

In 1986 morale is still high among the guerrillas, higher in the field than in Peshawar. There is certainly more aid available, but the Afghans cannot understand why there was not aid four years ago. Even though there may now be enough Kalashnikovs to go around, the Afghans still lack effective unity, organisation, and training. The 1985 attempt at a political coalition may help prevent the increases in aid from being applied in an ineffective way and, more important, may give them a chance to have a voice in world affairs similar to that accorded to the PLO and SWAPO.

While the Afghans have certainly improved on the battlefield since the start of the war, so have their opponents. It is probable that only widespread famine or political upheaval in Pakistan could reduce the resistance to the level of being a mere

Guerrillas, wearing as close to uniform clothing as is to be found among the resistance (see Plate G3), man a tripod-mounted 12.7mm DShKM heavy machine gun, their standard air defence weapon. The tripod is sand-khaki, probably identifying a Soviet example—Chinese versions have olive green-painted mountings. Some Chinese guns have elaborate mechanical lead-computing sights which are potentially effective against targets flying a straight path, but complex to use. (Author's photo)

annoyance to the Soviets before 1990. After that, no one knows. No one can doubt the bravery and commitment of the Afghans, but ten years of unequal struggle would be a terrible burden. They are only likely to achieve their aim—an Afghanistan without Soviet combat troops—if the West helps them to raise the cost of the war to the Soviets: a cost only partially inflicted on the battlefield. It is not too late for the Afghans. The Vietnamese fought for 30 years. The Afghans, fighting for their homes and way of life, and inspired by the dream of going home again and living as they did before the war, are no less dedicated.

The Plates

A: Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan:

A1: Sergeant, Airborne Forces

Based upon a photograph of the late Sgt. L. Barkandaj, taken from his body after he was shot and killed in the winter of 1983 by a friend of the present author. He was killed while giving orders to his men under fire; and his diary showed that this Ukrainian platoon sergeant had a deep concern for their welfare. It also contained sketches, and verses of poetry. Not all the victims of the Soviet invasion have been Afghans.

Sgt. Barkandaj is depicted wearing the khaki drab two-piece uniform of the VDV (Air Assault Force), the collar open to show the striped vest shared with naval personnel by this branch of service. Shoulder boards and collar tabs are in branch-of-service light blue, the former bearing the Soviet Army's cypher and the stripes of this rank.

Junior sergeant (two yellow stripes on shoulder straps) of Soviet Motor Rifle troops, wearing the light khaki drab summer shirt-tunic, trousers and bush hat; the cloth has a slightly greenish cast. Buttons are painted olive drab, but a full-colour red and brass star badge is worn on the hat. Field collar patches are of shirt material, with dull metal branch-of-service badges. The white undercollar can be made out inside the open neck of the shirt-tunic.



Branch-of-service patches are worn on both sleeves. He carries the folding-stock 5.45mm AKSD assault rifle, now the standard weapon of Soviet airborne infantry units, and its associated web equipment; his belt buckle is dulled with drab paint. Note that VDV personnel wear the same high pull-on marching boots as other branches. Camouflage overalls are now apparently being issued as standard combat dress to airborne forces (see Elite 5, *Soviet Bloc Elite Forces*, for full details of VDV clothing and equipment).

A2: Private. Engineers

The increased use of mines by the Afghan resistance has led to a corresponding increase in the role played by Soviet combat engineers. This soldier wears the hot-weather fatigue bush-hat in pale khaki drill, in use in a number of slightly varying styles since the 1930s. Note applied badge, and chinstrap. The camouflaged overalls, standard issue to combat units throughout Afghanistan, are normally worn with the hood down—the better to hear the click of a mine detonator or a Lee Enfield bolt! The long webbing container is for tin mine marker flags and a mine probe, for use when detecting non-metallic mines; his German Shepherd is a highly trained mine-sniffer, not a pet. His personal weapon is the AK-74 rifle with a wooden stock.

A3: Private, KGB Border Guards

Similarly armed is this soldier of a Mobile Group of the Border Guards, deployed for action inside Afghanistan; this branch has also seen service against guerrilla forays on to Soviet territory. The distinctives of this branch are the green cap, shoulder boards (with Cyrillic 'PV' cypher) and collar tabs; the former is worn at all possible times, and always clean and stiff—there are no '50 mission crush¹ caps in the KGB. The shoulder and collar insignia are even applied to this camouflage uniform, the *kamuflirovanniy kurtki*, introduced by the KGB Border Guards in the early 1980s. Of the same material as the standard overall, it is cut like a service dress.

A4: Private, Motor Transport troops

A great deal less dedicated to his duty is this transport driver, who never asked to be sent south—

or, indeed, to wear a uniform at all—and who has probably been ambushed more than once. He is drably uniformed in the standard khaki Soviet Army summer dress with the *pilotka* sidecap; its red star badge, and the dull metal branch-of-service badges on his drab-coloured field collar tabs, are the only insignia worn. Like many second-line troops he is still armed with the 7.62mm AKM. Note, just visible, the white collar liner which Soviet conscripts have to sew inside their shirt and tunic collars.

B1: Mi-24 'Hind-D' attack helicopter

The *Hind* has proved the single most powerful Soviet offensive weapons system in Afghanistan, devastatingly effective in carrying out the policy of massive destruction from the air, and so heavily armoured that it is extremely difficult to shoot down with the weapons at the disposal of the resistance. *Hind-A* versions were used from the opening stages of the war, and remain in service with the DRA; but most DRA and all Soviet attack helicopter units had re-equipped by 1984 with *Hind-D* and *Hind-E* models. The *Hind-D* illustrated was photographed by a British cameraman while it attacked guerrillas near the town of Jagdalak, east of Kabul, early in 1984. It is finished in the standard Soviet helicopter camouflage scheme of 'sand and spinach', and marked with the national insignia on the sides and belly, and with a two-digit individual aircraft serial, in this case '55'. For the missions with which it is tasked in Afghanistan the *Hind* does not usually carry pairs of AT-2 'Swatter' anti-tank missiles on the outer pylons, but relies on the massive destructive potential of its four UV-32 pods each carrying 32 x 57mm rockets, and the chin-mounted rotary four-barrel 12.7mm cannon power-aimed by radar and infra-red sensors. A varied combination of bombs and bomblet and chemical weapons dispensers can be carried in the ground-attack role.

B2: Soviet Army T-55 Main Battle Tank, 1980

The Motor Rifle divisions initially committed to the invasion of Afghanistan used T-54/T-55 series MBTs in their integral tank regiments and battalions, as do many Soviet units still, particularly in the lower-readiness Military Districts. Since 1979 numbers of T-62S have also been committed; as



This DRA AF *Hind-D* was flown to Pakistan by its crew in 1985. The box-like structure above the stub wings is an infra-red suppressor for the engine exhausts, to confuse heat-seeking SAMs. This aircraft carries UV-32 rocket pods and 250kg bombs underwing.

have a few T-72S, possibly in divisional reconnaissance battalions. Tank '119' served with a Soviet tank sub-unit which was roughly handled in eastern Afghanistan soon after the invasion, and was one of the casualties. It is marked with the white 'invasion cross' on its upper surfaces, traditionally used when Soviet forces anticipate opposition from similar tank types to their own; first seen during the invasion of the Baltic Republics in 1940, it figured prominently during the Prague invasion of 1968, but was seen infrequently in Afghanistan in 1979-80.

B3: T-55A turret markings, DRA Army

DRA tanks are painted in Soviet green drab, with similar turret numbers; for parades the national emblem of the DRA, in the version used since 1980, is added to the turret cheeks. T-55A '517', fully marked in this way, was captured by guerrillas in Paktia Province in 1983 and has seen limited action against the Communists since then. It was one of three captured tanks used in the unsuccessful attack on Urgun in December 1983.

C1: Mi-8 'Hip-C' helicopter, DRA Air Force

Although an old design with performance limitations, the *Hip* in its many versions has been the Communist workhorse of this war. It has seen service in the ground-attack role as well as in its more usual character as a troop transport (carrying 28 men, plus crew) and an all-purpose utility and liaison machine. No. '378', finished in faded Soviet camouflage and marked with one of two differing

versions of the DRA national insignia, was shot down at the Panjsher Valley town of Rokha during the 'Panjsher V' offensive in 1982. When the guerrillas re-occupied the town during the year-long truce which they forced on the Soviets, they stripped it of everything useful, and then turned the fuselage into an ice-cream parlour.

C2: BMP-1 Infantry Fighting Vehicle, 1982

Supplied to the Afghan army before the war, the BMP-1 is apparently limited to service with their armoured brigades. This example was captured from the DRA 7th Armd. Bde. in 1981; since its capture its former crew have occasionally taken it into action against the Communists. The guerrillas have a few captured AFVs in the eastern part of the country, but their use is sporadic, limited by shortage of diesel fuel and by enemy air superiority. This vehicle is finished in standard Soviet and DRA green drab; its turret number seems to be hand-painted rather than neatly stencilled in Soviet style. As the DRA insignia is rarely displayed in the field, it is often hard to tell the two armies apart—except by their combat performance. The guerrillas frequently daub captured vehicles with graffiti—both slogans, and the signatures of the victors.

D: Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan:

D1: Captain, Tank Troops, winter field dress

Guerrilla warfare presents junior officers and NCOs with opportunities to take command responsibility; captains often lead reinforced companies used for enveloping operations in the mountains. This officer wears the standard tank crew black winter jacket over black overalls, and the AFV crew helmet. A branch-of-service shield is sometimes applied to the sleeve in felt, or stencilled. The common practice of stencilling the vehicle turret number on the helmet brow is not often seen in Afghanistan. This officer carries the short AKR (AKSU) rifle for self-defence when dismounted; he does not wear the Makarov pistol, whose holster might catch and delay him when 'bailing out' of a 'brewing' T-62. Crews of other categories of AFV, including BMDs and self-propelled howitzers, also wear this uniform.

D2: Soviet soldier in NBC suit

Soviet troops have carried their NBC suits

throughout the war in Afghanistan; guerrillas have reported them being worn in action, and an engagement in Nangarhar province in 1981 yielded Soviet dead wearing these suits. Guerrillas have retained captured masks and suits; while the extent of Soviet use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan is uncertain, that they *have* been used repeatedly is supported by strong evidence. This soldier, armed with an AKMS, wears the standard-issue Soviet NBC suit and is trying on his gasmask.

D3: Paratrooper in winter field dress

He wears the standard Soviet *ushanka* synthetic fur hat, with the heavy winter version of his khaki drab field dress. The body armour worn by this VDV trooper has become widespread during 1984–85 and is now standard issue for combat operations. He would wear it not only when dismounted, but also inside a BMD personnel carrier; and he would probably sit on it when making a heliborne assault in a *Hip*. Paratroopers—'*desantniki*'—from the 103rd, 104th and 105th Guards Air Assault Divisions, dressed in this basic uniform though without the armour, played a major role in the 1979 invasion of Kabul. Since then Soviet airborne and motor rifle companies have formed special anti-sniper squads armed with the SVD sniper's rifle; they have also found that the RPG-7 and RPG-18 anti-tank weapons are an effective, if rather wholesale counter to enemy sniping.

D4: Starshina, Motor Rifle Troops, winter 1980

Standard Soviet Army winter field dress of *ushanka* and grey greatcoat worn by a senior NCO of motorised infantry. During the initial Soviet invasion some troops were photographed in Afghanistan wearing this uniform complete with full-coloured shoulder boards and collar tabs, and coloured branch-of-service shields on their sleeves. A more subdued field appearance is now the norm; the photo upon which we base this figure shows no insignia apart from the red star on the cap flap, the dull metal branch badges on the field collar tabs, and the broad red stripe of this rank on the khaki drab field shoulder boards. He is armed with both an AKM, and a holstered Makarov pistol.

E and F: Army of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan:
(Additional material by Martin Windrow and

Peter Abbott. Although these figures are closely based upon colour photographs, the lack of detailed, authoritative references to the DRA Army's uniform and insignia practices have in some cases made their interpretation somewhat speculative.)

E1: Private, Security Troops, urban field dress

The contexts in which these troops have been photographed strongly suggest that the red cap band, collar patches and shoulder strap piping identify security troops—possibly the *Tsarnadoy* gendarmerie under the Ministry of the Interior, rather than the DRA Army proper.

This soft cap, blouse and trousers of shoddy grey drab constitute the DRA Army's winter uniform, for field and service dress alike. Personal equipment is normally of Soviet pattern, and small arms are of the Soviet 7.62mm family. The belt buckle is of Soviet pattern, with the DRA emblem in the centre of the star; equipment belts are often seen worn over two other patterns in the trouser loops—a plain brown leather type with a two-claw frame buckle, and a pre-revolutionary pattern with a circular 'boy scout'-type clasp. The high boots with a double-buckled flap are a fairly new innovation. In the field, no insignia at all are worn in any of the photographs we have located. In pre-revolutionary days the NCO ranks were marked by one to five red chevrons on the shoulder straps, points inwards, the top chevron having a naval-type 'loop' in it. These *may* still be worn, but cannot be made out in pictures; a few photos of troops in service dress show the branch-of-service collar patches, and the red chest stripes, illustrated on Plate F2—the latter *may* be NCO insignia. The Soviet steel helmet, usually without a cover or netting, is occasionally seen; and on parade occasions some use is still made of M1918 Austro-Hungarian *stahlhelms* from a batch bought from Czechoslovakia in the 1930s.

E2: Infantryman, winter field dress

Only the Soviet RPD light machine gun and its associated webbing equipment date this hang-dog figure at later than . . . 1914? The poor quality of Afghan government uniforms is emphasised in the original photo of this unhappy conscript. He wears two old-pattern items: the belt with a circular clasp, whose many studs seem a personal affectation; and



This DRA trooper, unusually neat and 'squared away' for the photograph, wears summer khaki uniform. His cap—note interesting variation from the norm, a stiff leather peak—bears the red band, and his shoulder straps the red piping, which are thought to identify security troops, since they are often seen on guard duty around Kabul: cf. Plate E1. His DRA Army leather belt and suspenders support standard Soviet Kalashnikov pouches, AKM bayonet and canteen; the buckle, 'subdued' with olive drab paint, is like the Soviet type but has the DRA insignia in the centre of the star rather than the hammer and sickle. Buttons are drab brown; the khaki uniform cloth is noticeably dark in shade.

the ankle boots worn with two-buckle canvas gaiters, still by no means fully replaced by the new boot with the built-in buckled flap worn by other figures on these plates. The DRA lacks the Soviet Army's warm, if heavy, winter uniforms; soldiers are often reduced to using local *pukhoor* blankets for warmth.

E3: Captain 2nd Class, Infantry, winter field dress

The officer's uniform is basically identical to the enlisted men's winter battledress, though apparently of marginally higher quality. The cap is of slightly sharper appearance, and bears an enamelled national emblem (rather smaller than that worn on service dress caps)—see Plate B3 for basic design. The battledress blouse is worn open over a

khaki drill shirt and a stone-coloured tie. Pocket details seem to vary from batch to batch: but several photos show officers with three-point flaps on pleated breast pockets, and a small left sleeve pocket. Photos show the rank insignia on the shoulder straps worn in a number of ways—bright SD insignia, blackened field versions, and this black-painted stencilled version marked directly on the cloth; the insignia here are the star and two bars of a *turan*¹. Note that the belt in the trouser loops is the waist part of a conventional 'Sam Browne', with a soldier's belt worn over it to support the magazine pouch for his AKM and the holster of his Makarov pistol. He has Soviet binoculars and mapcase slung round his neck and shoulder.

E4: Militiaman

The DRA have a variety of militia forces, many of them completely un-uniformed and thus hard to tell apart from the guerrillas—and indeed, militiamen by day are often guerrillas by night. Operating from his home village, this man does not wear any field equipment apart from a magazine pouch for his PPSH-41—a common militia issue—on an old pre-revolutionary army belt. His mixture of a turban, an old Western-style suit jacket, and the local tan pyjamas is entirely typical. He is contemplating a TM-46 anti-tank mine: this type was in DRA Army use pre-war, and much of the inventory found its way into guerrilla hands.

F1: Major, service dress

This *Jagran*, identified by the shoulder strap insignia of one star above crossed sabres in gold, wears standard DRA Army officer's khaki service dress, with a khaki drill shirt and stone-coloured tie. The colour of the cap band identifies grade; in pre-revolutionary days the sequence was red for generals, red-brown for field officers and dark green

for company officers, but red now seems to be worn by field officers as well. All officers wear the large enamelled national emblem on the front of the exaggeratedly 'Germanic' cap. Cap cords are gold for company officers and, apparently, mixed gold/red for field officers. Gorget patches follow cap bands in colour; for field officers they bear a stylised cornstalk motif in gold on the red backing; company officers' green patches arc plain apart from the button. Branch-of-service insignia are not well documented, and are not generally worn. The lower lapel badges worn here are unexplained, but *may* be the silver branch-of-service emblems taken from the now-abandoned 1965 pattern branch-of-service armshield worn on the right sleeve before the revolution.

F2: Infantryman (NCO?), summer dress

The hot-weather uniform for all ranks is a khaki drill version of the field cap, and khaki drill shirt and slacks; such details as pockets vary, but most enlisted men seem to wear patch pockets with straight flaps while officers have pointed or three-point flaps and pleated pockets. Enlisted men have no shoulder straps; officers' shirts do, and display ranking either directly or on khaki drill slip-overs. This enlisted man was photographed on parade; it is thought that the diamond-shaped collar tabs are worn only on such occasions, and certainly never in the field. The enlisted ranks' collar patches, unlike the officers' gorget patches, indicate branch rather than grade; since the old royal army followed Turkish practice, dark green indicates the infantry. Men have been photographed with either one or two red cloth strips sewn permanently to the left breast of the shirt or the grey winter blouse; whether this is a mark of NCO rank is not known, but in the photo on which we base this soldier the front men in four parallel files of parading men each had one strip. The combination of the old webbing pouches for the Simonov carbine clip, and the AK-47 family of weapons, is seen in several photos.

Note that the colour of the summer uniform varies greatly; in one group colour photo it ranges from pale golden khaki drill, through a duller mushroom shade, almost to pale grey drab; other photos show a strong mustard-brown cast. A new, green drab uniform has also been observed, particularly in armoured or mechanised units.

¹DRA Army officer ranks are:

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----|------|-----------|
| Dreyom Baridman | ... | Jnr. | 2nd Lt. |
| Dyahom Baridman | ... | | 2nd Lt. |
| Lomri Baridman | ... | 1st | Lt. |
| Turan | ... | Jnr. | Capt. |
| Jag Turan | ... | | Capt. |
| Jagran | ... | | Major |
| Dagarman | ... | | Lt.Col. |
| Dagarwal | ... | | Col. |
| Brid Jenral | ... | | Brig.Gen. |
| Turan Jenral | ... | | Maj.Gen. |
| Dagar Jenral | ... | | Lt.Gen. |
| Setar Jenral | ... | | Gen. |
| Marshal | | | |

F3, F4: Junior lieutenant and radioman, Commandos, c.1981

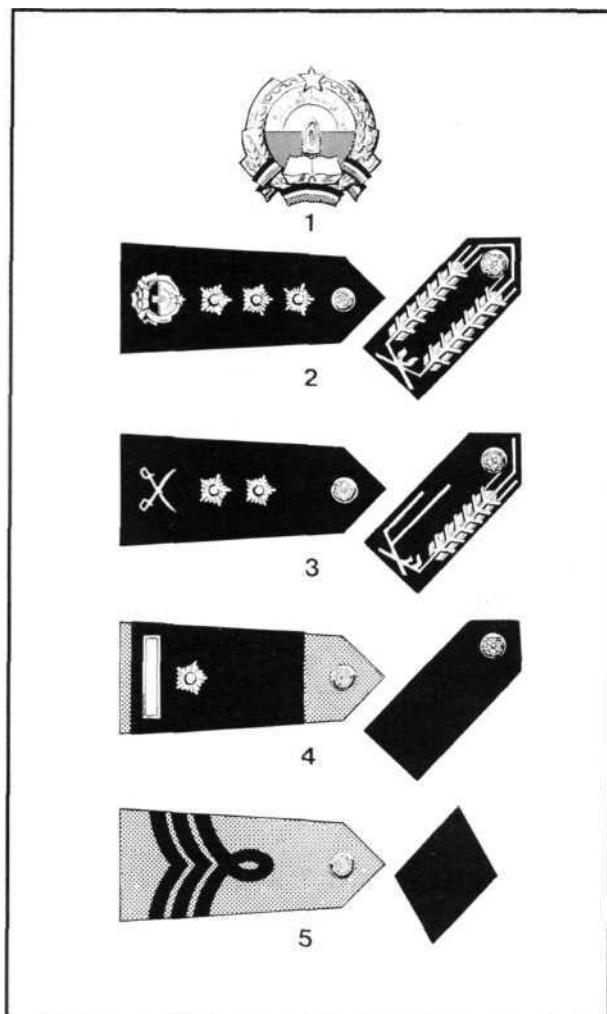
The exact identity of these elite troops is unknown; since the book in which their colour photos appeared was published in 1983, and the DRA's 26th Airborne Bn. was apparently disbanded for mutiny in 1980, the presumption, at least, must be that these are men of the once-reliable Commando Brigades. Commando units are known to have made combat jumps; and photos show men dressed in both these patterns of camouflage clothing, and all wearing the badgeless maroon beret, wearing (individually) the DRA parachutist's badge displayed here by F3. Whether there is any significance, apart from sheer availability, in the different 'splinter' and 'duckhunter' camouflage clothing is unknown. It is believed that, through attrition, these special uniforms may have become scarce, and that Commando units may now wear either standard DRA field uniform or Soviet camouflage overalls; the parachutist badge is occasionally seen in photos of troops in the normal grey drab outfit.

Note that only the officer's version of the 'splinter'-pattern suit has shoulder straps, used here to display slip-overs in company officers' green, bearing the single gold bar of the *dreyom baridman* (junior lieutenant). The officer wears the waist part of a Sam Browne belt, even with combat dress; and all troops in the relevant photos carry the folding-stock AKMS rifle.

G: Mujahideen, Paktia province, 1984:

G1: Colonel Ramatullah Safi

A colonel in the Royal Afghan Army, who commanded its Commando Brigade before the war, Safi survived two years in the Kabul regime's prisons. He now works with the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, one of the seven Peshawar-based resistance groups, training guerrillas and engaging in combat in Paktia province. Safi wears a mixture of Afghan and Western gear. The ubiquitous Afghan *puhtee* hat can be worn in many ways: Safi wears his rolled tightly and pulled to the right in the style of a British beret—he trained with the British Army during his days in the Royal Afghan Army, and remains a great anglophile. His locally-made combat jacket is worn with light tan 'pyjama' trousers and shirt, the local norm, but



DRA Army insignia:

(1) Cap badge: gold and white, with green centre, red star, and black, red, green ribbons. (2) General officers' shoulder board and gorget patch styles, here lieutenant-general: red background, gold insignia, full colour national insignia. (3) Field officers' style, here lieutenant-colonel: gold insignia on background officially maroon, but colour photos show red apparently as bright as generals'. (4) Company officers' style, here the second of the three lieutenant grades: gold insignia on dark green. (5) Red pre-revolutionary style NCO chevrons; and branch-of-service colour collar patch for enlisted men. (Peter Abbott)

tailored here in a rather sharper and more military manner than is usual. The jacket conceals an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. His main personal weapons are either an old Lee Enfield, whose ammunition he carries in one of the ornate local bandolier rigs; or this Chinese-made AK-47, whose forestock he has had decorated with Pathan beadwork.

G2: Dr. Khalid Akram

An intern in Kabul before escaping to Pakistan and

offering his services as a doctor to the guerrillas, 'Doc Khalid' carries both a medical kit (marked as donated by the Saudi Red Crescent) and a folding-stock AKMS 7.62mm assault rifle—the Soviets do not respect the Geneva Convention, and he has no choice but to go armed in self-defence. (As he himself puts it, nodding towards these two essential items of equipment: 'One is for micro-organisms; the other is for macro-organisms.') He wears the universal Afghan country costume of a long shirt and loose trousers, pyjama-style; *chapati* sandals; a *puhtee* hat; and, in cold weather, the local embroidered brown blanket or *pukhoor*, which can be arranged like a Mexican *serape*.

G3: NIFA guerrilla

A Pathan from one of the border tribes, this fighter represents the more effective guerrillas who have been in action since about 1983. Trained at Safi's camp, he wears a cheap locally-made field jacket loosely patterned on the US M65, and a *puhtee*, together with loose pyjama shirt and trousers in the stone grey shade preferred as a camouflage colour in Paktia, and brown boots. He carries an AKMS, 'personalised' with flowers on the butt, and carries ammunition in green drab webbing 'ChiCom'-style

DRA elite troops, almost certainly Commandos, wearing a splinter-pattern camouflage uniform in drab sand, light red-brown and sage green, with a badgeless maroon beret; see Plate F3. (In a country as poor as Afghanistan even a simple ball-point pen is prized, and to wear one in the pocket is a proud sign of literacy. The Communists trade on this by leaving booby-trapped ball-points lying around for the guerrillas to find.)



chest pouches. He handles a round for the 82mm M-1937 mortar of Soviet design, the guerrillas' standard indirect-fire weapon. Safi has used these weapons to bombard Khost, Urgan, and other Communist outposts in the border area. Simple and reliable, they are well liked, although their three-kilometre maximum range puts them within retaliatory range of Communist artillery.

H1: Ahmad Shah Massoud; Panjsher Valley, 1984

The most famous of the guerrilla leaders inside Afghanistan, Massoud represents the best of the Afghan resistance. He is a skilled guerrilla organiser and leader who has mastered modern combat tactics while respecting local traditions. He wears here his usual uniform of olive drab field jacket and fatigue trousers over a Western shirt, with the *puhtee* and a Panjsheri scarf—the standard 'uniform' of Panjsheri forces, which are organised in Western-style tactical units. Massoud wears Afghan Army boots and belt, the latter supporting—out of sight under the jacket—a Spanish Star automatic in a black leather holster. Here he examines a captured AKS-74 assault rifle with an under-barrel BG-15 40mm grenade launcher.

H2: Hamid Walid; Wardak province, 1981

Shown here wearing the Soviet-made aircrew helmet which he always wore in battle, Hamid Walid was one of the best RPG-7 gunners in Central Afghanistan. He is known to have accounted personally for 12 armoured vehicles and numerous trucks. An intelligent, cultured man, Hamid Walid, like Ahmad Shah Massoud, was educated at the French *Lycee* at Kabul and, like Massoud, spoke fluent French. He fought alongside his friend and classmate Amin Wardak, a guerrilla leader in Wardak province, until killed in action attacking a Soviet convoy on the Ghazni highway on 23 July 1983. Here he wears the ubiquitous pyjama shirt and trousers, *chapati* sandals, a sweater and a waistcoat, and carries spare RPG rounds in a civilian-made but military-style knapsack.

H3: Afghan guerrilla; Panjsher Valley, 1981

A fighter typical of the early war period, before specialised field equipment became available to the men actually doing the fighting. He wears his traditional pyjamas with odds and ends of Western-



style clothing; the turban with a long hanging end is considered fashionable. His legs and sandalled feet are wrapped against the cold in improvised *puttees*, tied with colourful strings. His similarly-decorated Lee Enfield Mk.III may be a family heirloom captured in the 3rd Afghan War, a purchased weapon, or even locally made—village gunsmiths have displayed astonishing skill for many generations, and can reproduce almost perfect copies of modern weapons with the most basic equipment. His ornate bandolier rig is likely to be his only field equipment, if he has even that. He is probably a fairly bad shot, having never had enough ammunition to expend in practice to become really proficient. In areas where there is no leader like Ahmad Shah Massoud or Amin Wardak such guerrillas would fight with their kinfolk and friends under a local *mullah* or *malik*. Not a natural soldier, he is nevertheless stubborn, implacable, and tremendously brave.

A group of guerrillas in the Khost area, 1984. Centre front are Ramatullah Safi and Dr. Khalid Akram: see Plates G1, G2. The man behind and between them holds Safi's personal Lee Enfield, fitted with an elaborate beadwork sling; and Safi wears a leather bandolier rig. This group represents the improved weaponry used by guerrillas since 1984, especially in eastern Afghanistan. In a group of 23 men we can make out 20 weapons: 14 AKMS assault rifles, both Soviet and Chinese patterns; three Lee Enfield and one Mauser bolt-action rifles; and two RPG-7S. (Dr. Khalid Akram)

Also illustrated is a 12.7mm M-1938 DShKM heavy machine gun or 'Dashika'. This Soviet-designed machine gun is the standard guerrilla anti-aircraft weapon; though it cannot penetrate the heavy armour which protects much of the *Hind* helicopter, hits on more vulnerable spots have brought down many *Hinds*. It is also used in ambushes, as it will penetrate much of the armour of BMPs and other APCs. Both Soviet- and Chinese-made versions are available to the resistance, some of the latter using a large mechanical gunsight which, though cumbersome, is effective in the hands of a trained crew.

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