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The Soviet and American Wars in Afghanistan: Applying Clausewitzian Concepts to Modern Military Failure

Artur Kalandarov

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An Honors Paper for the Department of Government and Legal Studies

By Artur Kalandarov

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Introduction

Clausewitz's writings have long been the subject of scholarly debate. Historians and political scientists alike have expressed a spectrum of views on the relevance of his theories on modern conflicts. Some have argued that Clausewitz's *On War* is replete with so many theoretical axioms and exceptions that anyone can claim Clausewitzian principles support their view on a military conflict.[1] Conversely, others have claimed that the lessons contained therein show "a theory of war, the elements of which appear to be universal and timeless."[2] John Keegan is perhaps the most prominent anti-Clausewitz military historian. In his expansive *The History of War*, he criticized one of Clausewitz's most prolific contributions to the study of armed conflict: the notion that "war is the continuation of politics by other means."[3] For Keegan, culture was "the great determinant of how human beings conduct themselves," and Clausewitz failed to acknowledge that war was "always an expression of culture," not politics. Likewise, Keegan claimed that Clausewitz evaluated only regular warfare, excluding unconventional actors such as the Cossacks.[4] This view has been flatly rejected by scholars who claim Keegan undervalued the complexity of Clausewitz's military philosophy and failed to acknowledge the relationship between culture and policy.[5]

However, not all commentators adopt a black-or-white view of Clausewitz. Manabrata Guha, for example, has argued that Clausewitzian theory is durable because Clausewitz expected

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[1] Bruce Fleming, "Can Reading Clausewitz Save Us From Future Mistakes?" *Parameters* 34, (Spring 2004).
[2] Mackubin Thomas Owens, "The Main Thing," *The National Review*, March 28, 2003, https://www.nationalreview.com/2003/03/main-thing-mackubin-thomas-owens/.
[3] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War,* trans./ed. Michael Eliot Howard, Peter Paret (New York: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.
[4] John Keegan, "What is War?" in *A History of Warfare* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 3-12.
[5] Jim Byrne, "Keegan Versus Von Clausewitz," clausewitz.com, April 24, 1999, http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Keegan/ByrneArt.htm.

the character of war – who wages it, how it is waged – to change, while the nature of it – the concepts that govern war – remains the same.[6] There are many who claim that while particular aspects of the theory are still relevant, they have been misinterpreted by the military leadership. Colin Fleming has asserted that the concept of the Trinity – the wartime balance among the people, the government, and the army – has been misconstrued, and the original idea remains applicable today.[7] Likewise, Antulio Echevarria has highlighted how the "center of gravity" concept continues to inform perspectives on contemporary conflicts.[8] I share in the view that certain Clausewitzian principles remain relevant today, and will evaluate several concepts from Clausewitz's magnum opus, *On War*. The scope of this project will be limited to three of Clausewitz's views on military conflict, and they will be evaluated in both the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan. This study will reveal important insights into both conflicts and will also reinforce the view that Clausewitz's *On War* remains a source of guidance for modern conflict.

Both the Soviet and US armed forces at times relied heavily on conventional strategies and tactics in conflicts that turned into unconventional wars with insurgent groups. Conventional warfare is defined by an absence of guerilla/insurgent fighting and is "conducted without the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons."[9] "Unconventional warfare" refers to "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a

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[6] Manabrata Guha, *Reimagining War in the 21st Century: From Clausewitz to Network-Centric Warfare* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2011), 169-70.
[7] Colin M. Fleming, *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity: A Framework for Modern War* (UK: Ashgate, 2014), 1.
[8] Antulio J. Echevarria II., "'Reining in' the Center of Gravity Concept," *Air & Space Power Journal*, (Summer 2003), Gale Onefile.
[9] *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military, s.v.* "conventional war," accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199891580.001.0001/acref-9780199891580-e-1951?rskey=Sjc8rZ&result=1873.

government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area."[10] According to the U.S. Department of Defense, an "insurgency" is defined as "the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region."[11] Conversely, "counterinsurgency" or "COIN" refers to "comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes."[12] A similar term that will be used in this paper is "irregular warfare," which describes "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)."[13]

In a 2014 article titled "From Limited War to Limited Victory: Clausewitz and Allied Strategy in Afghanistan," Christopher Griffin argues that Clausewitz's theories have been undervalued by some modern scholars, and highlights several Clausewitzian principles that can be used to help explain the ISAF experience in Afghanistan.[14] In this paper, I will apply several of these concepts to the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. I will also revise and add to Dr. Griffin's analysis of the war against the Taliban. While I agree with most of Griffin's assertions, there are some areas of disagreement. Clausewitz defined the "culminating point" as the moment at which an offensive has reached its maximum point of defensible extension.[15] I offer a clearer culminating point, whereas Griffin says only that the chances for a culminating point of victory passed the U.S. after 2006.

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[10] Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, (Washington DC: The Joint Staff), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf, 223.
[11] Ibid., 106.
[12] Ibid., 52.
[13] Ibid., 112.
[14] Christopher Griffin, "From Limited War to Limited Victory: Clausewitz and Allied Strategy in Afghanistan," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no.3 (2014): 446-467.
[15] Clausewitz, *On War*, 639.

I also offer a method of comparison that uses Clausewitz's culminating points and an "counterinsurgent acceptance point" (CAP) to identify analogous points in the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan. The CAP is my own idea. I believe it is an appropriate counterpoint to the culminating point, which for both the Soviets and Americans occurred right before the respective armies transitioned from largely conventional warfare to counterinsurgency. The CAP then marks the turning point when the insurgents denied the counterinsurgents a strictly military victory, and the political leadership was forced to publicly acknowledge the failure of the COIN policy for the first time. I believe these two points of comparison can be used in comparative studies of other conflicts as well.

In Chapter 2, I consider the perspective Clausewitz had on force size and concentration as it applies to both conflicts. Clausewitz advocated for the use of overwhelming force that was concentrated in the regions that posed the greatest threat to the objectives of the invading state. An analysis of Soviet and American troop deployments and resources will reveal how both countries failed to deploy an adequate force into Afghanistan early in the war, and were unable to concentrate troops in the problem regions. I will also argue that both the Soviet and American leadership were made aware of the Clausewitzian view on mass and concentration by members of the military, but disregarded it in favor of a modest deployment and concentration approach.

In Chapter 3, I analyze Clausewitz's war aims framework, which describes the trajectory warfighting should follow, and the importance of maintaining parity between political and military aims and the means deployed to achieve them. I argue that – while there were significant differences between U.S. and Soviet objectives throughout each conflict – both struggled to adapt their goals and methods. A key aspect of Clausewitz's war aims framework is the increasingly political nature a conflict takes on once military objectives prove impossible to

attain. This seemingly basic concept sheds light on the quagmires both superpowers experienced in Afghanistan.

Literature Review

Insurgencies have occurred around the world for hundreds of years. Logically, the study of insurgencies has ebbed and flowed with their prevalence. Most of these popular uprisings have been unsuccessful.[16] In the 20th century, the aftermath of World War I "created the opening and opportunities within international politics for revolutionaries to seize and hold power," but with few exceptions – southern Ireland and China – the rebellions were crushed.[17] Up until the 1960s, insurgencies were on the periphery of military study, growing in popularity after the end of the Cold War and once again with the wars in Afghanistan (2001-Present) and Iraq (2003-Present).[18] Scholars, insurgents, and counterinsurgents have presented many frameworks and theories that consider this type of warfare from multiple perspectives.

One of the earliest modern guides to insurgencies was Mao Zedong's *On Guerilla Warfare.* Written as an instruction manual for successful insurrection while Mao led the Communist guerillas in China during the 1930s, it describes the stages of rebellion and the transition from irregular to regular warfare over the course of a "protracted war."[19] David Galula, a French officer who based his theories on the Algerian revolution, wrote another foundational text for the study of irregular conflict. His *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* was published in 1964. It offered a framework for rooting out insurgencies that emphasized an

[16] Christian P. Potholm, *Winning at War: Seven Keys to Military Victory Throughout History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 202.
[17] Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, "The Study of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (London: Routledge, 2012), 4.
[18] Ibid., 2.
[19] Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare,* trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Praeger, 1961).

extended time commitment and holistic "clear, hold, build" strategies for the counterinsurgents.[20] Seen as a bedrock of modern COIN strategy, his guide heavily influenced *Army Field Manual 3-24*, the U.S. Army's 2006 framework for addressing the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan.[21] Written by General Petraus and James Amos, *Manual 3-24* sought to provide a framework that would inform the U.S. military on how to combine "combat tasks and skills more often associated with nonmilitary agencies" to defeat insurgencies.[22]

Either explicitly or implicitly, Clausewitz's influence can be seen in all these texts. Mao Zedong's *On Guerilla Warfare* drew heavily from *On War*, including the chapter that directly addresses insurgent uprisings: "The People In Arms."[23] Likewise, John Galula's *Counter-Insurgency Warfare* – cited extensively in *Army Field Manual 3-24* – adapted Clausewitz's definition of war to define insurgency as "the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside a country, by every means."[24] Moreover, in 2014, in line with Clausewitz's emphasis on the political aspects of military conflict, the *Army Field Manual 3-24* was updated to include a greater focus on the political objectives of COIN policy.[25] As for direct study of Clausewitz, it was only in the late 1970s that American and British scholars began to analyze his work. Jan Willem Honig and others have observed that the publication of Michael Howard and Peter Paret's 1976 translation

[20] David Galula, *Counter-Insurgent Warfare: Theory and Practice*, (London: Praeger Security International, 2006).
[21] Christian P. Potholm, *Understanding War*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016), 108.
[22] David H. Petraeus, James F. Amos, *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, (Washington D.C.: Dept. of the Army, 2006), 2.
[23] Potholm, *Understanding War*, 108.
[24] Galula, *Counter-Insurgent Warfare*, 1.
[25] Tony Fry, *Unstaging War, Confronting Conflict and Peace* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 87.

of *On War* sparked the "Clausewitz Renaissance."[26] Widely accepted as the standard translation, this edition will be used for my study.

In 2015, Christopher Daase and James W. Davis translated and edited *On Small War*, a collection of Clausewitz's lecture notes and memoranda concerning small-unit and militia warfare, as well as a new translation of "The People in Arms," the only chapter from *On War* explicitly about asymmetric, unconventional conflict.[27] While these texts pertain more closely to irregular warfare, they have been studied and debated extensively. Hence, my study will look at several other concepts in *On War* that I believe are applicable to the wars in Afghanistan, despite lying outside of Clausewitz's writings explicitly concerning irregular conflict.

Research Questions

1. Do parts of Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* remain relevant to contemporary counterinsurgencies?
2. Using Clausewitz's concepts of culminating points, mass & concentration, and war aims, what insights can be gained from a comparative analysis of the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan?

Thesis

In this paper, I will argue the following:

A. Certain Clausewitzian concepts apply to modern insurgencies and can be used to help explain the military failure in Afghanistan. I will evaluate the application of Clausewitz's

[26] Jan Willem Honig, "Clausewitz's *On War*: Problems of Text and Translation," in *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 73. Note: For more on the debate regarding Clausewitz's relevance to contemporary conflict, see "Introduction."

[27] Carl von Clausewitz, *Clausewitz on Small War*, ed. Christopher Daase and James W. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

culminating points, mass & concentration, and war aims to the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan.

B. Identifying when a non-military resolution to a conflict becomes a choice the political leadership accepts – referred to as the "counterinsurgent acceptance point" (CAP) in this study – is an idea I have developed that provides a point of comparison to the culminating point. Considered together, the culminating point and counterinsurgent acceptance point provide a standardized model for comparative conflict analysis that can be applied to other wars as a means to identify analogous moments across many conflicts.

Methodology & Scope

This study will focus on the military developments in the Soviet (1979-1989) and the U.S. (2001-Present) wars in Afghanistan, and will use Carl Von Clausewitz's theories to explain some of the shortcomings of the counterinsurgents in both conflicts. Some scholars have decried the lack of case studies about insurgencies.[28] This study will seek to contribute to the literature on the enduring concepts that have defined contemporary insurgencies. The Soviet and American experiences present two instances in which global superpowers attempted – and failed – to achieve their military objectives against insurgents. Given these events, Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex geopolitical issues. The wars I will be analyzing present a unique opportunity to study two irregular conflicts within one country. To this end, my paper will look at primary and secondary sources that detail the decisions of the respective militaries and insurgents. Political and military histories as well as interviews and documents will be used to provide context and evidence for this study. In regard to scope, the first chapter will limit the paper to an evaluation of military decisions up until the counterinsurgent acceptance point in

[28] See Ian Beckett, "The Historiography of Insurgency," in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* (Florence: Routledge, 2012).

each conflict (February 1987 and September 2007, respectively). This time frame provides distinct points of comparison and allows Clausewitz's concepts to be evaluated with events for which there is a substantial body of information available. Limiting my analysis up to the CAP thereby permits more recent developments in the U.S. war in Afghanistan – which lack extensive historical documentation – to be excluded.

Chapter I

The Soviet and American Wars in Afghanistan: Points of Comparison

Culminating Points

In *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz's seminal treatise on armed conflict, Clausewitz discusses the numerous elements that make up offensive and defensive military operations. Book Seven, Chapters Five and Twenty-Two present his culminating point theory. Clausewitz writes that often during offensive operations, "the force of an attack gradually diminishes" and the "advantages that may become valuable at the peace table" must be paid for "on the spot."[29] According to him, unlike the rare culminating point *of victory* (which will be discussed later in this chapter), most armies achieve a culminating point "where their remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defense and wait for peace."[30] Any progress by the aggressor after the culminating point has been attained is increasingly susceptible to a reversal in fortune, as the invading army's energy and resources decline over the course of an offensive.[31] The following section identifies the initial Soviet and American culminating points in Afghanistan, and also assesses whether they met, surpassed, or fell short of the respective armies capabilities at the time. Deciphering and analyzing the moment at which the prospects for achieving military objectives were highest will provide a point of comparison to when the situation began to favor the insurgency.

There are always debates on whether a military offensive reached, surpassed, or fell short of the ideal culminating point. For example, some argue that the U.S. overstepped its initial military successes during the Korean War (1950-53) and fell short of further success in the First

[29] Clausewitz, *On War*, 639.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

Gulf War (1990-91). In Korea, the U.S. army has been criticized for pushing too far north and overextending itself.[32] This extension beyond the true culminating point, it has been claimed, led to higher casualties and ultimately a weaker negotiating position. The First Gulf War, on the other hand, saw U.S. forces attain their military objectives, but – despite their capabilities – decide not to pursue and destroy Saddam Hussein's forces in Iraq. In this case, it has been alleged that the culminating point was not attained.[33] While they are debatable and difficult to pinpoint, culminating points nonetheless provide a period of time that can be useful in evaluating the high-water marks of military operations to better understand conflicts and their most difficult military questions.

In the Soviet war in Afghanistan, February 1980 can be considered as the culminating point for the Soviet Union because it occurred after the 40th Army took control of the cities and main roads, and before it embarked on the many unsuccessful forays into rebel territory. These later attempts at achieving military objectives would come to define the conflict and lead to the army's retreat. The major operations after February 1980 failed to gain territory for the communist government, and the few garrisons that were established in the rural parts of the country did not yield any strategic or tactical advantages for the Soviets. In the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the United States reached its culminating point in December 2001, when the Taliban gave up its last stronghold in Kandahar province. The resurgence of the Taliban since then has prevented the U.S. and its allies from achieving the broad territorial control and stability the U.S. army possessed during the first two months after its invasion. Before an analysis of the wars in Afghanistan can be undertaken, a historical overview of the conflict is necessary.

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[32] Patrick J. Garrity, "The Parameters of Victory," Claremont Review of Books, August 15, 2012, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-parameters-of-victory/.
[33] Ibid.

Historical Background to the Soviet Culminating Point

The last king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, ruled from 1933-1973, overseeing an expansion of the central government and the creation of economic infrastructure and state institutions. The reach of the national government was limited by access and resources, however, and traditional tribal structures and practices governed the rural regions where Kabul's presence was virtually nonexistent.[34] Notably, the King's four decade reign was a time of unusual peace in Afghanistan. Prior to Shah's reign, the British clashed with Afghan troops in three separate conflicts between 1830 and 1920, ending with the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919, which formally delineated an independent Afghanistan from British India. In the 1960s, Shah instituted modest reforms that led to political liberalization, enhanced the education system, and provided new voting rights for women, a move that was considered to be controversial by the more conservative parts of the country.[35]

Zahir Shah was deposed in a bloodless coup by his brother-in-law and former prime minister, Daud Khan, in 1973. After Daud took power, he sought to consolidate his influence by banning every political party. Some Islamists were jailed, while others fled to Pakistan, where they sought refuge and built up their political and military resistance to the Daud regime. Ahmad Shah Massoud, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Burhanuddin Rabbani were just a few of the individuals who escaped to Pakistan during this era and would go on to become key changemakers in Afghanistan's future.[36] Daud's repressive tendencies, however, were not

[34] Ali Ahmad Jalali, *A Military History of Afghanistan: From the Great Game to the Global War on Terror*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 331.
[35] Barry Bearak, "Mohammed Zahir Shah, Last Afghan King, Dies at 92," *New York Times*, July 24, 2007, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/24/world/asia/24shah.html?auth=login-email.
[36] Jalali, *A Military History of Afghanistan*, 348.

limited to Islamists, as he routinely persecuted communist elements in the government and sought to establish ties with nearby Islamic countries.[37]

Like virtually all conflicts in the second half of the 20th century, the Cold War played a key role in the lead up and prosecution of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. The country was an unaligned state under the leadership of both Shah and Daud as it sought to maximize its economic and military support from both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Humorously, Daud was rumored to have said that he wanted "to light his American cigarette with a Russian match."[38] Between 1935-54, there were repeated unsuccessful attempts by the Afghans to get military aid from the United States, which did not consider the landlocked country to be an important regional actor. The USSR, on the other hand, vied for influence over the country. In 1955, Moscow announced that Pashtunistan should be independent from Pakistan – an important gesture in Afghanistan's favor – and began to provide the country with economic and military support.[39] The United States then followed suit.

By the 1970s, Afghanistan had a robust trade relationship with the USSR but continued to welcome American military advisors and economic aid.[40] Seeking close ties with both superpowers, however, came with consequences. When Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev told Daud that he wanted the Western advisers to leave Afghanistan, Daud angrily responded that Afghanistan was an independent country that would not be forced to make decisions by foreigners.[41] While this exchange soured Daud's relationship with Brezhnev, it would be the

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[37] Ibid., 352.
[38] Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-1989*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32.
[39] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 342-344.
[40] Martin McCauley, *Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Modern History,* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 12.
[41] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 33.

Afghan leader's internal political battles that would end his reign. Despite Daud's attempts to purge the government of communists, a coup by military regiments representing the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) led to his overthrow. Dubbed the Saur (April) Revolution, the events transpired in April 1978 after the PDPA leaders quickly initiated a military attack on Daud's palace amidst an escalation of arrests. The communists used tanks and air bombers to swiftly overtake the royal palace, killing Daud and many other government officials.[42]

The Soviet role in the revolution has been a mystery. While the USSR had supported the PDPA, the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan and other senior diplomats were unaware of the coup until it happened.[43] Tellingly, TASS, the official Soviet news agency, referred to the events as a "coup" and not a "people's revolution" for the first three days after it occurred.[44] The PDPA's leaders, meanwhile, proclaimed the victory as a different, and perhaps even superior iteration of communist revolution. Nur Muhamed Taraki, who became the President and Prime Minister of Afghanistan following the overthrow, announced that he had added to Marxist-Leninist theory by using the military for the socialist agenda. Other Afghan Communists described the Saur Revolution as equally important to the Russian October Revolution.[45]

Events on the ground, however, told a different story. As Ali Ahmad Jalali noted, "The Communist takeover, nevertheless, was a rebellion by the military assets of one faction of the Communist party with no significant following in the country and no sociopolitical prerequisites of a revolution."[46] Furthermore, the PDPA was split into two warring factions. Parcham (*Banner)*

[42] William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars,* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 26.
[43] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 42.
[44] Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 27.
[45] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 357.
[46] Ibid.

was led by Babrak Karmal and had the support of urban intellectuals seeking rapid change. Khalq (*Masses* or *People),* was led by Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, and was popular amongst agrarian and more gradualist-minded citizens.[47] While they formed a joint government, the Khalqists effectively exiled the most prominent Parchamists by assigning them to ambassadorial posts. As instability increased, the Khalq faction resorted to mass arrests and torture, persecuting Parchamists as well as anticommunist dissidents.[48]

Soviet advisers repeatedly told Taraki to end the brutal repressions and open the party to a broader ideological base, but he did not heed their advice. In March 1979, the Afghan city of Herat and the nearby villages rebelled against the communists, sacking socialist symbols and murdering public officials. Fearing the mobs, Taraki desperately asked the Soviets to intervene. After four days of internal debate, the Politburo agreed to send extra military supplies but refused to send armed forces. Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet Prime Minister, told Taraki: "If we sent in our troops, the situation in your country would not improve...Our troops would have to struggle not only with an external aggressor, but with a part of your own people. And people do not forgive that kind of thing."[49]

In September, a KGB assessment found that the Taraki-Amin administration was losing popularity as they continued their repressive policies and tried to handle political problems militarily. It recommended that the PDPA institute reforms that would allow clergy members, some exiled dissidents, and minorities to become members.[50] Many who opposed the PDPA were joining the resistance fighters, growing the armed threat to the regime. The Afghan Army

[47] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 38.
[48] Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 28.
[49] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 7.
[50] Ibid., 59.

began to shrink, as young conscripts and their commanders defected.[51] In July 1978, an anti-communist uprising took full control of the Panjshir Valley, and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) forces were unable to retake it. The USSR was split on how to address the tide of issues threatening the fledgling communist state. The Soviet military was more supportive of the Khalq faction since the officers in the Afghan army tended to be Khalqists. The KGB, however, attributed the PDPA's issues with Taraki's repressive policies and saw Babrak Karmal and the Parcham faction as the preferred communist vanguard.[52] In July 1979, the Carter administration approved about $500,000 in non-lethal aid to the rebels, formally beginning U.S. clandestine support for the mujahedin.[53]

On October 8th, Amin's men murdered Taraki, precipitating a series of events that led to the Soviet invasion. Amin did not end Taraki's oppressive policies. Citing Stalin, he ignored the advice of his Soviet advisors, and continued to terrorize the populace. While estimates vary, the infamous Pul-i Charkhi prison is believed to have been the site of twenty-seven thousand executions between the time of the Communist takeover and the Soviet invasion, with thousands more killed across the country.[54] The Soviet leadership became convinced that Amin was too extreme, and began considering a military intervention to remove him from power.

Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev and members of the Politburo devised a plan to invade Afghanistan on December 8th, 1979. KGB agents would remove Amin, making way for Babrak Karmal, a member of the opposing Parchamist faction, to take over. Nine days after Brezhnev decided to remove Amin, the KGB attempted to poison him through a compromised cook, but

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[51] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 45.
[52] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 362.
[53] Coll, *Ghost Wars,* 46.
[54] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 76.

ultimately only poisoned members of his family. Upon learning of the KGB's assassination attempt, the Soviet military voiced its opposition, saying a formidable military force would be necessary to back up the plot. Another attempt on Amin's life was delayed as the Soviet military and political leaders debated the appropriate size of the invading force. When the chief of the general staff, Marshall Nikolai Ogarkov was told by Dmitry Ustinov, the Soviet Defense Minister, to prepare 75,000-80,000 troops for a "temporary" presence in Afghanistan, he vehemently opposed, saying an army of that size would be far too small to ensure stability in Afghanistan.[55] The plan went ahead anyway.

The Soviet Culminating Point: February 1980

"One country may support another's cause, but will never take it so seriously as it takes its own."
- Carl von Clausewitz[56]

Aware of the precarious position of the PDPA in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union was a reluctant invader. When the decision was made, however, the Soviets experienced a set of truly unique circumstances that allowed them to establish a military presence with little initial resistance. Prior to the Soviet invasion, a team of 60 Soviet officers spent several weeks in Afghanistan studying the Afghan army's capabilities, the country's terrain, and public support for the PDPA.[57] Kabul's prior attempts at getting Moscow to send military support gave the Soviet army the perfect cover to arrive, remove Amin, and firmly establish a foothold in the country. Under the guise of arriving to help Amin stabilize his country, the Soviet army openly

[55] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 364-366.
[56] Clausewitz, *On War*, 728.
[57] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 361-362.

entered Afghanistan by land and air. Between December 25th and 27th, it had deployed forces to secure Afghanistan's largest roads, cities, and towns.[58]

Given the expectation that the Soviet army was there to help Amin fight against the resistance, the short-term Soviet objectives – overthrowing Amin and seizing 13 key parts of Kabul – were relatively easily achieved. The operation to break into Amin's palace and execute him took only 43 minutes, and the Soviets managed to quickly take control of the important media, political, and military targets across the capital with low casualties. By mid-January, the bulk of the Soviet 40th Army had entered Afghanistan.[59] Due to the swift establishment of the Soviet military across Afghanistan's major city centers and the mujahideen's lack of organization and resources, February 1980 would mark the culminating point in the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

81,000 Soviet soldiers would be stationed in Afghanistan by the spring of 1980, but by then, attacks by resistance fighters were well under way, and costly Soviet operations to gain territory for the DRA government would soon be planned.[60] Prior to the invasion, Amin's government had control of only 20% of the country.[61] As Rahamim Emanuilov and Andrey Yashlavsky observed: "The anti-Soviet and anti-government resistance in Afghanistan was very heterogeneous – it included radical Islamists, monarchists, nationalists, and Maoists. Some of the mujahideen organizations appeared even before the Saur Revolution; others were formed during the civil war."[62] Throughout the USSR's intervention, the Soviets managed to establish some garrisons in the rural provinces, but were unable to hold meaningful territory outside of the major

[58] Ibid., 367.
[59] Ibid., 369-370.
[60] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 122.
[61] Ibid., 76.
[62] Rahamim Emanuilov, *Terror in the Name of Faith: Religion and Political Violence*, (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 173.

cities and the roads that connected them. A study of some of the 40th Army's biggest military operations beyond the February 1980 culminating point supports this view. Since these operations were hampered by a lack of force mass and concentration – two Clausewitzian concepts that naturally intertwine with one another – they will be discussed in Chapter 2.

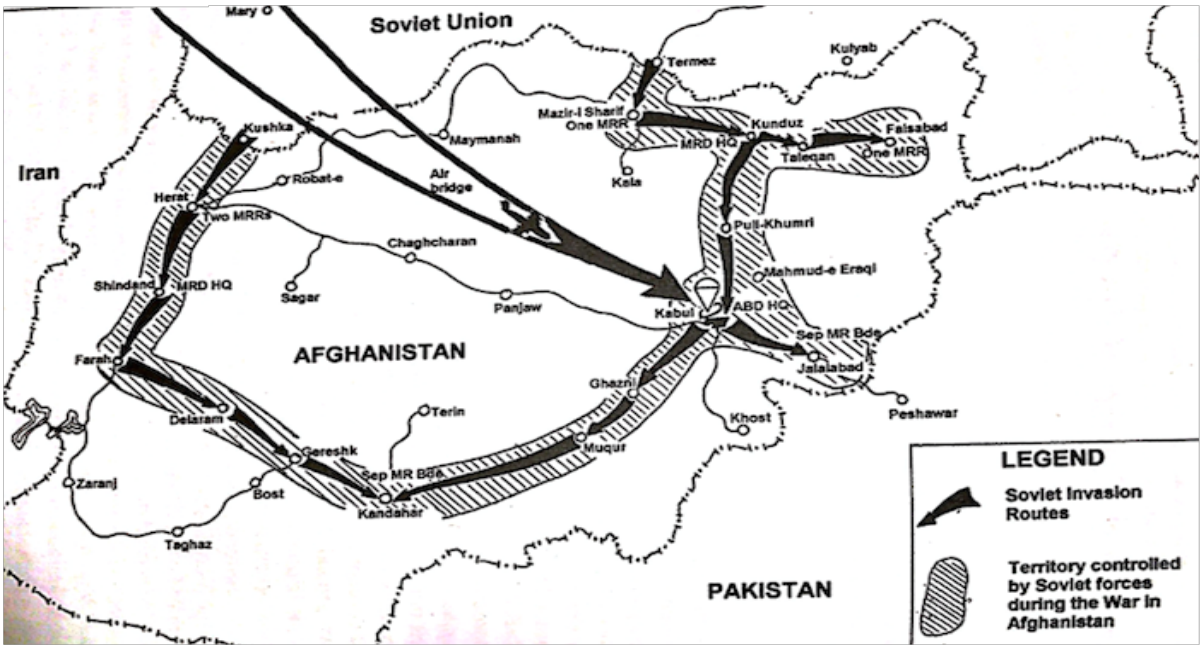

Figure 1: Soviet invasion and territorial control in Afghanistan.[63]

[63] This map comes from the official Russian General Staff account of the war: Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, (University Press of Kansas, 2002), 16. A nearly identical map can be found in Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 368. Furthermore, Mohammad Yousaf writes in *The Bear Trap* that the Soviets "had opted to hold the area Kabul-Bagram as the vital sector, with most of their major units deployed to protect routes converging on this region, or to guard the Salang highway that was its lifeline from the Soviet Union," Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin. *Afghanistan: The Bear Trap - The Defeat of a Superpower,* (Pennsylvania: Casemate, 2001), 47. Similarly, in *No Miracles: The Failure of Soviet Decision-Making in the Afghan War*, Fenzel writes that "the Soviets attacked the rural countryside sporadically and brutally but never made an effort to hold that ground," Fenzel, *No Miracles*, 67.

Historical Background to the American Culminating Point

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the war in Afghanistan continued. The communist regime relied upon Soviet aid to stay afloat, using Soviet food stuffs to feed the people, weapons to fight the insurgents, and money to purchase the loyalty of influential commanders. The USSR provided approximately $300 million in aid to the DRA every month after Soviet forces withdrew.[64] The collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 resulted in the loss of Najibullah's only source of significant support. Boris Yeltsin, the president of the newly independent Russian Federation, had long argued for an end to Soviet arms supplies to Afghanistan, going so far as to hold talks with the mujahideen leaders. As a result, aid was formally cut off on January 1, 1992.[65] The civil war in Afghanistan continued.

In March 1992, Najibullah announced he would step down as part of a UN plan to transfer power to an interim government. Members of his administration, skeptical of the UN scheme, began to defect to the various insurgent factions. The new government that emerged after the UN plan failed was a coalition of several insurgent groups, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leader of the Jamiat-e-Islami party. Almost immediately, factional rivalries led to fighting inside Kabul. While Masoud – now the defense minister of the Islamic State of Afghanistan – managed to remove the immediate threats to the fledgling regime, the Rabbani government was on weak legs from the start. The lack of institutional legitimacy, resources, and police power set the stage for numerous attempts to overthrow Rabbani not only by the old Mujahideen factions, but by new ones as well.[66]

[64] Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 169-170.
[65] Ibid., 187-188.
[66] Ibid., 188-204.

In 1994, the Taliban formed out of individuals belonging to the Pashtun tribes of southern and eastern Afghanistan. The Pashtuns collectively made up roughly 40% of the total population, making them the country's largest ethnic group. Despite the common background, the Pashtun people have had internal rivalries rooted in tribal and regional differences dating back centuries. After years of depraved leadership by warlords and their corrupt soldiers, many Pashtun civilians initially welcomed the Taliban, seeing them as a group of devoted students (*Talib* means "student" in Arabic) that formed an armed religious movement to bring back stability to the region.[67]

The Taliban was started by Mohammed Omar. A veteran of the war to overthrow Najibullah, he became the mullah of Singesar, a small village in Kandahar province. When locals complained about an abusive commander who kidnapped and assaulted two village girls, Omar organized a group of armed students to execute the commander and release the victims. This act of vigilante justice raised Mullah Omar's profile, and soon his team of young militants began to challenge the status quo in Kandahar. Seeking to stabilize Afghanistan so it could open lucrative trade routes to Central Asia, Pakistan was initially a benefactor of the Taliban. It provided the fledgling group with resources and students from its border *madrassas* (religious schools). After seizing an arms dump, the Taliban advanced on Kandahar in November 1994, capturing the second largest city with few casualties.[68]

These initial successes spurred a feedback loop that propelled the Taliban onto the national scene: the more territory and weapons the Taliban captured, the more volunteers joined the movement, emboldening the leadership to fight more formidable warlords and expand their

[67] Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 2-3, 11-12.
[68] Ibid., 24-29.

area of control. Within three months of capturing Kandahar, 11 more provinces would be conquered by the Taliban.[69] However, not all of these victories were a result of military prowess. Some provinces, such as Zabul and Uruzgan, were captured without a fight. The Taliban – which included plenty of seasoned war veterans among its ranks – sometimes bribed local leaders and frightened others into immediate surrender.[70] These initial sweeping advances gave the Taliban an aura of invincibility that was not shattered until March 1995, when Mohammed Shah Masoud and his troops forced the Taliban out of southern Kabul. In the same month, Masoud would capitalize on the Taliban's lack of airpower, medical resources, and disorganized structure to push them out of Shindand province. By May 1995, the Rabbani government regained control of Kabul and nearby areas as the Taliban's territory shrunk to eight provinces.[71] However, with support from Pakistan and the enlistment of thousands of new soldiers, the Taliban resurged.

In September 1995, the Taliban regained Shindand and seized Herat, brutally occupying the western – non-Pashtun – portion of the country for the first time. Kabul, on the contrary, remained elusive.[72] In an attempt to unite against the Taliban, President Rabbani managed to make peace with two of the regime's powerful enemies: the Hezb-i-Islami faction, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of Afghanistan's Uzbek population. After an unsuccessful 10-month siege of Kabul, the Taliban surprised Masoud and the other military factions by pivoting to an attack of Jalalabad, which was captured with few casualties. The offensive spread to three other eastern provinces, and in a matter of weeks, the Taliban opened an eastern front in the Battle for Kabul.[73] The capital was finally captured in

[69] Ibid., 29-30.
[70] Ibid., 33; Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan,* 447.
[71] Rashid, *Taliban,* 35-36.
[72] Ibid., 39-40.
[73] Ibid., 41, 46-48.

September 1996. The CIA, who by this time had a limited presence in Afghanistan, had not expected the collapse of Kabul.[74]

Fighting in the region continued, but the Taliban managed to take back territory it had lost along the Salang highway and push Masoud into hiding in the Panjshir Valley. Their next objective was to focus their military efforts on the northern provinces, the last non-Taliban stronghold. As of March 1997, the Taliban controlled 22 of Afghanistan's 31 provinces.[75] The bid to take the North was initially unsuccessful. Taliban attempts to disarm the Hazaras led to a revolt which precipitated a series of defeats. Dostum, with support from Russia, Uzbekistan and Iran, maintained control of six northern provinces, while Masoud launched a counterattack and once again regained the territory around Kabul.[76] Thanks in part to a donation of 400 pick-up trucks from the Saudis and $5 million of logistical aid from Pakistan, the Taliban defeated Dostum's forces and wiped out the Hazaras in August 1998.[77] Two years after seizing Mazar-e-Sharif, the last anti-Taliban stronghold of Taloqan was captured, leaving Masoud's presence in a small part of the Panjshir Valley as the Taliban's only territorial rival.[78]

While the civil war in Afghanistan was fought within the country's borders, it was not really an internal conflict. Over 3.8 million Afghans fled to Pakistan and Iran during the war.[79] Moreover, Afghanistan's many neighbors expressed their own national security interests by propping up the factions that were ethnically and/or ideologically similar to themselves. India,

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[74] Coll, *Ghost Wars,* 15.
[75] Rashid, *Taliban,* 53-54.
[76] Ibid., 56-59.
[77] Ibid., 72-74.
[78] Seth G. Jones, *Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 59,66.
[79] Daniel A. Kronenfeld, "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Not All Refugees, Not Always in Pakistan, Not Necessarily Afghan?" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no.1 (March 2008): 43–63, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem048.

Iran, and the former Soviet Central Asian states supported the Rabbani government and the other anti-Taliban factions. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia aided the Taliban. In India's case, the support for the groups opposing the Taliban was largely a result of the country's intention to foil Pakistan's plans. Russia and the Central Asian nations feared the spread of the Taliban's Islamic fundamentalism to their own countries. Iran, a Shiite country, opposed the Sunni Taliban. As a result of its opposition to Iran, Saudi Arabia – alongside Pakistan – wanted to support its Sunni brethren.[80]

U.S. involvement in Afghanistan during the mid-1990s was defined by a desire to stop the arms flow into the country and stabilize the region so lucrative gas pipelines could be constructed. While the U.S. opposed Iran, it did not aid any faction in the war, and instead called for negotiations and the shipment of humanitarian aid.[81] As Taliban policies towards women and minorities became more public, however, the United States made its antipathy known. In November 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, "'It's very clear why we're opposed to [the] Taliban. We're opposed to their approach to human rights, to their despicable treatment of women and children and their lack of respect for human dignity, in a way more reminiscent of the past than the future."[82]

At first, American disgust with the Taliban's behavior did not translate into military aid for the anti-Taliban forces. The policy under the Clinton and pre-9/11 Bush administrations was to provide non-lethal aid to Masoud: night vision goggles, cameras, communications

[80] Rashid, *Taliban*, 44-46.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Steven Erlanger, "In Afghan Refugee Camp, Albright Hammers Taliban," *New York Times*, November 19, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/19/world/in-afghan-refugee-camp-albrig ht-hammers-taliban.html.

equipment.[83] U.S. military involvement began in August 1998, when Bin Laden's Al Qaeda terrorist network bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The Taliban's relationship with Al Qaeda was multifaceted and mutually beneficial. Some Al Qaeda soldiers were incorporated into the Taliban's military, and Mullah Omar was recognized by Bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders as Commander of the Faithful (a religious term with deep historical meanings that signified Omar was the supreme leader of the Taliban).[84] In response to the embassy bombings, the U.S. launched cruise missiles at Osama Bin Laden's training camps in northeastern Afghanistan and demanded Bin Laden's extradition. The Taliban denounced the missile assault and said they would never give him up, causing a rift not only with the United States, but also with Saudi Arabia, whom Bin Laden had denounced and threatened for its relationship with the United States. With Saudi Arabia's support cut off, Pakistan became the Taliban's only ally.[85] The September 11th terrorist attacks – perpetrated by Al Qaeda – led to a more forceful demand for the Taliban to turn over Osama Bin Laden. When they refused, the U.S. and its allies commenced an invasion of Afghanistan.

The American Culminating Point: December 2001

"The history of military conflict in Afghanistan [has] been one of initial success, followed by long years of floundering and ultimate failure. We're not going to repeat that mistake." - President George W. Bush, April 17, 2002 [86]

The U.S. response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was swift. As soon as Pentagon leadership knew that Al Qaeda was responsible for the hijackings and the Taliban were harboring members

[83] Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001-2016* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 11-12.
[84] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 53-54, 83-84.
[85] Rashid, *Taliban,* 75; Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 83-84.
[86] George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President to the George C. Marshall ROTC Award Seminar on National Security," Speech, Virginia Military Institute, April 17, 2002, accessed April 19, 2020, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020417-1.html.

of Al Qaeda, the U.S. and its allies decided to invade Afghanistan. The initial invasion utilized airpower, special forces, and the Northern Alliance to systematically defeat the Taliban, leading to the American culminating point in December 2001, only three months after the war began. However, the events of the first three months also featured significant missteps, which provide clues as to why the culminating point did not lead to complete victory. Clausewitz's insights on mass and concentration, and war aims will be used to explain the initial and long-term errors in Chapters 2 and 3.

From the outset, it appeared that the Pentagon was influenced by the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. When CIA Director George Tenet informed President George W. Bush of the plan to topple the Taliban, he noted that U.S. Special Forces would play the role of the insurgents, by operating covertly in small numbers.[87] Likewise, General Tommy Franks, one of the main war planners and the head of U.S. Central Command, wanted to blend U.S. and Afghan forces to make the invasion more palatable to the Afghan populace. The bombing campaign, which sought to eliminate the Taliban's communications infrastructure and minor air-defense capabilities, began on October 7, 2001.[88]

Since Uzbeks and Tajiks were inclined to oppose the Taliban, the land invasion began in the northern areas where they resided. General Dostum and Atta Mohammed, a Tajik commander of the Jamiat-e-Islami faction, attacked Taliban forces in the North. Mazar-e-Sharif and Bamiyan fell in quick succession on November 10 and 11, and Kabul was abandoned with no fighting on November 13. U.S. and Afghan soldiers then surrounded the city of Kunduz, engaging the 5,000 Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters for 12 days before taking the city. Kandahar, the southern stronghold of the Taliban, was captured by U.S. Special Operations Forces and

[87] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 90-91.
[88] Ibid.

members of the Popalzai tribe, led by Hamid Karzai. The fight for Kandahar was more drawn out than the battles for other provinces, but by December 7th, Mullah Omar and the Taliban leadership fled, removing any semblance of Taliban control of Afghanistan.[89]

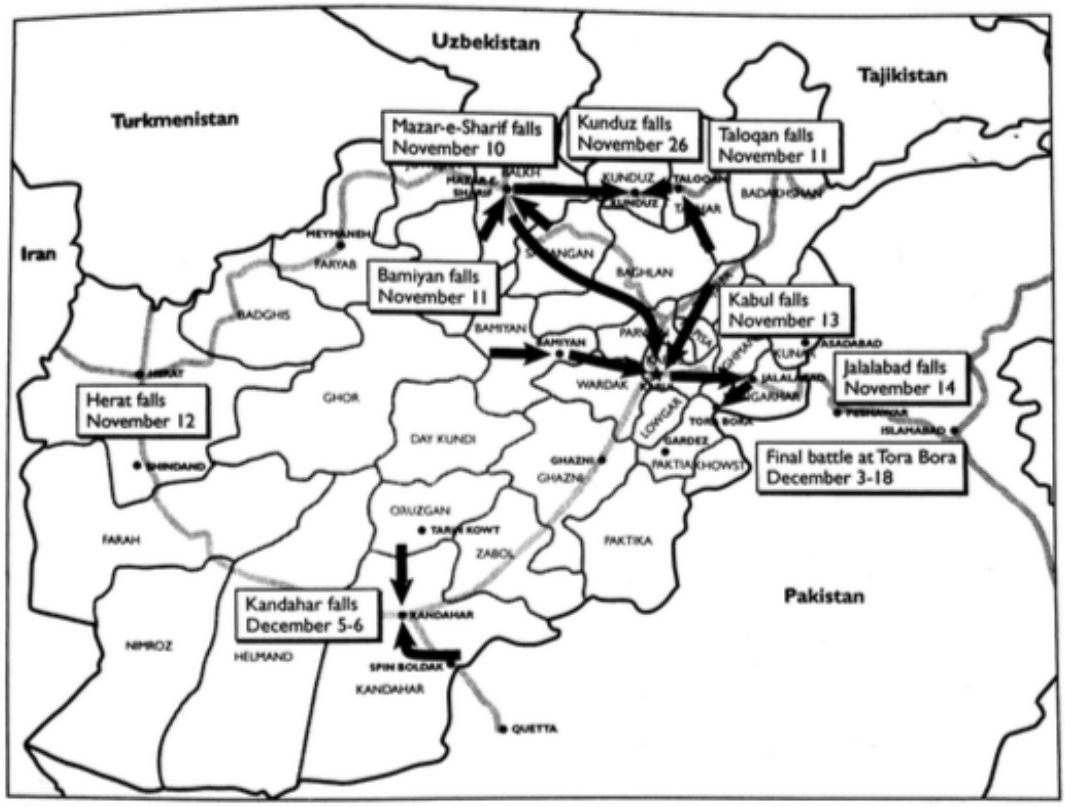

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Figure 2: Coalition takeover of Afghanistan, 2001.

December 2001 can be considered the culminating point for the U.S. and its coalition partners for a number of reasons. From a military perspective, the Taliban's infrastructure had been destroyed and it marked – prior to the Taliban's resurgence – a period during which the Taliban did not control or challenge any of the provinces in Afghanistan. Likewise, it was also before America's botched Operation Anaconda in 2002 and the pivot to Iraq in 2003. In this early phase of the war, the military was focused on removing the Taliban and Al Qaeda threat;

[89] Ibid., 92-94.
[90] Ibid., 93.

there was not an expectation that it would become involved in nation-building.[91] While plans for state-development could have built on initial military success – therefore pushing the culminating point further – this did not occur, and the military operations that occurred after the culminating point also proved less capable of attaining their objectives. As a result, December 2001 marked the furthest point of defensible extension for the U.S. military.

Clausewitz says there are essentially two kinds of culminating points. One occurs when an enemy is entirely defeated – a "culminating point *of victory,*" (emphasis added) – but as Clausewitz notes, "these are the minority."[92] The majority of culminating points of attack lead only to the point at which the remaining force is "just enough to maintain a defense."[93] The inability of the ISAF to maintain control of all provinces in Afghanistan marked an attainment of the latter type of culminating point in December 2001.

The Counterinsurgent Acceptance Points in the Soviet and American Wars in Afghanistan

Given the analytical benefits of identifying the Soviet and American culminating points, it would be logical to attempt to locate culminating points for their respective enemies, the Mujahideen and the Taliban. However, the nature of insurgencies and guerilla warfare tactics does not lend itself to the concept of culminating points. In Book Seven, Chapter Five ("The Culminating Point of the Attack"), Clausewitz writes: "Beyond [the culminating point] the scale turns and the reaction follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack."[94] At face value, this view is not applicable to irregular warfare. In contrast to the clear military objectives of conventional armies, insurgents seek to raise the enemy's costs of

[91] General Paul Kern, interview with author, July 24th, 2019.
[92] Clausewitz, *On War*, 639.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

maintaining a military presence through many small-scale attacks over a long period of time. David Galula attributed this tactic to the asymmetry of the warring forces, observing the insurgent need to "carry the fight to a different ground where he has a better chance to balance the physical odds against him."[95] As a result, the uncoordinated, localized nature of guerilla warfare does not yield the immediate effects that one could evaluate through the lens of a Clausewitzian culminating point. As Mao Zedong notes: "There is in guerilla warfare no such thing as a decisive battle; there is nothing comparable to the fixed, passive defense that characterizes orthodox war."[96] Indeed, this "slow burn" / "death by a thousand cuts" aspect of insurgency was identified by Gorbachev himself. In a speech to the 27th Party Congress in 1986, he called Afghanistan "a bleeding wound."[97]

Thus, given the unsuitability of evaluating insurgent warfare with culminating points, an effectually equivalent substitute is necessary. Pinpointing the moment when the insurgent's enemy began to seriously consider a non-military option to ending the conflict provides the most appropriate antithesis to the culminating points of the Soviet and American military interventions in Afghanistan, and other analogous conflicts. While considering other aspects of change – such as shifts in public support, international disapproval, etc. – may be useful complements, they are difficult to gauge comparatively when one considers the unequal social and political climates of the Soviet Union and the United States. Furthermore, as this is a study focused on the American and Soviet militaries, these elements are also beyond the scope of this project.

An identification of the point in each conflict when the counterinsurgent leadership realized it had to publicly consider a non-military resolution to the war – marking a crucial

[95] Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare,* 4.
[96] Mao, *On Guerilla Warfare*, 52.
[97] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 420.

turning point for the insurgents – is a suitable yardstick for evaluating change over time. It is particularly significant because, from the perspective of the insurgents, it marks the denial of a purely military victory for the counterinsurgents. In *On War*, Clausewitz portrayed war as a "battle of wills" between two enemies. The counterinsurgent acceptance point identifies when the mujahideen and the Taliban first obtained a significant victory in this figurative battle of opposing wills.

In both the Soviet and American interventions in Afghanistan, it was the client regime who publicly announced its willingness to pursue a non-military resolution to the conflict. While what is crucial to the CAP concept is the underlying action (not whether the client state or supporting country announces it), it is noteworthy that the local governments were responsible for the announcements in both cases. This may be understood as a reflection of the role the client state plays in counterinsurgencies. As the political arm of the intervening superpower, it is responsible for pivoting to negotiations after assessing the failure of the superpower's military means.[98]

In the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the counterinsurgent acceptance point occurred in January 1987, when the new president of Afghanistan, Mohammad Najibullah, announced the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP). The initiative attempted to persuade insurgents to put down their arms and join the political process. In the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the counterinsurgent acceptance point occurred in September 2007, when then president Hamid Karzai publicly announced his intention to enter into peace negotiations with the Taliban for the first time.

[98] Thank you to Barbara Elias for this observation.

The Soviet Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point: January 1987

"Is there the likelihood of conditions in other countries reaching the point where the cup of the popular patience overflows and they take to arms? Yes… The Communists support just wars of this kind wholeheartedly and without reservations." - *World Marxist Review, 1961*[99]

The Soviets considered withdrawing from Afghanistan on numerous occasions. Documents from the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces suggest that some members of the military, perhaps wistfully, viewed the Karmal government to be stable enough to allow for a withdrawal as early as February 1980.[100] Brezhnev considered the option in May 1980, and his successor, Yuri Andropov, did the same in the spring of 1983.[101] However, these early discussions of a withdrawal were not indications of a desire to resolve the conflict by non-military means. Instead, they were attempts at transferring the military burden to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).

After conducting major operations utilizing only Soviet forces, the Soviets began to have tandem operations with the DRA army. An objective of the Soviet army was to build up the DRA forces so that they could battle the insurgents on their own. However, given the desertion and corruption of the Afghan army, these attempts proved futile.[102] As a result, both the Soviet and Afghan leadership slowly abandoned the hope of resolving the conflict by military means. The counterinsurgent acceptance point occurred in January 1987, when the new leader of Afghanistan, Mohammad Najibullah, announced the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), a clear attempt to end the war without more fighting.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader under whom troops would ultimately withdraw, voiced the decision to bring the army home soon after coming to power. In October 1985, he told

[99] Mao, *On Guerilla Warfare*, 5.
[100] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 420-421.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 395, 374.

the members of the Politburo that a decision needed to be reached on remaining in Afghanistan. Instead of calling for a withdrawal then, however, Gorbachev approved an 18-month escalation of the war as a last-ditch effort at attaining control of the country.[103] This was the most deadly period of the war, and only after the escalation failed did the Soviet leadership begin to pursue a policy of withdrawal and a resolution not defined by the use of force.

The switch to seeking a diplomatic resolution to the war was part of a comprehensive shift in Soviet foreign policy during the latter half of the 1980s. Dubbed the "New Thinking," it was defined by a more conciliatory attitude towards adversaries, denuclearization, and a retraction of military support for allied nations.[104] As Gorbachev would note in a speech at an international peace conference in 1987, the USSR now recognized the need for "lasting peace, predictability, and a constructive orientation in international relations."[105] While notes and

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[103] Ibid., 420-421. Michael R. Fenzel, *No Miracles: The Failure of Soviet Decision-Making in the Afghan War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 91-92. Whether there was a last-ditch troop surge immediately after Gorbachev took power is disputed. Braithwaite asserts there never was any escalation, while Fenzel and Jalali do. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who at the time was a CIA official, concluded that while Gorbachev was in support of a withdrawal, there was an escalation of the conflict during this period that led to an increase in U.S. support for the mujahideen. Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996, 336, 404, 428-429. Brigadier General and insurgency expert Theodore C. Mataxis saw 1985 as a "year of decision" largely because of Gorbachev's call for a surge and an end to the war. Theodore C. Mataxis, foreword to *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, by Russian General Staff (University Press of Kansas, 2002), xiv. In *Charlie Wilson's War*, George Crile provides plenty of evidence of a Soviet surge in 1985: "This was the year the Soviets might actually have succeeded in breaking the resistance. Had it not been for the huge CIA escalation… the Soviet offensive might have worked," George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History,* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), 342. With the appointment of General Mikhail M. Zaitsev, "the 40th Army took to the offensive everywhere," deploying its elite Spetsnaz forces and increasing raids of border towns and supply lines. By the summer and fall of 1985, many Western analysts seemed to think the Soviets were on the verge of pulling it off. The escalation had taken its toll on the mujahideen." Ibid., 343. Also, see page 435-436. Interestingly, Gorbachev devotes no portion of his lengthy memoirs to the war in Afghanistan, and only mentions the conflict in passing. See Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (Doubleday: New York, 1996). Also, see Niels Annen, "Echoes of the Soviet Surge," *Foreign Policy,* March 2, 2011, accessed April 20, 2020 foreignpolicy.com/2011/03/02/echoes-of-the-soviet-surge/.

[104] Joseph L. Nogee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Fourth Edition,* (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 369-373.

[105] Ibid., 368.

minutes from the Politburo sessions of 1985-1987 reveal increasing acceptance that the military would not be able to solve the insurgent problem, the announcement of the NRP was the counterinsurgent acceptance point as it marked the acquiescence of the key decision makers to seek a non-military solution. As William Maley notes:

> National reconciliation' was radically inconsistent with Marxism, since it emphasised [sic] nations rather than classes as appropriate bases for solidarity, and cooperation rather than struggle as an appropriate political strategy. In this sense, it was both an aspect of 'new thinking', and part of the process of ideological dismantling that the Gorbachev era had inaugurated. *It also reflected the failure of military force to solve the regime's political problems.*[106] (emphasis added)

Presented to the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) Central Committee in late December 1986 and formally revealed to the Afghan public in January 1987, the NRP was defined by three main tenets. The first was a six month ceasefire, during which negotiations between the insurgents and the PDPA could begin. The second and third were contingent on the pause in hostilities, and they called for the creation of a forum in which all factions would be represented, as well as the establishment of a coalition government that would be inclusive of the resistance fighters.[107] As Najibullah would admit in an interview 10 months after the announcement of the NRP, the insurgents refused to lay down their arms, rendering the policy a failure.[108] However, its significance as a turning point remained. Despite the continuation of insurgent attacks, the Soviet Union – beset with many other domestic and international issues – no longer saw an exclusively military solution to the conflict, and refused to halt the withdrawal of its forces.

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[106] Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 100.
[107] Fenzel, *No Miracles,* 109.
[108] "People need peace, not Stingers," *Newsweek*, October 12, 1987.

The American Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point: September 2007

"America is in the rare position of fighting the same war twice in one generation, from opposite sides. And it's easier to be the insurgents." - Bruce Riedel[109]

The U.S. war in Afghanistan has not been a conflict with a clear trajectory. The initial successes in the first few months suggested the war would be short-lived, but for reasons that will be considered in subsequent chapters, the tide turned against the coalition forces after December 2001 and resulted in the counterinsurgent acceptance point in September 2007. By then, the Taliban insurgency had demoralized Afghanistan's government, leading the president, Hamid Karzai, to publicly announce his intention to negotiate with the Taliban for the first time.[110]

The Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters who escaped coalition forces in 2001 fled to Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, as well as the Baluchistan and North-West Frontier provinces. These secluded areas would serve as a sanctuary, recruitment, and training center for the Taliban and Al Qaeda.[111] In August 2002, nine months after their retreat from Afghanistan, the Taliban began an insurgency against the Karzai government with a string of offensives in Kandahar and Khost provinces, among others. Between 2002 and 2007, coalition and Afghan forces launched multiple operations to push back against the Taliban insurgency. Perhaps a parallel to Gorbachev's escalation in 1985-86, the war saw an increase in combat right before Karzai's announcement.

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[109] Yaroslav Trofimov, "Soviets' Afghan Ordeal Vexed Gates on Troop-Surge Plan," The Wall Street Journal (Dow Jones, November 30, 2009), https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125831141804049337.

[110] Earlier in 2007, Karzai had alluded to peace talks without mentioning the Taliban by name. In September, his offer was more explicit. Saeed Ali Achakzai, "Taliban Reject Afghan President's Peace Talk Offer," *Reuters*, September 30, 2007, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghan-talks-idUSISL26606720070930.

[111] Jones, *The Graveyard of Empires*, 98.

Operation Mountain Thrust, begun in May 2006, was the largest offensive against the Taliban since the invasion. However, Mountain Thrust – as well as subsequent British operations in January and March 2007 – were not enough to end the insurgency.[112] In fact, it appeared that the Taliban's capabilities were only increasing. ISAF commander General David Richards said 2006 was the year exploitation of Afghanistan's developmental issues "reached a new pitch."[113] Political scientist Seth G. Jones described the uptick in insurgent activity:

> By 2006, a full-bodied insurgency had developed in Afghanistan. The overall number of insurgent-initiated attacks increased by 400% from 2002 to 2006, and the number of deaths from these attacks increased more than 800% during the same period... The increase in violence was particularly acute between 2005 and 2006.[114]

It was in this context that President Karzai announced his intention to hold talks with the insurgents. The Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammed Yousuf responded by saying, "[The] Karzai government is a dummy government. It has no authority so why should we waste our time and effort."[115] It was not unlike the Taliban to categorically refuse to negotiate with their adversaries. Throughout the Afghan civil war, there were multiple attempts by opposing factions, countries, and the UN to engage the Taliban in the peace process; none were successful.[116] However – barring a complete end to the conflict – the response of the insurgents to the call for talks is not relevant to the counterinsurgent acceptance point. (In the Soviet case, the majority of mujahideen also refused Najibullah's plea to negotiate.)

The significance of the turning point instead lies in the willingness of the counterinsurgent to publicly state their intentions to compromise with no guarantee the insurgents will respond in kind. Politically, this opens the door for hardliners to criticize the

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[112] Ibid., xiv-xvi.
[113] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 510.
[114] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, xxiii-xxiv.
[115] Ali Achakzai, "Taliban Reject Afghan President's Peace Talk Offer."
[116] Rashid, *Taliban*, 34-48.

current leadership and damage their image. To the public, it is a clear sign that the military has been unable to make substantial progress on their objectives, and does not foresee future progress. Given these risks, such an announcement has very large implications. While there would be many other calls for talks in the future (some of which even showed signs of moving forward) the first attempt in September 2007 signified the counterinsurgent acceptance point and represented a crucial change in the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

The Significance of the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point- Depriving the Counterinsurgent of the Culminating Point of Victory

The CAP can be seen as a crucial milestone for the insurgents in both the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan. By depriving the counterinsurgent of a military resolution to the conflict, the CAP is reflective of Clausewitz's "battle of wills" concept. This is a key aspect of his definition of war, and an integral part of Clausewitzian theory as a whole. In Book One, Chapter 1, Clausewitz defines war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do *our will*," (emphasis added).[117] While the insurgent's ultimate "will" is to force the counterinsurgents to withdraw and reestablish their control over Afghanistan, compelling the adversary to publicly announce a willingness to negotiate signifies a departure from the planned counterinsurgent policy. Initially, both the Soviets and Americans renounced the notion of negotiating with the insurgents.

"When we speak of destroying the enemy's forces," wrote Clausewitz, "we must emphasize that nothing obliges us to limit this idea to physical forces: the moral element must also be considered."[118] During a February 1980 meeting of the Politburo, Yuri Andropov spoke at length about his recent visit to Afghanistan. He emphasized the USSR's efforts to unite the

[117] Clausewitz, *On War*, 83.
[118] Ibid., 111.

Communist Party of Afghanistan and improve both the economic and security situation in the country.[119] The Committee agreed to maintain a troop presence in the country, and Premier Leonid Brezhnev even stated his willingness to increase the force size.[120] Significantly, the transcript of this early meeting reflected the outlook of the Soviet leadership; They expected to reconfigure Afghanistan without any negotiations with the mujahideen.

The same outlook could be seen when President George W. Bush laid out his vision for Afghanistan in a speech at the Virginia Military Institute in April 2002. He spoke of the progress U.S. armed forces had made in routing the Taliban, as well as the humanitarian efforts underway to improve the conditions in the country.[121] Bush noted that spring would lead to renewed attempts by the insurgents to retake parts of the country, but said the U.S. army would be "relentless" in its pursuit of the insurgents.[122] "Peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan develop its own stable government. Peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan train and develop its own national army," added Bush.[123] Missing from his speech – and from the plans of the U.S. officials responsible for the war in Afghanistan – was any consideration for negotiation with the insurgents. Since the CAP was the first indication that the expectations of the Soviets and Americans had changed drastically, it signified a change in the political framework both counterinsurgents had initially applied to the wars in Afghanistan.

As Chapters 2 and 3 will demonstrate, Clausewitz's culminating point and my counterinsurgent acceptance point provide an evaluative framework that standardizes and

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[119] Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, *Meeting of the CC CPSU Politburo - February 7th, 1980 (excerpt),* National Security Archive, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB396/docs/1980-02-07%20Politburo%20Session%20on%20Affghanistan.PDF.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Bush, "Remarks by the President," Virginia Military Institute, April 17, 2002.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

enhances conflict analysis. The four points in time – February 1980, December 2001, January 1987, September 2007 – will be used to analyze the events that led to consequential changes in both wars.

Chapter II

Mass & Concentration - The Soviet and American Folly

"As a rule, the negotiators pledge only a small and limited contingent." - Carl Von Clausewitz[124]

Introduction

In Book 2, Chapter Two ("On the Theory of War"), Clausewitz explains his view of the origins and flaws of mainstream war theories and lays out his intentions for writing *On War*. While he acknowledges the need for a theoretical underpinning to armed conflict, he is highly critical of the existing literature, specifically noting its overreliance on the material factors at play in a conflict, as well as the lack of consideration for the less tangible characteristics that influence wars.[125] In outlining the limitations of narrow, simplistic theories, Clausewitz lists "numerical superiority" as one factor that is often incorrectly "fitted into a mathematical system of laws."[126] He claims that this attempt to "reduce the whole secret of the art of war" yields an "oversimplification" at odds with "the realities of life."[127] However, Clausewitz does not dismiss force size as a method of evaluating warfare completely. Instead, he offers several nuanced principles of war that relate to army size in subsequent chapters. Although Clausewitz was reluctant to provide "rules" for military engagements, he nonetheless wrote qualified instructions throughout *On War.*[128] The principles that relate to force mass and concentration, discussed below, provide important insights into the Soviet and American military failures in Afghanistan.

In Book 3, Chapter Eight ("Superiority of Numbers"), Clausewitz describes the effect army mass can have on war outcomes with his classic dialectical approach. He first argues that if

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[124] Clausewitz, *On War*, 729.
[125] Ibid., 153-171.
[126] Ibid., 155.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Thomas Waldman, "Clausewitz and the Study of War," *Defence Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2012): 357-358, accessed April 14, 2020, DOI: 10.1080/14702436.2012.703843.

all other factors – geography, fighting skill, resources, etc. – are removed from consideration, the number of soldiers an army possesses "will determine victory."[129] Conversely, given the multitude of circumstances and elements at play in actual engagements, larger force size could end up contributing "very little" to military success.[130] Clausewitz notes that increases in army mass can make up for other weaknesses and serve as a "counterbalance to all other contributing circumstances," but he does not present this as a principle of war. In some scenarios, he says, even massive force disparities can prove ineffective. He offers a hypothetical "mountain pass, where even a tenfold superiority would not be sufficient."[131] For Clausewitz, these geographic traps are not true military engagements, and thus lie outside of the scope of his analysis.

In regard to military operations, however, Clausewitz clearly advocates for the use of the largest possible force, concentrated at what he calls the "vital" or "decisive" point.[132] Significantly, he does not define what this point is, only commenting that success depends on "the correct appraisal of this decisive point."[133] This idea is reiterated in Chapter 3 of Book 5 ("Relative Strength"), and Chapter 11 of Book 3 ("Concentration of Forces in Space"), where he writes that "there is no higher and simpler law of strategy than that of *keeping one's forces concentrated* (emphasis in original)."[134] Evaluating the manifestation of conflict as a realist, however, Clausewitz stresses the variance in outcome and – in Book 1, Chapter 1 ("What is War?") – underscores that "the very nature of war *impedes the simultaneous concentration of all forces* (emphasis in original)."[135]Yet, according to Clausewitz, this is a principle that should be

[129] Clausewitz, *On War*, 228.
[130] Ibid., 229.
[131] Ibid., 229-230.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 232.
[134] Ibid., 335-337, 240.
[135] Ibid., 89.

regarded "as a reliable guide" in military decision making.[136] This chapter will analyze the factors that prevented an appropriate concentration of Soviet and U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

The language in *On War* suggests that the decisive point was understood by Clausewitz to be both temporal and geographic. In Chapter 11, Book 3, he writes of the preferred physical state of the army: "No force should ever be detached from the main body unless the need is definite and urgent."[137] This idea can also be seen in Chapter 8, Book 3, where Clausewitz asserts the need for "courage to retain the major part of one's forces united," so "relative superiority is attained at the decisive point."[138] The "calculation of space *and time*" is "the most essential factor (emphasis added)" in utilizing mass to achieve military success.[139]

In this chapter, I will address the following questions:

1. In the wars in Afghanistan, what were the "decisive points" at which Clausewitzian theory argues for a concentration of the greatest possible mass?
2. Did the respective militaries properly appraise these points? Why were the Soviet and ISAF forces unable to concentrate mass at the decisive point?

I will argue that – while there have been many "decisive points" throughout both wars in Afghanistan – the moment at which the tide of war could have been turned against the insurgents were the culminating points for both conflicts: February 1980 and December 2001. In both instances, political interference and military miscalculation led to an incorrect appraisal of the decisive point. Throughout the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan, military officials, diplomats, and scholars debated and continue to debate the number of troops necessary to overwhelm the insurgents. While commenting on a particular force size requires more research

[136] Ibid., 240.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 231-232.
[139] Ibid.

and specialized knowledge and is outside of the scope of this study, I will argue that Clausewitzian mass and concentration theory lends support to those who called for a far greater troop presence in Afghanistan at the outsets of both conflicts.

Furthermore, whereas traditional theorists have undervalued the effect of an insurgent sanctuary, more recent scholarship has persuasively argued that – while there are many factors that contribute to the success of insurgencies in Afghanistan – the Pakistan safe haven has been the key reason for the resilience of the mujahideen during the 1980s and the Taliban today. An evaluation of the number of insurgents between the culminating point and the counterinsurgent acceptance point, paired with Clausewitz's observations on force size, will more clearly delineate the connection between Pakistan's support for the insurgents and their success.

The Culminating Point as the Decisive Point for Force Concentration

While Clausewitz never mentioned the congruency between the "decisive point" and the "culminating point," it appears they can align with one another. Both points refer to an optimal moment in which resources and manpower are situated appropriately to provide the best opportunity for achieving the military objective. As I discussed earlier, Clausewitz described two different culminating points: one in which the military offensive reaches its farthest point of defensible extension, and one that leads to outright victory. His descriptions of the "decisive point" suggest that – if the attacking side was able deploy the appropriate amount of mass and concentration during an offensive that was culminating – it would lead to a culminating point *of victory.*

This is not to say that either the United States or the Soviet Union would have been able to defeat their adversaries at their respective culminating points had there been more troops at critical parts of the country. As anyone who is familiar with Clausewitz's theories would admit,

military success requires a plethora of factors – including ephemeral ones such as luck and weather conditions – coalescing to provide the decisive advantage for one side. Likewise, given the nature of insurgencies, there may be an appearance of stability and peace while an underground resistance movement reorganizes, recruits, and plans new offensives.

However, because the culminating point occurred in both conflicts as they transitioned from conventional military operations to counterinsurgencies, it presented the best opportunity to weaken the oncoming uprising. There were senior officials in both countries who unsuccessfully advocated for a Clausewitzian force doctrine: Chief of the Soviet General Staff Nikolai Ogarkov, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. While they adopted different strategic and tactical methods of waging war, both the Americans and the Soviets increased their force size *after* the insurgents escalated the conflict. This is in contrast to Clausewitz's theory of war, which supports a formidable, preemptive force concentration that is ready for an escalation of violence.

In the section of this chapter that discusses the Soviet war in Afghanistan, I will show how U.S. aid to the insurgency, Soviet force size, and the number of mujahideen between 1980 and 1987 illustrate how the culminating point was also the decisive point at which more troops were necessary. In the section of this chapter that discusses the U.S. war in Afghanistan, I will explain how U.S. force size and average strength, the increase in insurgent attacks, and the rise in the number of insurgents support this view as well. While it would have been ideal to select the same factors to evaluate in both conflicts, the variations in available, reliable information led me to choose different measurements of Soviet and American military failure. Nonetheless, the different statistics are all reflective of two, similar doctrines that only committed more forces after experiencing significant setbacks.

Soviet Lack of Mass & Concentration

"Massive troop reinforcement...might drastically reduce the insurgency in the next two years." - CIA Assessment, September 14, 1983[140]

Foreign Aid to the Mujahideen

The day after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, President Carter received a classified memorandum on the matter from Zbigniew Brzezinski, his National Security Advisor. Under a section titled "What is to be Done?" Brzezinski wrote: "It is essential that Afghanistani resistance continues. This means more money as well as arms shipments to the rebels."[141] Prior to the invasion, Carter had already approved approximately half a million dollars in non-lethal aid to the anticommunist resistance fighters in Afghanistan.[142] The military intervention would spur a massive aid increase that would last longer than the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. In 1980, $30 million of cash, weapons, and other aid was supplied to the mujahideen.[143] By 1987, the aid amount from the United States had increased to approximately $630 million (see Figure 1).[144] Additionally, while the U.S. played the central role in facilitating arms and money transfers to the mujahideen through Pakistan, China, England, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others were financially involved as well.[145] The Saudi royal family, encouraged by their own Islamist beliefs and fearing the Soviets could take their oil fields next, agreed to match U.S. aid to the

[140] Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "Afghanistan: Status and Prospects of the Insurgency," September 14, 1983, accessed April 18, 2020, 2, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85M00364R002404760 066-0.pdf.
[141] Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President [Jimmy Carter], memorandum, "Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," December 26, 1979, accessed April 18, 2020, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB396/docs/1979-12-26%20Brzezinski%20to%20Carter%20o n%20Afghanistan.pdf.
[142] Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 46.
[143] Barnett R. Rubin, "Afghanistan: The Forgotten Crisis," *Writenet,* (December 1996), accessed April 14, 2020, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6c0c.html.
[144] Ibid.
[145] See Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War.*

mujahideen dollar-for-dollar, a promise they kept even when U.S. support reached hundreds of millions of dollars per year.[146]

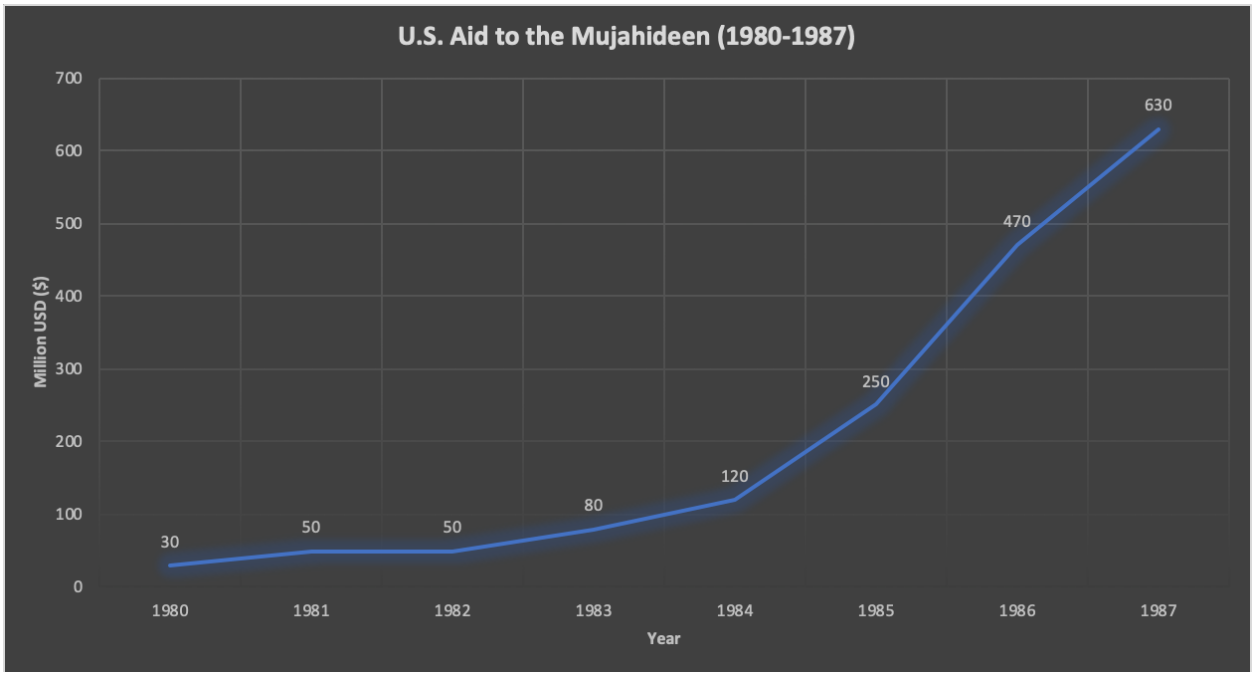

Figure 1: U.S. Aid to the Mujahideen, 1980-1987. U.S. aid was matched dollar-for-dollar by Saudi Arabia, while some wealthy individuals, organizations, and other nations contributed smaller amounts throughout the conflict.[147]

While it is true that the USSR could not have known the extent to which the U.S. and other nations would support the resistance movement, the KGB knew the mujahideen were receiving foreign assistance long before the Politburo considered intervention. In March 1979 – nine months before the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan – the Soviet Ambassador to Hungary told a Hungarian party member that the Afghan insurgents were receiving foreign assistance: "Recently the Afghan reactionary forces have organized armed actions with foreign support…

[146] Ibid., 236-239.
[147] Rubin, "The Forgotten Crisis," 1996. Yousaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 90. In particular, the covert mission most directly linked to supplying the insurgents with arms grew significantly. The Cross Border Program, initially a USAID initiative aimed at assisting Afghan refugees, became a means of transporting weapons to the mujahideen. Its budget increased substantially – from $6 million in 1985 to $90 million in 1989 – raising the costs of the Soviets' counterinsurgency campaign. See Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 370.

counter-revolutionary reactions have become stronger, [and] are actively supported and helped by the special services of imperialist powers like China, Pakistan and Iran."[148] After the invasion, – and due in large part to an extraordinary lobbying effort by Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson – the CIA launched Operation Cyclone, a clandestine effort that fueled the insurgency against the Soviets by indirectly providing arms, money, and training to the anticommunist fighters.

Congressman Wilson's lobbying campaign would lead to the transfer of Stinger missiles to the mujahideen in 1986. The Stingers were a surface-to-air missile the resistance fighters had long sought for their ability to destroy Soviet aircraft.[149] While the Soviets may have not

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[148] "Soviet Communication to the Hungarian Leadership on the Situation in Afghanistan," March 28, 1979, accessed April 18, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, National Archives of Hungary, trans. Attila Kolontari and Zsofia Zelnik, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113160.

[149] Robert Pear, "Arming Afghan Guerrillas: A Huge Effort Led by U.S.," The New York Times, April 18, 1988, accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/18/world/arming-afg han-guerrillas-a-huge-effort-led-by-us.html?auth=. Beyond the eventual introduction of the Stingers, an increasingly large budget led to a massive logistical supply chain buildup that provided the mujahideen with ammunition, rockets, mines, RPGs, heavy machine guns, etc. See Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 342. Instead of playing a decisive role in the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the introduction of the Stingers was one of the many factors that led to the success of the anticommunist insurgency. A review of the scholarship on the subject reveals that – while the Stingers were a boon to the confidence and capabilities of the resistance fighters – they were not responsible for changes in the decisions of the Soviet leadership. In *No Miracles*, Michael Fenzel explained the significance of the Stingers in the context of the later period in the war: "The strategic impact of Stinger missiles was not as significant as U.S. officials claimed at the time. Gorbachev had already committed to withdrawal when the Stingers made their debut in 1987… [Their introduction] complicated the Soviets' military challenges on the ground, but, based upon evidence found in the Politburo archives, they were not responsible for Gorbachev's decision to withdraw Soviet forces." Fenzel, *No Miracles,* 101. This view contrasts with an earlier appraisal by Theodore C. Mataxis: "'Stinger' changed the dynamics of the battlefield…Gorbachev realized that he had to expand the war significantly or withdraw. He prepared to withdraw." "Foreword," in *The Soviet-Afghan War*, xiv. Rodric Braithwaite echoes this view, writing "No convincing evidence has appeared from Russian sources that the Stingers affected the political decision-making process in Moscow, or that they had much beyond an immediate tactical effect on the Soviet conduct of military operations." Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 205. Indeed, the Russian General Staff said the introduction of the Stinger "severely limited" Soviet use of helicopters and "appreciably decreased the results of operations and combat." Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 23. Yet Lester Grau and Michael Gress note that "Soviet aircraft losses show[ed] no appreciable rise in the number of aircraft shot down." Ibid., 222. The Stinger prevented Soviet planes from flying at low altitudes. As a result, low-flying air raids and battlefield helicopter evacuations were no longer possible, harming the soldiers' confidence. Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 150. Overall, despite the

expected that foreign nations would provide weapons of this sophistication, Soviet intelligence were aware of the influx of arms that would occur because of foreign support. In fact, they used this information to threaten an increase in their force presence in Afghanistan. In July 1981, a KGB agent met with Pakistan's Chargé d'Affaires and warned him that the Soviet Union would increase its troop presence if Pakistan continued to arm the insurgents:

> In a confidential conversation, he passed on the views of the competent agencies… Particular emphasis was given to the theme that the US assisted the Afghan rebels with arms sent through Pakistan; these arms were used not only to kill Afghans but also to kill Soviet citizens; the USSR would be forced, not to reduce, but instead to increase the scale of its military assistance… the Soviet side would be unable to stand by idly in the face of such developments.[150]

Despite these direct threats, however, the Soviets proved unwilling to substantially increase their force deployment, thereby debilitating their capabilities as support for the mujahideen drastically increased. In contrast to the Clausewitzian understanding of mass and concentration, an evaluation of Soviet force size shows how there were only marginal force increases which occurred after the insurgents escalated their attacks.

Size of the Armed Forces

The Soviet Union underestimated the number of troops it would take to prop up the communist regime in Afghanistan. Entering the country with an initial contingent of 50,000, the

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publicity given to the Stinger, it was part of a large range of weapons systems and support that helped the insurgents prevail. President Reagan's 1985 National Security Decision Directive 166 identified the need to "improve the military effectiveness of the Afghan resistance in order to keep the trends in the war unfavorable to the Soviet Union." Ronald Reagan, National Security Directive Number 166, "U.S. Policy, Programs, and Strategy in Afghanistan," *U.S. National Archives and Records Administration,* (March 27, 1985): 2, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd166.pdf. As a result, the mujahideen began to receive not only more mines, sniper rifles, and antiaircraft weapons, but – among other new tools – they also gained access to valuable U.S. satellite images for the first time. Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 127, 144. Ultimately, it was a combination of many different armaments and pieces of intelligence – not any one weapon – that helped the insurgency succeed.

[150] "KGB Active Measures in Southwest Asia in 1980-82 ," April 2004, accessed April 18, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110013.

Soviet 40th Army kept the force size at around 80,000-100,000 troops during the years the insurgency was being bolstered by foreign aid and training.[151] Likewise, from 1980-1983, the USSR maintained a defensive posture around the main cities and roads, actively avoiding direct confrontation with the mujahideen.[152] During this period in the war, the grossly unprepared DRA Army was expected to handle the insurgents.[153] However, as an analysis of major counterinsurgent Soviet operations will show, Soviet force size was insufficient to defeat the insurgents even when the 40th army adopted an aggressive counterinsurgent effort and took on the bulk of the fighting.

Despite attempts to train and equip the Afghan army, it proved incapable of being an effective fighting force on its own. A CIA Assessment from September 1986 described the DRA Army as "under-manned, demoralized, faction-ridden, and ill-equipped. [They] remain unable to undertake large-scale operations on their own."[154] Initially, the Soviet military leadership expected the DRA Army to fight the mujahideen in the rural areas, while the Soviets guarded the cities and roads. They quickly realized, however, that the Afghan army was too small and incapable of making significant progress against the insurgents.[155] Due to desertion, the size of the Afghan Army declined from its pre-revolution level of 110,000 to only 25,000 troops by 1980.[156] To bring up the numbers, the Soviets adopted a controversial policy of encircling

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[151] See *Figure 2*.
[152] Giles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending- Afghanistan: 1979 to the Present*, trans. John King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 189.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Central Intelligence Agency, "Afghanistan: The Insurgency This Summer," September 8, 1986, 1, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91B00874R000100250014-0.pdf.
[155] Matt M. Matthews, *We Have Not Learned How to Wage War There: The Soviet Approach in Afghanistan, 1979-1989*, (Kansas: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011), 15.
[156] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending,* 188.

villages and forcibly conscripting young Afghan men. With the exception of the Afghan special forces – known as KhAD- the Afghan soldiers were generally reluctant to fight the mujahideen, and often switched sides, their Soviet weapons in tow.[157] In 1988, with Soviet forces beginning to withdraw, the DRA Army had a reported 150,000 troops.[158] But Lester Grau and Michael Gress, editors of the official account of the war written by the Russian General Staff, assert that Soviet reports of DRA strength were overestimations, since tribal militias would inflate their numbers to increase the amount of Soviet aid they received.[159]

An unreliable Afghan army left more of the warfighting burden on the Soviets, who themselves struggled with deploying enough troops to combat the insurgents. Most anti-mujahideen operations consisted of only 10,000-15,000 personnel.[160] Of the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan, only a portion of them were available for combat operations. "Of the 133 battalions in the 40th Army," writes Rodric Braithwaite, "only 51 took part regularly in operations. The rest spent much of their time in their garrisons or escorting convoys."[161] The battalions that participated in operations were incapable of holding territory they took from the rebels. One Soviet commander's lament explained the repercussions of a small force size:

> Throughout the whole of that war practically every operation ended in the same way. Military operations began, soldiers and officers died, Afghan soldiers died, the mujahedin and the peaceful population died, and when the operation was over our forces would leave, and everything would return to what it had been before.[162]

In the numerous Soviet-led operations in Zhawar and the Panjshir Valley, for example, the Soviets were unable to consolidate their victories in large part because of their inadequate

[157] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy,* 137-138.
[158] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending,* 188.
[159] Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War*, 330n20.
[160] Ibid., 21.
[161] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy,* 133.
[162] Ibid., 223.

force size. While the insurgents would evade head-on firefights and willingly cede territory with the intention of regaining it after the Soviets withdrew from the region, the inability to leave a sizable contingent in the area made this tactic easier to implement. Instead of invading the rebel-held territories initially with overwhelming force, the Soviets adopted a policy of escalation, with each attempt featuring greater troops and weaponry. The Panjshir operations exemplify the flaws of this approach.

The first Soviet invasion of the Panjshir Valley came four months after the Soviet arrival in Afghanistan. At this point, the mujahideen were not expecting an invasion of the valley, so the Soviets did not experience much resistance. They established the Rukha district center, but had to deploy troops to Rukha three times in the next nine months to defend it against attacks. The insurgency ultimately proved unmanageable, and a rescue operation evacuated the garrison, leaving the Panjshir Valley under rebel control.[163] In May 1982, the Soviets once again tried to invade Panjshir in a major, multi-phased operation. They established six garrisons and many outposts, but as with the first attempt at clearing the territory, the withdrawal of most armed forces led to increased attacks as the mujahideen returned. In January 1983, the leader of the Panjshir resistance fighters, Ahmad Shah Masoud, negotiated a one-year ceasefire agreement with the Soviets. Per the terms of the truce, the Soviets evacuated all but one of their garrisons in the Valley. The temporary peace allowed Massoud to rebuild his forces and prepare for the next Soviet offensive, which occurred in April 1984.[164]

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[163] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 399.

[164] Ibid., 403-404. It is unclear why the Soviets agreed to a ceasefire. According to Fenzel, they prioritized maintaining control over the major cities and roads, but were concerned about their pipelines in the north. They wanted to guarantee the steady shipment of supplies into Afghanistan. Fenzel, *No Miracles,* 74. The Russian General Staff account of the war mentions that the ceasefire occurred, but does not explain the reasoning behind it. Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War,* 32. On the insurgents' side, the ceasefire was not well received by Pakistan and some of Masoud's own aides. Masoud, however, felt it was

The 1984 operation to retake the Panjshir Valley involved 200 aircraft, 190 helicopters, and up to 16,000 Soviet and DRA troops. In the end, the Soviets regained control of five out of the six previously held main garrisons and once again established outposts throughout the region. While this was hailed as a great victory for the Soviet Union and the DRA, the mujahideen continued to attack the garrisons until the Soviet withdrawal.[165] Reflecting the situation in many of the rural provinces, the Soviets incurred high costs with each attempt at seizing control over the Panjshir Valley, did not achieve any strategic advantages, and had to repeatedly send in troops to reinforce the forts against rebel attacks, all signs of military operations that went past the culminating point, and an escalatory policy that could not succeed because of insufficient force mass.

The ineffectiveness of the seven military operations into the Panjshir Valley was also illustrated by the growing number of insurgents in the area. Led by "The Lion of the Panjshir" Ahmad Shah Masood, there were approximately 1,000 resistance fighters in 1980, 5,000 in 1984, and as many as 13,000 in 1989.[166] Evidently, the garrisons and guard posts in enemy territory did not help to free the area of mujahideen control. The smaller guard posts, called *zastavas*, dotted the Afghan landscape, with some located in areas so inaccessible that they were supplied solely by helicopter. 862 in total, they were manned by approximately 20,000 Soviet soldiers, and were tasked with being the eyes and ears of the armed forces. While some developed working relationships with the nearby villages, they were often attacked by the mujahideen.[167]

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necessary because the Soviet bombing campaign had destroyed the livelihoods of the Panjshir valley's civilians. Coll, *Ghost Wars,* 118-119.

[165] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 403-404.

[166] Ibid., 399.

[167] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 140.

Another example of Soviet military expeditions that failed because of an inability to hold conquered territory can be found in the multiple operations to seize Zhawar, a mountain canyon in Khost province, located approximately two and a half miles from the Pakistan border. Seen as an important base camp and staging area for the insurgents, Zhawar was one of the main targets for the joint Soviet and DRA offensives of 1985 and 1986.[168] The first attempt at seizing Zhawar was foiled when mujahideen reinforcements overwhelmed the counterinsurgents as they got close to the base. The second was successful in seizing the base, which consisted of a vast network of 41 caves that featured a mosque, hospital, hotel, bakery, library, and stockpiles of arms, ammunition, and mines, but did not lead to permanent control of the territory. Fearing a counterattack was imminent, the Soviet and Afghan troops held Zhawar for a total of five hours, during which they unsuccessfully attempted to blow up the caves. The Soviet and DRA casualty count is unknown, but the insurgents captured 530 men from the 38th commando brigade and executed all the officers, offering amnesty to the soldiers after two years of labor. Having shot down 24 helicopters and two jets during the battle, the mujahideen retook Zhawar and nearby territory.[169] Just like the Panjshir offensives, the Soviets were unable to hold any territory or gain a strategic advantage from temporarily seizing the Zhawar base.

The vast majority of the territory the Soviet army held in February 1980 (the Culminating Point) was not reclaimed by the mujahideen at any point during the war.[170] In contrast to the villages that were won and lost or destroyed, the major cities occupied during the culminating point withstood attacks by the insurgents and were passed onto the DRA government during the Soviet withdrawal. The Soviet operations after February 1980, on the other hand, surpassed the

[168] Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan*, 405.
[169] Ibid., 406-414.
[170] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 134.

culminating point because Soviet and DRA counterinsurgent force size and capabilities were inadequate for holding territory outside the urban areas.

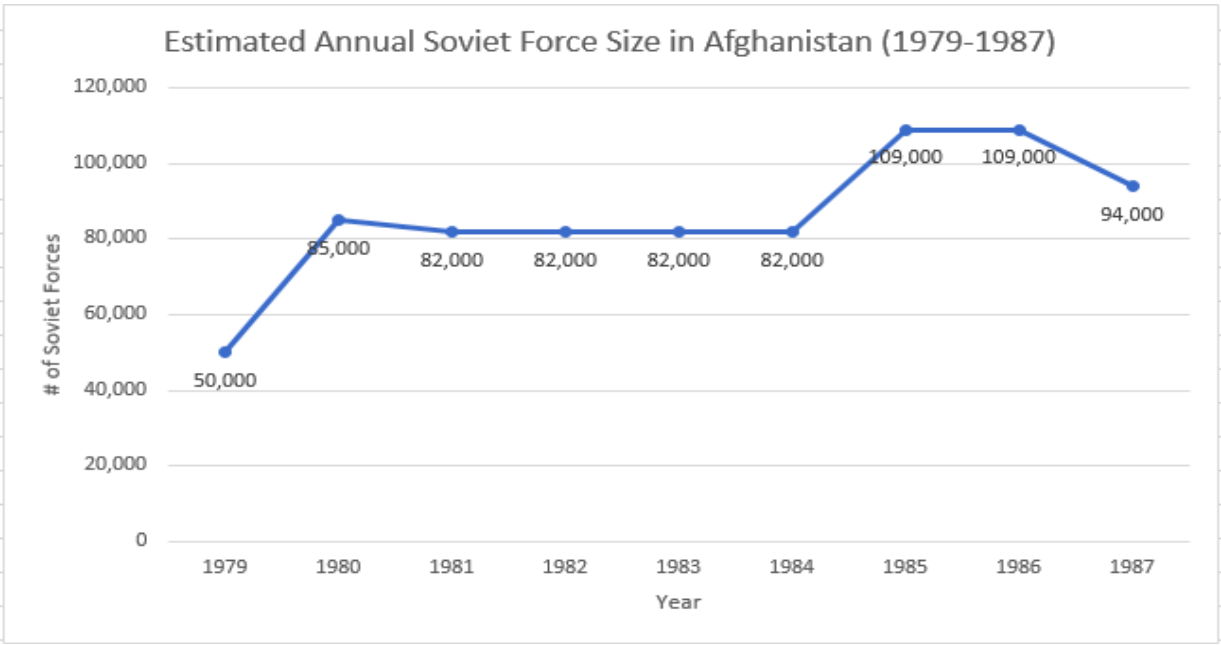

Figure 2: Soviet Armed Forces Deployed in Afghanistan, 1979-1987. The 1985-1986 troop surge has been credited by some scholars to Gorbachev, who allegedly gave the Soviet generals one last chance to solve the problem by military means. There was also a 15,000 force drawdown in late 1986, followed by a two-stage withdrawal of the entire Soviet army. The last Sovier soldier departed Afghanistan in 1989.[171]

Growth of the Insurgency and its Capabilities

The number of insurgents that fought the Soviets between 1980 and 1987 has never been determined, and estimates vary widely. In reporting the number of mujahideen that were killed

[171] The yearly force estimates are drawn from a number of sources: Meredith Reid Sarkees and Frank Whelon Wayman, *Resort To War: A Data Guide to Inter-State, Extra-State, Intra-State, and Non-State Wars, 1816-2007* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), Antonio Giustozzi, Martin Ewans, Peter Marsden and Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "History-Afghanistan," Europa World Online, London: Routledge, accessed 27 February 2020, http://www.europaworld.com/entry/af. hi., Jalali, *Military History of Afghanistan,* 375, Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War,* 20-21, 330. While all available statistics were in the same ballpark, for some years there was contradictory information concerning force size. This may be a result of differing "force size" definitions. In "The Forgotten Crisis," for example, Barnett Rubin says: "By 1981, the Soviet troop presence stabilized at about 105,000." Rubin, "The Forgotten Crisis," 13. However, in *Soviet-Afghan War,* the Russian General Staff claim the force evened out at approximately 82,000 troops during this time. Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War,* 20. Since editors Lester Grau and Michael Gress did not dispute these figures, I selected them for *Figure 2.*

during combat, the Soviets infamously utilized an unreliable formula that factored in the number of bullets they expended during battle.[172] The Russian General Staff claimed the number of insurgents tripled between 1983 and 1985.[173] Post-war scholarship has placed the number of mujahideen at anywhere between 35,000 and 250,000 at different points in the conflict.[174] However, the historical record indicates that the number of fighters grew substantially over time, a trend that was predicted by some members of the Soviet leadership, but was ultimately ignored when the Politburo crafted its military policy.

As international aid increased, thousands of young Afghan men were trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This provided the insurgency with the manpower it needed to challenge the Soviets with increasing aggression. In 1983, there were two training camps in Pakistan that each prepared 200 people per month. By 1987, there were seven facilities and approximately 20,000 trainees per year.[175] An April 1988 CIA analysis estimated the number of insurgents at approximately 350,000, noting that only half were "professional" fighters "whose main function is conducting guerilla operations," while many others split their time between fighting the Soviets and engaging in civilian occupations, such as farming.[176] Under a section titled, "Implications for Regime Counterinsurgency," the report also noted:

> Most specialists in counterinsurgency maintain that the government must have a 10-to-1 ratio in its favor in order to protect the cities and economic infrastructure and make progress against insurgents in their base camps. Kabul's forces almost certainly cannot match guerilla manpower, which bodes ill for the regime's counterinsurgency effort.[177]

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[172] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy,* 222-223.
[173] Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War,* 24.
[174] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 201.
[175] Yousaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 117.
[176] Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, "Afghanistan: Insurgent Manpower," May 1988, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP06T00412R000707960001-1.pdf.
[177] Ibid.

In addition to the growth of foreign aid and the increase in their ranks, the mujahideen received guidance on their military objectives from Pakistan. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – Pakistan's chief intelligence agency – used its power to disperse arms to also ensure the mujahideen were maximizing their capabilities. Mohammad Yousaf, ISI's head of the Afghan Bureau from 1983-87 wrote in his memoir: "I had to coordinate attacks on strategic targets and maintain the initiative over an area of 260,000 square miles… The only way I could influence the [mujahideen], get them moving in the right direction, was through the allocation and withholding of supplies and training."[178] This disciplinary approach further enhanced insurgent capabilities. Had the Soviet leadership adopted the views of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the Chief of the General Staff of the USSR from 1977-1984, they would have been better positioned to address the threat posed by the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Failure to Adopt The Ogarkov Doctrine

Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov rose through the ranks of the Soviet military at an unprecedented pace and became one of the country's leading military thinkers. In the 1970s, he developed "The Grand Strategy," a plan for overtaking Western Europe without using any nuclear weapons on the continent.[179] He viewed the swift use of conventional forces, paired with a modernized army and command structure, as the future of armed conflict. Throughout his career, Ogarkov developed many military exercises that emphasized speed and "intended to restore the land battlefield as the prime form of warfare."[180] Despite Marshal Ogarkov's renown,

[178] Yousaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap,* 103.
[179] Yossef Bodansky, "Ogarkov Tells How Soviets Can Win War in Europe," *Washington Times,* July 23, 1985, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R000100580003-8.pdf. The strategy called for a swift nuclear attack on the United States whilst it debated the pros and cons of launching a strike.
[180] Ibid., 1.

he was unable to convince the political leadership of the USSR that the war in Afghanistan would require far more troops than they were willing to commit.

In two meetings held on December 10th, 1979 – just 15 days before the Soviet invasion – Marshal Ogarkov voiced his opposition to military intervention. He first objected on the grounds of the political repercussions invading an Islamic country would have on the region and the world stage. Yuriy Andropov, with the approval of Brezhnev and other senior Party members, responded by telling Ogarkov to "stick to military affairs."[181] Later that day, Ogarkov was ordered to organize a 75-80,000 person troop deployment to Afghanistan. He again objected, saying that the force was not large enough to fulfill the mission.[182] In 1982, he published *Always in Defense of the Motherland*, a military operations book that considered the options the Soviet Union would have in an armed conflict with the United States.[183] While he did not directly address Afghanistan in the text, Ogarkov went against the Soviet status quo in proclaiming the importance of ground troops by saying that they were "in essence, the basic branch of our Armed Forces."[184] For him, the future of war with the United States would be defined by a protracted, regional, non-nuclear military engagement.[185] Despite these views, on December 24th, 1979, Marshal Ogarkov joined the Soviet Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov in signing a directive to provide "international aid to the friendly Afghan people and also to create favorable conditions

[181] "Summary of a Meeting on Afghanistan," December 10, 1979, accessed April 18, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, trans. Gary Goldberg, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111780.
[182] Braithwaite, *Afghantsy*, 77.
[183] Mary C. Fitzgerald, "Marshal Ogarkov on the Modern Theater Operation," *Conflict Quarterly* (Summer 1986): 40.
[184] Ibid., 43. Presumably, Ogarkov could not openly discuss Afghanistan because the Soviet leadership was committed to keeping the war out of the public's eye at the time.
[185] Ibid., 40.

to interdict possible anti-Afghan actions from neighboring countries," thereby authorizing the use of force in Afghanistan.[186]

The effects of introducing a relatively small contingent of troops for a strictly limited engagement were felt immediately. After securing the main roads and city centers, the Soviets were reluctant to commence any operations against the mujahideen, despite pleas from Afghan President Babrak Karmal. The Soviet military leadership "argued that they did not envision participation of the units and formations introduced into Afghanistan in combat activities in the DRA territory. [The troops] could only respond if forced to do so under immediate fire impact on the rebels, or undertake operations for the liberation of our military advisers."[187] When the decision to engage the mujahideen throughout the country was made, the Soviets lack of mass and concentration hampered their ability to combat the insurgents.

U.S. Lack of Mass & Concentration

"The light footprint translated into one of the lowest levels of troops, police, and financial assistance in any stabilization operation since the end of World War II." - Seth G. Jones[188]

In terms of a Clausewitzian understanding of mass and concentration, the U.S. war in Afghanistan has significant parallels to the Soviet war. Ironically, some of these similarities came about as a result of attempts by U.S. officials to wage war differently from the Soviets. Like the USSR, however, the U.S. assessed the need for greater force size too far past the culminating point. December 2001 was not only the moment at which the Taliban was most decimated and disorganized, it was also the decisive point at which a concentration of forces could have prevented the then fledgling insurgency movement from becoming a formidable adversary. An analysis of troop deployments, violence levels, and estimates of insurgent force size reveal how the decisive point was missed, and a study of the decisions leading up to the war in Iraq explains why.

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[186] "Directive Nº 312/12/001 of 24 December 1979 signed by Ustinov and Ogarkov," December 24, 1979, accessed April 18, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, trans. Gary Goldberg, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111784.

[187] Alexander Lyakhovsky, "On the Changing Mission of the Soviet Forces in Afghanistan," trans. Svetlana Savranskaya, Moscow, Russia: Nord, 2004, The National Security Archive, Document 14, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/r14.pdf.

[188] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 118.

The Culminating Point as a Decisive Point for Force Concentration

Temporally, the culminating point may have been the decisive point at which America had the best chance at winning the war in Afghanistan, but a number of missteps related to mass and concentration caused a widespread insurgency that led to the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point in 2007. Geographically, the concentration of U.S. and allied security forces was not near the south and east, where the Pashtun population that the Taliban arose from resides, or along the porous border with Pakistan, through which Taliban members could flee, reorganize, and recruit new members. Instead, the U.S. government was in disagreement over whether any troops should be sent to assist the interim Afghan government with its security concerns.

During a December 2001 conversation, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and President Bush's special envoy to the Northern Alliance James Dobbins discussed the amount of troops they believed would be necessary to secure Afghanistan's largest cities. Dobbins believed only 25,000 would be enough.[189] Venturing beyond the cities was not considered, as there was opposition to expanding the peacekeeping operation outside of Kabul. Secretary of State Colin Powell supported a larger deployment – a key aspect of the Powell Doctrine – while Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld advocated for the minimalist "light footprint" approach, which was ultimately implemented.[190] The error of not concentrating a sizable troop contingent in Afghanistan's problem areas would reveal itself in the months and years after the December 2001 culminating point. In January 2007, just 8 months before President Karzai would announce his intention to seek peace talks with the Taliban (the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point), the senior U.S. military official in Afghanistan Lt. General Karl Eikenberry would call for a larger

[189] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires,* 112.
[190] Ibid., 123-124, 115.

deployment of U.S. troops in response to the Taliban's resurgence.[191] This plea was indicative of a flawed military policy that escalated its resources only in response to a heightened threat level. In contrast, Clausewitz's concept of "decisive force," – unsuccessfully advocated for by Secretary of State Colin Powell – called for a larger troop presence at the outset of the conflict.

Force Mass

"By the winter of 2002-3 there was no longer any question that the Taliban had re-formed." - Gilles Dorronsoro[192]

In November 2001, after the initial combat operations against the Taliban were largely complete, about 1,000 U.S. troops remained on the ground.[193] The "light footprint" model, adopted in 2002, provided significantly fewer forces than would have been necessary to ensure a stable Afghanistan. A study of troop levels by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) detailed the changes in force size from 2001 to 2007. In terms of troops stationed in Afghanistan, the number of soldiers increased by approximately 10,800 troops from FY2002 to FY2005.[194] However, deployments lagged behind increases in the insurgents' capabilities. The Taliban were initially emboldened by the lack of a U.S. troop presence in some districts, as requests by the Karzai administration and the U.N. for force increases were not implemented for months.[195] As Seth G. Jones explained:

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[191] Reuters, "U.S. Commander in Afghanistan Calls For More Troops," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty,* January 16, 2007, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/1074051.html.
[192] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 338.
[193] Al Jazeera, "Timeline: U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan 2001 to 2017," *Al Jazeera,* August 22, 2017, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/2001-2017-intervention-afghanistan-170822035036797.html.
[194] Note- The CRS study reported force size for each fiscal year (FY), which follows the federal budget timeline. Each fiscal year runs from October 1 of the prior year to September 30 of the title year. (Example: FY2005 refers to the time between October 1 2004-September 30, 2005). Various DOD sources show slightly different troop deployment amounts. I used the figures cited in the Operations Report.
[195] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending,* 340-342.

> Low troop levels made it extremely difficult to establish law and order throughout the country. And there was almost no chance to revisit that decision. Once the United States began planning the war in Iraq, the light foot-print plan was virtually impossible to alter; the United States could not deploy additional forces to Afghanistan because they were committed elsewhere...U.S. and NATO forces could clear territory occupied by Taliban or other insurgent groups but could not hold it.[196]

In the fall of 2003, the U.S. supported the transfer of ISAF control to NATO, after which Provincial Reconstruction Teams were formed to coordinate humanitarian relief with the military's COIN operations.[197] Meanwhile, alongside the insufficient force deployed by the U.S. and international community, a fledgling Afghan army of 6,000 had been put together. Plagued with ethnic divisions and desertions, it was unable to assist the U.S. and ISAF forces in their military objectives.[198]

In 2006, with the onset of greater insurgent attacks, there was a deployment of approximately 2,600 additional troops (see *Figure 3*), and a greater portion were stationed in combat zones.[199] This is indicative of the responsive – not preemptive – nature of U.S. force deployment that was ultimately unable to make up for the initial strength deficiency. Beyond soldiers on the ground, the drastic change in the "average strength" – the number of assisting personnel stationed on Navy ships and in neighboring countries – also illustrates the lack of force. In FY2002, there were approximately 83,400 personnel taking part in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The following two fiscal years, however, had 74% fewer individuals involved in the mission. Despite yearly increases to the average strength, by FY2007 the total force was approximately 31,300, a far cry from the FY2002 amount (see *Figure 4*).[200]

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[196] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 115.
[197] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending,* 340-342.
[198] Ibid., 337-340. Barnett R. Rubin, *Afghanistan From the Cold War Through the War on Terror*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 423.
[199] Amy Belasco, *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues,* (Congressional Research Service, July 2, 2009), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R40682.pdf.
[200] Ibid.

It was not until 2009 that the U.S. surged its troop presence in Afghanistan, increasing its force size from roughly 30,000 to 60,000 troops.[201] In an effort by President Obama to finish the war, peak troop commitment was reached in 2011 with over 100,000 soldiers.[202] Conversely, between 2002 and 2006, while the Taliban – as well as Al Qaeda and its affiliates – were regrouping, the U.S. underestimated the threat level and focused its troops and resources on the war in Iraq. Military personnel and assets were diverted to plan and execute the invasion of Iraq as early as November 2001, even before the Taliban was removed from power in Afghanistan.[203] As a result, the peak security presence in the first two years of the war in Afghanistan for every thousand inhabitants was below U.S. operations in the Balkans, Iraq, and Haiti, among others.[204]

The demotion of the war in Afghanistan from being a top priority was evident in multiple facets of Operation Enduring Freedom beyond force size. U.S. financial assistance fell below pledged amounts, and even declined as the security situation worsened in 2005-6.[205] In terms of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets, U.S. forces in Afghanistan received one or two assets – such as Predator drones or reconnaissance planes – for every four or five that were sent to Iraq.[206] Likewise, Special Operations forces were moved from Afghanistan to Iraq, and Afghan National Army soldiers had to be trained by National Guard troops, while the preferred active duty soldiers were sent to Iraq.[207] As a result, between the Culminating Point and the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point the insurgency was able to grow with significantly

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[201] Danielle Kurtzleben, "Chart: How U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan Have Changed Under Obama," *National Public Radio,* July 6, 2016, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2016/07/06/484979294/chart-how-the-u-s-troop-levels-in-afghanistan-have-changed under-obama.
[202] Ibid.
[203] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires,* 126-128.
[204] Rubin, *Afghanistan From the Cold War Through the War on Terror,* 250-251.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires*, 128.
[207] Ibid.

less obstacles than could have been implemented. The data on insurgent violence in Afghanistan during this time supports this view.

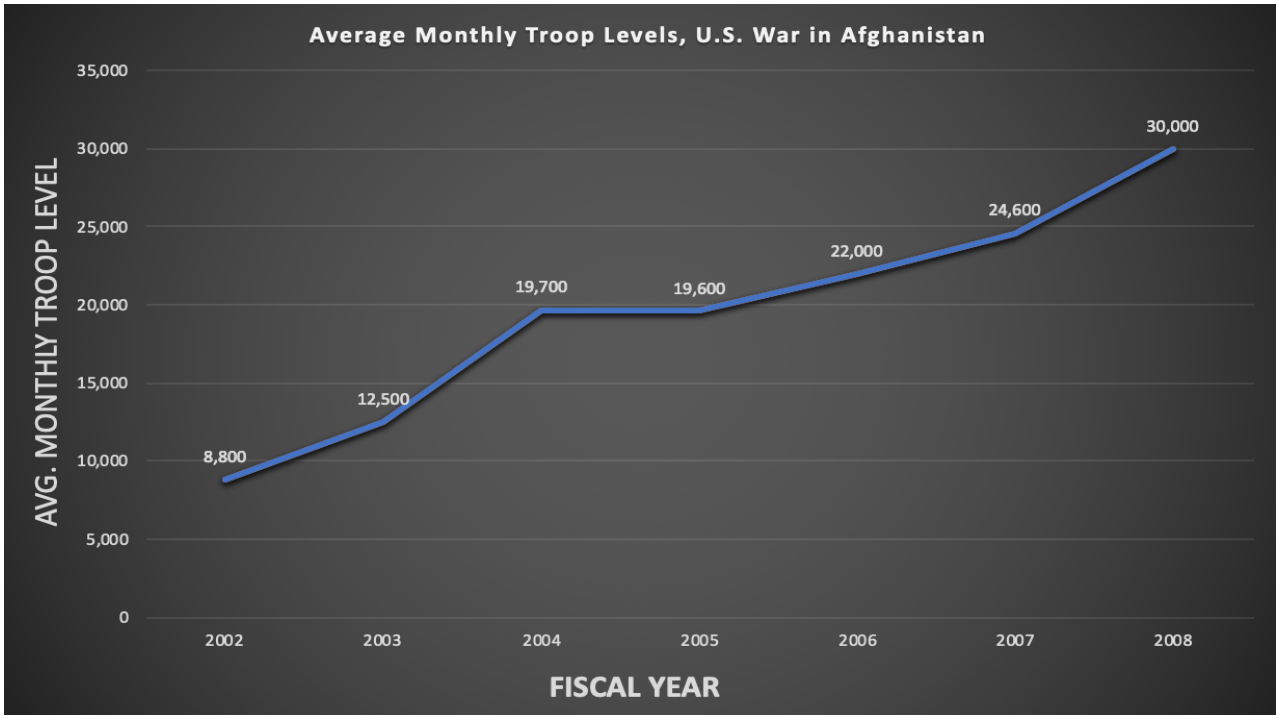


Figure 4: Average monthly troop levels, U.S. war in Afghanistan, FY 2002-2008. The increase in force size was responsive to an escalation in insurgent violence.[208]

[208] Belasco, *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012*, 23.

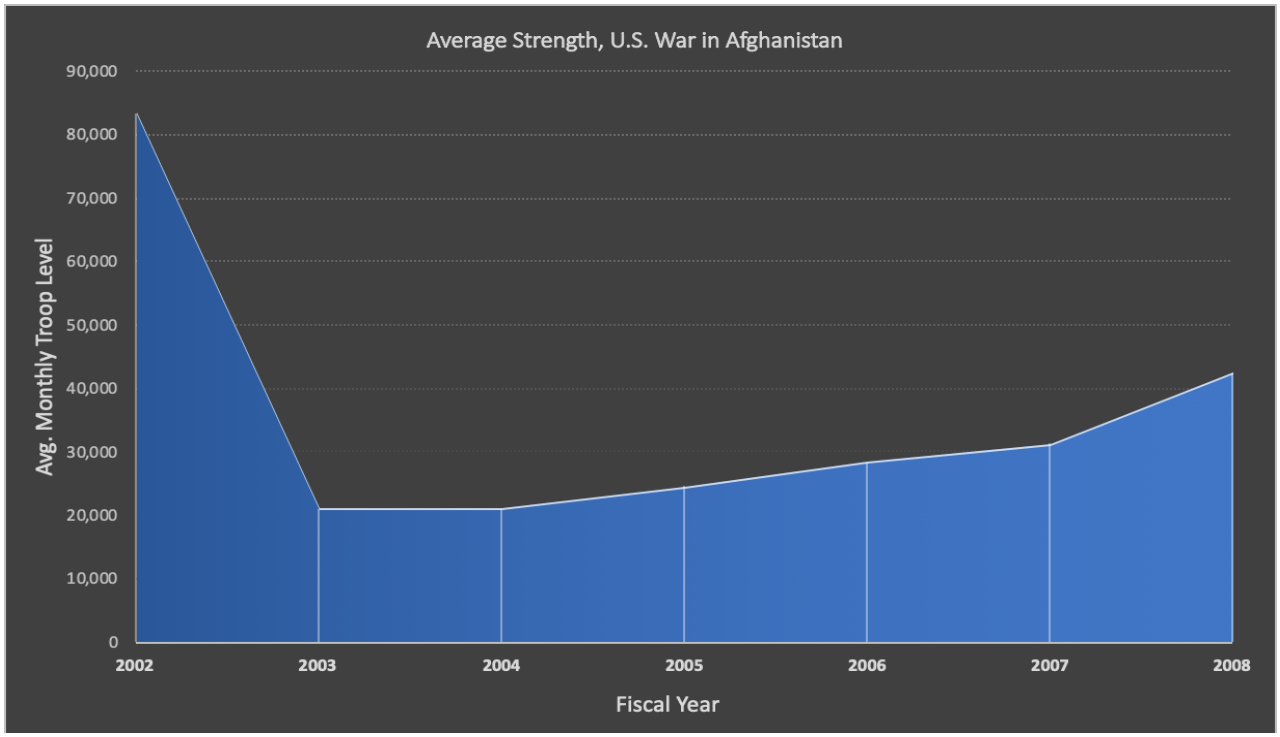
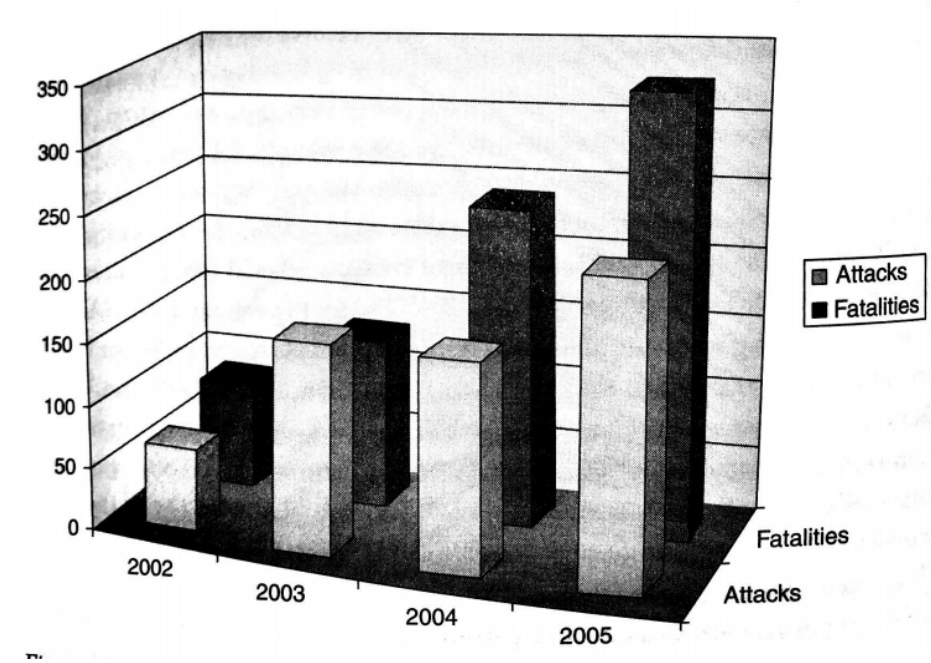


Figure 5: Average monthly troop strength, U.S. war in Afghanistan, FY 2002-2008. Average strength is a force measurement tool that includes "all military personnel providing theater support in the region, reflect the time personnel are deployed, and capture those present throughout the month."[209]

The Growth of the Insurgency



[209] Ibid., 23-24.

Figure 6: The Growth of the Insurgency. Between the Culminating Point and the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point, the number and severity of insurgent attacks increased significantly. The force response was delayed and insufficient.[210]

The 2001 Bonn Agreement established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The NATO-led international mission initially consisted of a 5,000 troop contingent limited to Kabul and nearby areas, but was expanded over time to encompass the whole country.[211] While U.S. forces – which made up the bulk of the ISAF presence in Afghanistan – were incrementally enlarged, the insurgency grew drastically. Until 2006, the insurgency's territorial growth was tracked by the U.S. government at the district level, but the maps have not been declassified.[212] However, the increase in violence that came with the Taliban's resurgence was tracked by the media and NGOs. As early as 2002, the Logar and Wardak provinces were threatened by members of the Taliban.[213]

Heightened levels of violence demonstrated the need for larger initial force deployment. Between 2002 and 2005, the number and severity of insurgent attacks more than quadrupled (see *Figure 6*). 2006, in particular, witnessed an unprecedented increase in violence as the Taliban grew in strength and capability. Statistics released by the U.S. military showed a more than 200% increase in bomb attacks and a five-fold increase in suicide attacks.[214] On September 8th, 2006, a suicide bomb detonation outside of the U.S. embassy in Kabul left 16 people dead, the most fatal assault up until that point since the 2001 invasion.[215] Overall, 2006 was the deadliest

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[210] Rubin, *Afghanistan From the Cold War Through the War on Terror*, 230.
[211] U.N. Security Council, "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions," December 5, 2001, accessed April 16, 2020, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_011205_AgreementProvisionalArrangementsinAfghanistan%28en%29.pdf, 9. See also: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "ISAF'S Mission in Afghanistan 2001-2014," September 1, 2015, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq /topics_69366.htm?selectedLocale=en.
[212] Seth G. Jones, e-mail message to author, March 11, 2020.
[213] Mohammad Osman Tariq Elias, "The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul - Logar and Wardak," in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights From the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 45-46.
[214] Andrew Gray, "Taliban Step Up Cross-Border Attacks- U.S. Military," *Reuters,* January 21, 2007, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL240273.
[215] It is worth noting that more recent attacks (those that occurred after the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point) have been far deadlier, with casualties numbering in the hundreds: "The Afghan Taliban," Center for International Security and Cooperation, accessed April 16, 2020, https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmil itants/profiles/afghan-taliban#highlight_text_8581.

year the country experienced since the arrival of U.S. forces.[216] Yet, the force size response was not commensurate with the Taliban's resurgence. In 2005 and 2006, the U.S. troop presence grew by only several thousand. By 2008, it was at approximately 30,000, less than a third of the eventual peak level in 2011 (see *Figure 4*).[217] While U.S. commanders requested more soldiers and politicians struggled with how to justify sending more troops to the public, the insurgency continued to grow.

Insurgent Force Size

As with the mujahideen during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, verified and complete force size estimates are unavailable. Given the nature of insurgency warfare, many combatants are involved in the war effort part-time. Due to the climate in Afghanistan, insurgents also tend to launch offensives during the spring and summer months, making yearly calculations difficult.[218] Furthermore, size estimates may not be a good indicator of the strength of an insurgency on their own. The asymmetric dynamic of guerilla warfare allows for a very small insurgent force to have a devastating effects on the counterinsurgents. But while it is less relevant than the number of U.S. troops deployed to Afghanistan, the amount of insurgents remains a useful gauge of the popularity and capability of the insurgency over time. Despite the lack of consensus on the Taliban's size, multiple sources indicate that between 2002 and 2007 – along with the heightened violence – the number of insurgents grew. While a thorough analysis of the reasons for this growth is beyond the scope of this study, it is well known that the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which border Afghanistan on the Pakistan side, became a sanctuary and recruitment area for the Taliban after the U.S. invasion.[219] A 2009 intelligence report said the Taliban had grown four-fold.[220] A 2008 estimate placed the total

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[216] Gray, "Taliban Step Up Cross-Border Attacks," *Reuters*.
[217] Kurtzleben, "Chart: How U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan Have Changed Under Obama," *National Public Radio.*
[218] "US: Taliban Has Grown Fourfold," *Al Jazeera,* October 9, 2009, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2009/10/200910918144839 62.html.
[219] Claudio Franco, "The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan," in *Decoding the Taliban*, ed. Giustozzi, 271.
[220] "US: Taliban Has Grown Fourfold," *Al Jazeera,* October 9, 2009.

number of insurgents at 7,000-11,000.[221] Their revenues, meanwhile, had expanded with the opium trade.[222] Failure to provide an adequate force size contributed to the prevention of an early containment of the insurgency, and may have contributed to the Taliban's resurgence.

The Powell Doctrine

While there are many factors that affect military outcomes, the doctrinal approach that is initially applied to a war effort is instrumental in laying the groundwork for military success or failure. The Clausewitzian approach to armed intervention emphasizes a concentrated, decisive force size. Colin Powell's intervention framework advocated for this approach, but it was not adopted. Consisting of a five-pronged analysis that calls for military intervention only if all five standards are met, Colin Powell derived his force intervention framework from that of his mentor and boss, former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. In essence, the Powell Doctrine considered military involvement in a foreign country as justified if it (1) involved a crucial national interest, (2) all other non-military avenues failed, (3) the planned use of force was decisive/overwhelming, (4) there was a well defined exit strategy, and (5) the intervention had international and public support.[223] Throughout his lengthy military and diplomatic career, Powell attempted to apply it to intervention decisions, and only achieved partial success in

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[221] Jonathan S. Landay and Saeed Shah, "9/11 7 Years Later, U.S. 'Safe,' South Asia in Turmoil," McClatchy Newspapers, September 10, 2008, accessed April 16, 2020, https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/article24499744.html.

[222] Research on the sources of the Taliban's wealth identifies the flourishing opium trade as a revenue stream that brings in as much as several hundred million USD annually. The Taliban also receive significant financial support from international backers that support the organization's mission. Donations from wealthy Saudi and Emirati donors, among others, are smuggled or laundered into Pakistan. A third major revenue stream comes from ransom payments from kidnappings, racketeering, and theft. The money is used to pay fighters and purchase weapons. See Arabinda Acharya, Syed Adnan Ali Shah Bukhari, and Sadia Sulaiman, "Making Money in the Mayhem: Funding Taliban Insurrection in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no.2, (2009): 95-108, DOI: 10.1080/10576100802 628314. Also Colin Clarke, *Terrorism, Inc.: The Financing of Terrorism, Insurgency, and Irregular Warfare*, (Praeger Security International, 2015).

[223] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Military and Diplomatic History*, s.v. "Powell Doctrine," edited by Paul S. Boyer. Oxford University Press, Inc., 2013.

shaping intervention policy. His opposition to limited force deployments was evident in a 1992 *Foreign Affairs* article on the post-Cold War military policy of the U.S.:

> We should always be skeptical when so-called experts suggest that all a particular crisis calls for is a little surgical bombing or a limited attack. When the "surgery" is over and the desired result is not obtained, a new set of experts then comes forward with talk of just a little escalation—more bombs, more men and women, more force. History has not been kind to this approach to warmaking.[224]

Clausewitz's influence on the Powell Doctrine is clearly evident in Powell's descriptions of his own views. Asked in a 2001 interview about his support for the use of overwhelming force in the first Gulf War, Powell appeared to speak of force size and "decisive points" through a Clausewitzian lens, saying, "I've always talked about decisive force, meaning you go to the point of decision and that's where you apply decisive force."[225] Likewise, in his 1995 memoir, *My American Journey*, Powell acknowledged his application of Clausewitzian theory to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. He opposed the intervention, asking "if it was worth going to war to liberate Kuwait. It was a Clausewitzian question which I posed so that the military would know what preparations it might have to make."[226] While he was unable to convince President George H.W. Bush about first attempting economic means to coerce Saddam, his "decisive force" policy was implemented; an army of 550,000 soldiers quickly decimated the Iraqi army, pushing it out of Kuwait.[227] The Powell Doctrine's emphasis on large force size was also evident

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[224] Colin L. Powell, "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs,* Winter 1992/93, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/ world/us-forces-challenges-ahead/p7508.

[225] "Powell's Doctrine, in Powell's Words," *Washington Post,* October 7, 2001, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/10/07/powells-doctrine-in-powells-words/e8fd25c 5-a97f-4550-8cbd-0588eb4a9d8e/. In this interview, Powell said the characterization of appropriate force size as "overwhelming" was incorrect, opting to call it "decisive" instead. Scholars before and since have continued to use "overwhelming."

[226] Colin Powell, *My American Journey*, (New York: Random House, 1995), 464.

[227] Walter LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009): 71-93, accessed April 17, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/25655610, 75-76.

two years earlier, when the Air Force and 20,000 U.S. troops successfully ousted Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega.[228]

Yet, despite the success of the Powell Doctrine, it was not implemented in Afghanistan. In 2001, Powell was the Secretary of State, a position that put him in the Situation Room alongside the Commander in Chief for key national security decisions. Furthermore, while he was best positioned to implement it, Powell was not the only one who advocated for a larger initial deployment. Richard Haass, Senior diplomat and coordinator of the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan under President Bush, said he strongly recommended an initial deployment of 20,000-25,000 troops, but his plan was turned down, as President Bush favored the light footprint approach Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney supported.[229] While the problematic aspects of the post-war Afghan government may have occurred independent of military progress, had Colin Powell's intervention framework – or a similar plan – been implemented, the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan likely would have been more successful.

Conclusion

Clausewitz acknowledged the potential political limitations on force size in Book 3, Chapter Eight ("Superiority of Numbers"), writing that force size would "be decided by the government...the general who is to command the army in the field usually has to accept the size of his forces as a given factor. Either he was not consulted in the matter, or circumstances may have prevented the raising of a sufficiently large force."[230] Likewise, Chapter 11 of Book 3 ("Concentration of Forces in Space") expresses a similar allusion to political influence on

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[228] Ibid., 74.
[229] Craig Whitlock, "Stranded Without a Strategy," *Washington Post,* December 9, 2019, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan- war-strategy/; LaFeber, "Rise and Fall of Colin Powell," 81, 84-85.
[230] Clausewitz, *On War*, 231.

military operations: “The effort needed to create military strength...does not always emanate from the general.”[231] In both the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan, political considerations repeatedly overruled the views of military leaders.

It is important to acknowledge that an increased force size could have led to negative consequences that would have hampered the counterinsurgency effort in each conflict. Greater foreign troop presence might have angered the populace and led to an increase in domestic support for the Taliban and other insurgent groups.[232] Likewise, more soldiers and attempts at concentrating them at decisive points may not have led to achieving military objectives. Afghanistan has been plagued with numerous issues – such as governance capability and corruption, all of which have made pursuing military aims difficult.[233] But it is true that, had a Clausewitzian force model been applied, there would have been a far greater troop presence at the beginning of the conflict, concentrated in the areas of the country that were most at risk for insurgent activity. This, in turn, may have resulted in a greater period of time for the Afghan state to grow without the danger of an insurgency.

[231] Ibid., 240.
[232] Rubin, *Afghanistan: From the Cold War Through the War on Terror*, 427.
[233] See Seth G. Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 7-40, accessed April 17, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/30129790.

Chapter III

Changing War Aims

"When the decision is made to employ our forces in combat, the committee should ask, [...] 'Are the political objectives clearly defined and achievable?" - General Jim Mattis, Speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee, January 2015[234]

In *On War*, Carl Von Clausewitz advocated for a careful parity between political and military war aims and means, warning that a failure to align the methods with the intended goals would lead to an inability to accomplish military objectives. Testing this concept with the wars in Afghanistan reveals its validity and highlights the shortcomings of two superpowers who incorrectly estimated their war aims and the costs it would take to achieve them. The Soviet and American experiences in Afghanistan were marred by significant miscalculations of their objectives both at the outset of each conflict, and as the wars progressed. Significantly, the mismatching – and at times, lack of clarity – between the methods and aims transpired in different ways for the Soviets and Americans.

During the crucial early period of the Soviet invasion, the Soviet leadership expected Soviet troops to play a cursory role in Afghanistan's internal affairs. As a result, they understated their military objectives and provided insufficient resources to address the dissension the DRA government was struggling to eradicate. Conversely, the U.S. initially overstated its objectives and failed to adequately clarify them for the military and political actors that were tasked with executing them. In both cases, the historical record reveals multiple attempts to modify the war aims in an effort to bring the goals closer to feasibility. But as Chapter Two already discussed,

[234] General James N. Mattis, "Statement of James N. Mattis Before the Senate Armed Services Committee," January 27, 2015, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mattis_01-27-15.pdf.

the number of forces deployed and their lack of concentration never matched the needs of each counterinsurgency.

Clausewitz on Allies Providing Military Support

In Book 8, Chapter 6 ("The Effect of the Political Aim on the Military Objective"), Clausewitz discusses pacts of mutual support between allies.[235] His observations are remarkable for their insights on the military relations between two states. In particular, Clausewitz pays attention to the nature of the relationship between a country that sends its troops to assist an ally, and the country that receives this support. The state that deploys its troops – usually a contingent of thirty to forty thousand, in Clausewitz's estimation – in support of another country's cause, retains control of its army: "The auxiliary force, usually operates under its own commander; he is dependent only on his own government."[236] For the assisting state, "the affair is more like a business deal," and "even when both [states] share a major interest, action is clogged with diplomatic reservations."[237] Clausewitz appears to want to present this uneven relationship as a principle of war, acknowledging that it is "a practice deeply rooted in the frailties and shortcomings of the human race."[238] Yet it appears that he stops short of doing so because of his personal experiences.

Having witnessed the rise of Napoleon, Clausewitz came to the conclusion that there were certain circumstances in which an extreme danger forced nations "to act in a natural manner" and form strong, genuine alliances.[239] Barring such unique developments – comparable perhaps only to the rise of Hitler during the Second World War – Clausewitz's perspective on

[235] Clausewitz, *On War*, 728.
[236] Ibid., 728.
[237] Ibid., 728-729.
[238] Ibid., 729.
[239] Ibid.

troop deployments in allied nations highlights the unwillingness of countries to make their neighbor's wars their own. This viewpoint is tied to one of *On War*'s most central concepts: the primacy of politics over armed conflict.[240] Political motivations are at the core of war aims, since they provide the meaning and parameters for war. According to Antulio Echevarria, "Clausewitz demonstrated that, without the overarching influence of purpose, the elements of violence, aim, and effort have no inherent logical limits."[241] But Clausewitz's theory of war did not merely identify the conjunction of war and politics. Throughout *On War*, he explained how the alignment of political objectives and the use of force could work to a nation's benefit, and how errors along this nexus could lead to military failure.

In Book One, Chapter One ("What is War?"), Clausewitz writes that the political objectives – or aims – "determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires."[242] While the political aims may determine the amount of effort required to achieve them, this does not mean that this amount of effort will be applied. Clausewitz cautions that political objectives in warfare cannot be evaluated absent the interaction of two warring parties. They must be evaluated through "the influences [political objectives] can exert upon the forces it is meant to move."[243] According to Christopher Griffin, "Clausewitz argues that the political goals must necessarily limit the military objectives. His theory goes beyond war as a continuation of politics to show that politics will in fact limit war."[244] However, a close reading of Clausewitz suggests that this is how he believed political aims *should* limit war, as opposed to what may actually occur.

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[240] Waldman, "Clausewitz and the Study of War," *Defence Studies*.
[241] Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 64.
[242] Clausewitz, *On War*, 90.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Griffin, "From Limited War to Limited Victory," 452.

In Chapter Three, Book Eight ("Scale of the Military Objective and of the Effort To Be Made"), Clausewitz makes a seemingly instructive statement about the relationship between political objectives and the use of force that is of an actualistic nature: "The degree of force that must be used against the enemy depends on the scale of political demands on either side. These demands… would show what efforts each must take; but they seldom are fully known."[245] In the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the political demands of the mujahideen were well known. While the factions that battled the Soviets and D.R.A. forces followed different strands of Islam and were often at odds with one another, they all sought to will the Soviets out of Afghanistan and overthrow the communist regime in Kabul. Likewise, in the U.S. war in Afghanistan, the Taliban were public about their intentions to seize power from the Karzai government, push the U.S. and its allies out of Afghanistan, and enforce a strict interpretation of Sharia law. The difficulty in both wars arose largely with the incongruity and/or unintelligibility of the counterinsurgents' own war aims.

The instructive nature of Clausewitz's views on war aims is further seen in the introductory note Clausewitz added after writing the first draft of *On War*. While his planned revision of the text was never completed due to his untimely death, his intention in writing this addendum was to introduce the guiding principles that would shape his edits. Clausewitz wrote:

> War can be of two kinds, in the sense that either the objective is to overthrow the enemy - to render him politically helpless or militarily impotent, thus forcing him to sign whatever peace we please; or merely to occupy some of his frontier-districts so that we can annex them or use them for bargaining at the peace negotiations...the fact that the aims of the two types are quite different must be clear at all times, and their points of irreconcilability brought out.[246]

[245] Clausewitz, *On War*, 707.
[246] Ibid., 77.

Here, Clausewitz lays out a dichotomy of war aims that acknowledges a variance in military objectives. The examples he provides – complete overthrow of the enemy, or a partial occupation – set up a spectrum of potential aims, which he mentions in Book One, Chapter One: "Wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation."[247] In *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat*, military historian Colonel Trevor Nevitt Dupuy offers a concise synthesis of Clausewitz's conceptual war aims framework:

> War can be total, or War can be limited. When the ends of war are total (i.e., the overthrow of the opponent or survival against such an effort), the means will be violent to the utmost capability of the contestants. If the ends of war are less than the overthrow of the enemy, then the means will be less violent.[248]

Dupuy's summation could be enhanced by incorporating an additional facet Clausewitz identifies in the expansive discussion of armed conflict in Book One, Chapter One ("The Diverse Nature of War"). In this section, Clausewitz asserts that "more powerful and inspiring… motives for war" lead to a greater emphasis on "the destruction of the enemy," which leads to a parity between military and political aims, with the war taking on a more military focus.[249] Conversely, "the less intense the motives, the less will the military's natural tendency to violence coincide with political directives… the conflict will seem increasingly political in character."[250] This additional element provides a complete picture for evaluating the changing war aims of the belligerents in the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan (see *Figure 1*). The rest of this chapter will identify how Soviet and American war aims did not match the means employed between their respective culminating points and counterinsurgent acceptance points.

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[247] Ibid., 91.
[248] T.N. Dupuy, *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat* (UK: Leo Cooper, 1992), 24.
[249] Clausewitz, *On War,* 99.
[250] Ibid.

Figure 1. Clausewitz's spectrum of war aims. If a war was fought for limited aims, such as obtaining leverage for peace negotiations, then it should be a more political conflict that utilizes limited means, such as occupying several provinces to gain an advantage. If a war was fought for unlimited or very broad aims, such as disarming an enemy or completely breaking their will to contest one's power, then the military and political objectives should align entirely, and the military's precedence would make the conflict appear markedly less political.[251]

Soviet War Aims at the Culminating Point

When the Politburo decided to intervene in Afghanistan, they established very limited war aims, despite being cognizant of the rapidly declining security situation the D.R.A. government was experiencing throughout the country. While the Soviet military was able to meet these initial objectives, they were unable to achieve the broader political and military aims that they were tasked with immediately after the culminating point. The main reason for this was a gross overestimation of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan's own military capabilities, and an underestimation of the threat posed by the mujahideen.

The Herat uprising was an indicator that the Soviet Union's aims – and the means they planned to use to achieve them – were not reflective of the situation on the ground. Prior to March 1979 – nine months before the Soviet invasion – the city of Herat was home to many of the Soviet advisors who assisted the fledgling communist regime in its social, economic, and political development.[252] Geographically distant from Pakistan and the tribal areas that were

[251] Clausewitz presents the major parts of this concept in his introductory "Note of 10 July 1827" and throughout "Book One, Chapter One: What is War?"
[252] Vladimir Snegirev and Valery Samunin, *The Dead End: The Road to Afghanistan*, trans. ed. Svetlana Savranskaya and Malcolm Byrne, (National Security Archive 2012), accessed April 18, 2020, 353-354, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB396/Full%20Text%20Virus%20A.pdf.

already dissenting from the Taraki government, Herat's military division (the 17th Infantry) was considered especially reliable by the Soviet advisors who resided in the city.[253] Yet, on March 14, 1979, Herat became the site of the first major anticommunist uprising that resulted in Soviet casualties.

While what sparked the revolt is unknown, the historical record indicates the uprising started in the rural outskirts of the city and quickly spread to the urban parts of the province.[254] The protestors, chanting anticommunist slogans, attacked the homes of PDPA officials and Soviets, killing who they could find and setting fire to their homes and the Party buildings.[255] The violent rebellion surprised both Moscow and Kabul, but the aspect that was perhaps most ominous was the treachery of the 17th Infantry Division:

> Even in the division, which was considered to be one of the most reliable and loyal to the PDPA, the influence of the mullahs had proven stronger than the soldiers' dedication to the new Afghan regime. After the artillery units fired upon the crowd approaching the military base, the cannons were turned around and began to fire upon the barracks and the base itself. Two days later, the detachments of almost the entire division had either sided with the rebels or simply deserted.[256]

While the Soviets and DRA troops took back control of the suburbs and main road, they never reclaimed the old city from the mujahideen.[257] Beyond the transformation of Herat from a stable province to a hotbed of insurgent activity, this initial uprising also articulated all the elements of future Soviet miscalculation regarding political and military war aims. For one, the rebellion showed the appeal of the mujahideen's message to a broad swath of Afghanistan's civilians. Likewise, it demonstrated the quickness with which violence could overtake the limited

[253] Ibid., 354-355.
[254] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 6.
[255] Snegirev and Samunin, *The Dead End: The Road to Afghanistan*, 353-354.
[256] Ibid., 356.
[257] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 165.

force size on the ground. The most foreboding message the Herat uprising sent out, however, was the unreliability of Afghan government troops, many of whom had a greater allegiance to their faith than to the PDPA's political agenda, or were willing to switch sides for their own safety. By initially sending in a limited contingent of troops to address an unlimited war effort in which civilians and federal troops were willing to join the insurgents, the Soviet Union failed to follow Clausewitz's war aims framework.

The incongruity between Soviet war aims and "the scale of political demands" by the mujahideen became even more apparent when the Soviet army reached its culminating point in February 1980.[258] At this point in the war, the Soviets had secured the major cities, communication centers, and roads, but had no plans to pursue the resistance fighters in the insurgent hotspots across the country. This task was instead given to the badly equipped and poorly trained DRA forces.[259] Beyond the lack of soldiers after numerous desertions, the DRA army had a deficient training program and struggled with the operation of Soviet weaponry.[260] Likewise, the officer class was rife with nepotism and corruption; the possibility of mujahideen sympathizers across the ranks made the Soviets reluctant to share intel and work closely with their Afghan counterparts.[261] Nevertheless, as Lester Grau and Michael Gress observed, the DRA forces "were supposed to take on the bulk of the combat."[262]

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[258] Clausewitz, *On War*, 707.
[259] This is covered in greater detail in Chapter 1 (see "The Soviet Culminating Point: February 1980") and Chapter 2 (see "Size of the Armed Forces"). Had the Soviets successfully been able to pursue the insurgents in the rural parts of the country, the culminating point would have occurred later than February 1980.
[260] Russian General Staff, *Soviet-Afghan War,* 48-52. In contrast, the mujahideen surprised CIA analysts with how well they were able to use high-tech weapons and communication devices to destroy Soviet convoys without CIA assistance. Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War,* 407.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., 52.

Beyond the inability of the domestic forces to employ the means necessary to contest the mujahideen, the Soviet army's own troops were not prepared for an expansion of the war aims at the time they were deployed. The first regiments were drawn from the two military districts nearest to Afghanistan, which had never been tasked with any deployment of this size.[263] Furthermore, in an effort to maintain the secrecy of the operation, they were told they were being mobilized only for training exercises, which resulted in a hastily-created group of units that were deficient in specialists and were filled mostly with inexperienced, poorly-trained troops.[264] After February 1980, when the Soviet leadership realized it would have to lead the way in conducting counterinsurgency operations, its own army was not prepared for the endeavor.

Soviet War Aims at the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point

Up until the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point in January 1987, the Soviets expanded their war aims to include directly engaging the insurgents outside of major cities and roads. While this led to an expansion of means with the increase in force size and the precedence of military operations throughout the country, it was insufficient to end the insurgency, as the mujahideen were by then extensively supported by the United States and others. The counterinsurgent acceptance point marked a return to a more political conflict; the DRA modified its war aims and began to abandon a strictly military solution to the war by seeking a political compromise.

Attempts to remove the insurgent threat emanating from Pakistan provide support for Clausewitz's war aims concept. After an expansion of the military aims failed, the Soviet Union pressed for a political solution to the issue. As early as September 1981, Soviet intelligence was

[263] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy,* 122.
[264] Ibid.

aware of the uptick in the arms supplies and training the mujahideen were receiving from their allies, and attempted to appropriately adjust their objectives.[265] The following year, General Victor F. Ermakov was tasked with sealing off Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan and Iran, through which flowed the insurgents and arms. Given the extensive length of the border and the many entry points, this proved impossible.[266] Clausewitz's war aims framework suggests that the failure of a military solution would result in a switch from primarily military means to more political ones, which is what occurred.

Throughout the war, stemming the tide of insurgents and supplies from Pakistan was a key military objective, but the failure of expanded military aims to address the issue meant the political sphere took precedence, and became a limiting factor on the military goals. During a 1985 meeting of Communist Party officials in General Secretary Gorbachev's office, Gorbachev told his colleagues about his attempts to exert diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to end its support for the insurgency at a recent meeting, saying he "put quite serious pressure on [President of Pakistan] Zia Ul Haq," telling him "it is precisely from those camps located inside Pakistan, from Pakistani territory, that the main war is being waged against those Afghan people friendly to us, as well as against the limited contingent of Soviet troops."[267] Gorbachev told President Zia that Pakistan would be threatened by the Soviet Union if they did not cease their support for the

[265] "A Report by Soviet Military Intelligence," September 1, 1981, accessed April 19, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, trans. Gary Goldberg, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111796.
[266] Alexander Lyakhovsky, Трагедия и Доблесть Афгана [*Tragedy and Valor of the Afghan]* (Moscow: Iskona, 1995), 198.
[267] "Conference of Secretaries of the CC CPSU, Held in the Office of CC CPSU General Secretary Comrade M. S. Gorbachev," March 15, 1985, accessed April 19, 2020, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Dmitriĭ Antonovich Volkogonov papers, 1887-1995, mm97083838, Reel 17, Container 25, accessed April 19, 2020, trans. Svetlana Savranskaya, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121966.

mujahideen.[268] The following year, "the Politburo discussed conducting a 'secret exchange of ideas' with Pakistan regarding the possibility of expanding the Kabul government by inviting émigrés to participate. These talks expanded through 1987, and included meetings on the deputy-ministerial level."[269] While these diplomatic overtures were ultimately unsuccessful, the prioritization of political means after the failure of military operations supports Clausewitz's war aims framework, and indicated the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point was on the horizon.

Clausewitz's connection between a decrease in war aims and an increase in the political nature of the conflict was also apparent in the diplomatic bargaining that defined the later period of the war. A CPSU memorandum for October 1986 links the drawdown of 15 Soviet regiments deployed to Afghanistan with "corresponding steps from [the Chinese] who are participating in an undeclared war against the DRA."[270] By this point in the war, the Soviets were no longer focused on clearly defined military objectives such as establishing control over areas of insurgent activity or sealing the border with Pakistan. Instead, they were occupied with political *quid pro quo* as they attempted to secure the DRA government – a more limited objective than ending the insurgency – while planning their withdrawal.

Militarily, the period leading up to the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point saw an increase in the number of DRA and DRA-led missions.[271] As the 40th army had done when it first intervened in Afghanistan, the Soviets attempted to play a supportive role in military operations against the mujahideen after years of training and equipping their Afghan

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[268] Ibid.
[269] Artemy Kalinovsky, "Old Politics, New Diplomacy: The Geneva Accords and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Cold War History* 8, no. 3 (2008): 381-404, accessed April 19, 2020, DOI: 10.1080/14682740802222213.
[270] "CPSU Memorandum," October 24, 1986, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien- und Massenorganisationen im Bundesarchiv, Berlin, DY30/2383, 122, accessed April 19, 2020, trans. David Wolff, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117270.
[271] Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 143.

counterparts. While the transfer of military objectives to the DRA forces can be seen as an effort to maintain the same war aims, ceding the objectives to a lesser military force because of the USSR's military failure and political stresses amounts to an abandonment of the war aims. As Artemy Kalinovsky described, "By early 1987 it had started to become clear that the situation in Afghanistan was worse than Moscow had thought. The economy was ruined, Najib[ullah] was isolated in the government, and a withdrawal was no closer than it had been in October 1985."[272] The National Reconciliation Policy and transfer of military responsibility to the DRA Army were the signs of an increasingly limited, political conflict.

Clausewitz's war aims framework is not only supported by the trajectory of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, but it also reveals some nuances in the failed Soviet war effort. The Soviets experienced particular difficulties when they sought to wage a limited war with nearly unlimited aims. Their attempts at expanding their limited means were insufficient to achieve their objectives. This led to a lowering of military and political aims. As the political demands were scaled back, so was the amount of force used, and the war took on a more political nature. However, this did not mean that the Soviets capitulated to the demands of the insurgents. Through their financial and arms support of the DRA, they continued to support the war against the mujahideen after the withdrawal.[273]

U.S. War Aims at the Culminating Point

In contrast to the Soviet Union's relatively modest initial war aims, the United States and its allies announced nearly unlimited political and military objectives upon invading Afghanistan. The means deployed after the Culminating Point in December 2001, however, were

[272] Kalinovsky, "Old Politics, New Diplomacy," 383.
[273] Yousaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap*, 215-216.

too limited to address the aims. Likewise, the political objectives were unclear for those in charge of implementing them, which contributed to a gradual and uncoordinated retreat from the unlimited aims. This led up to the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point in September 2007, which – as with the Soviets in January 1987 – marked a shift away from a military resolution to a political agreement.

President George W. Bush's announcement of the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in October 2001 presented the U.S. military with a unique set of long-term objectives that it was unprepared for. During the previous decade, the U.S. Department of Defense had been developing the capabilities of the armed forces specifically to handle two major theater conflicts simultaneously, as opposed to developing capabilities to address limited guerilla wars.[274] Furthermore, OEF was announced less than a month after the events of 9/11 and was part of the global War on Terror, a far-reaching and vague endeavor. As David Kassing and Walter Perry observed, for military leaders at the time, "only cursory attention was given to planning post-conflict operations. The objective in the 1990s was to push the enemy back into his own territory, not to depose his government and replace it."[275] Perhaps for these reasons – and the overwhelming shock of the 9/11 tragedy – the long-term aims set out in October 2001 were broad and unclear.

Furthermore, in contrast to Clausewitz's war aims framework, the political objectives did not lend themselves to military aims. President Bush's address to a joint session of Congress on September 20th, 2001 laid out the thematic aims of the War on Terror. "Any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile

[274] Walter L. Perry and David Kassing, *Toppling the Taliban: Air-Ground Operations in Afghanistan, October 2001–June 2002,* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015, accessed April 19, 2020, 2, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR381.html.
[275] Ibid., 2-3.

regime," he said, promising that the transnational conflict would "not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."[276] The objectives laid out by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in his 2002 report to the President and Congress were more specific, but were still broad enough to suggest that the conflict in Afghanistan would be an unlimited war, thereby calling for nearly unlimited means: "The Secretary of Defense outlined the objectives of the military operations:

(1) To make clear to the Taliban leaders and their supporters that harboring terrorists is unacceptable and carries a price;
(2) To acquire intelligence to facilitate future operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban regime that harbors the terrorists;
(3) To develop relationships with groups in Afghanistan that oppose the Taliban regime and the foreign terrorists that they support;
(4) To make it increasingly difficult for the terrorists to use Afghanistan freely as a base of operation;
(5) To alter the military balance over time by denying to the Taliban the offensive systems that hamper the progress of the various opposition forces; and
(6) To provide humanitarian relief to Afghans suffering truly oppressive living conditions under the Taliban regime.[277]

For the short-term goals – removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan – the U.S. was able to achieve them utilizing limited means. U.S. Special Forces joined members of the Northern Alliance in attacking Taliban strongholds through a series of offensive operations and airstrikes.[278] But the long-term objectives, which were a mix of political and military goals, proved to be much more difficult to achieve. The 2002 report alluded to the nation-building

[276] George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," Speech, Washington D.C., U.S. Capitol, September 20, 2001, accessed April 19, 2020, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.
[277] Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress,* 2002, accessed April 19, 2020, 28, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/annual_reports/2002_DoD_AR.pdf?ver=2014-06-2 4-15 3732-117.
[278] See Chapter One, "The Culminating Point in the U.S. War in Afghanistan: December 2001." Also, see Doug Stanton, *Horse Soldiers: The Extraordinary Story of a Band of U. S. Soldiers Who Rode to Victory in Afghanistan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

aspect of the war, adding: "Even after the fall of the Taliban regime, the task in Afghanistan is far from complete… the United States will help the new government of Afghanistan."[279] The key element of that were lacking – which Clausewitz's war aims framework implies as a necessary part of any military endeavor – is the clarity of aims, and the political and military means to reach them.

The Afghanistan Papers, released in 2019 as part of a Freedom of Information suit by the Washington Post, shed light on the lack of clear war aims the U.S. military struggled with immediately after the culminating point. The Papers consisted of numerous private interviews the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) held with the officials who oversaw the war effort, as part of the agency's advisory project entitled "Lessons Learned."[280] Investigative journalist Craig Whitlock explained:

> At the outset...the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan had a clear, stated objective – to retaliate against al-Qaeda and prevent a repeat of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Yet the interviews show that as the war dragged on, the goals and mission kept changing… Fundamental disagreements went unresolved. Some U.S. officials wanted to use the war to turn Afghanistan into a democracy. Others wanted to transform Afghan culture and elevate women's rights. Still others wanted to reshape the regional balance of power among Pakistan, India, Iran and Russia.[281]

The confusion surrounding the war aims only increased with time. President Obama adopted a different strategy that featured a troop surge and a tight timeline for withdrawal, but the war aims were never constructively reassessed.[282] In one interview with SIGAR, former Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns remarked, "After '03-04, once we were fully engaged in

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[279] Rumsfeld, *Annual Report,* 29.
[280] Craig Whitlock, "At War With the Truth," *Washington Post,* December 9, 2019, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afg hanistan-war-confi dential-documents/.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Whitlock, "Stranded Without a Strategy," *Washington Post.*

both wars [Iraq and Afghanistan], I can't remember us ever saying, 'Should we be there? Are we being useful? Are we succeeding?"[283] An unidentified NATO liaison put it more bluntly in his interview with a SIGAR official: "It was never fully clear in our own minds what the established goals and timelines were."[284]

Despite the misgivings many government officials had about the lack of direction in the war in Afghanistan, the lack of clear war aims remained a serious issue between the culminating point and the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point. The Powell Doctrine – the most cohesive alternative to the actual intervention in Afghanistan – may have led to different outcomes. In addition to the Doctrine's emphasis on the concentration and use of decisive force – discussed in Chapter 2 – its other prongs called for concrete political and military objectives and a clearly defined exit strategy.[285] However, due to the back seat role Powell played in the intervention as a result of Secretary Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney's involvement, it was not given serious consideration.[286]

U.S. War Aims at the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point

By September 2007, the war in Afghanistan had intensified to the point that Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced his intention to seek peace talks with the Taliban.[287] At the time, the United States and its allies had begun to realize that they could not win a war in which limited means were employed to achieve nearly unlimited aims. While military objectives remained a major part of the war, the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point marked a transition to a

[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.
[285] "Powell Doctrine," *Oxford Encyclopedia of American Military and Diplomatic History*, 2013.
[286] See LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly.*
[287] See Chapter One, "The Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point in the U.S. War in Afghanistan: September 2007."

politically oriented conflict in which the U.S. could not seek a resolution to the war that left Afghanistan without a Taliban presence.

Problems with clear objectives persisted – and may have even intensified – during this period. As Clausewitz's war aims framework suggests, the result of unclear aims was a widening incongruence between political and military goals. In contrast to the first few years of the war, when Afghanistan was receiving less aid than most other recent humanitarian crises, the amount of economic and humanitarian assistance dispersed by the United States jumped to over USD$1 billion in 2007 in an effort to shore up the political objectives of the United States.[288] Yet, there were only small troop increases in 2007.[289] Evidently, the light footprint approach was not abandoned until President Obama took office, delaying a troop surge until 2009, a date that some experts say was too late to be effective.[290]

The public nature of President Karzai seeking to negotiate with the Taliban leadership should have been a sign that the conflict was becoming more limited and political in nature, but the complexity of U.S. war aims and the failure to acknowledge a lack of military progress prevented this. The result was a significant departure from the trajectory suggested by Clausewitz's war aims framework. Despite the failure of military means, political attempts at conflict resolution were stymied by U.S. and coalition members. When President Karzai called

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[288] "Map of Foreign Assistance: Afghanistan," accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.foreignassistance.gov /explore. The amount of aid that flooded Afghanistan as well as the way in which some of it was spent has also been strongly criticized, see Sarah Almukhtar and Rod Nordland, "What Did the U.S. Get for $2 Trillion in Afghanistan?" *New York Times,* September 9, 2019, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.nyti mes.com/interactive/2019/12/09/world/middleeast/afghanistan-war-cost.html?searchResultPosition=1&mtrref=.

[289] Peter Baker, "Additional Troop Increase Approved," *Washington Post,* March 11, 2007, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001397.html.

[290] Kurtzleben, "Chart: How U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan Have Changed Under Obama," *National Public Radio;* Todd Greentree, "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing: U.S. Performance and the Institutional Dimension of Strategy in Afghanistan," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no.3 (2013): 337, 352, accessed April 19, 2020, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2013.764518.

for negotiations in September 2007, he was opposed by officials in Washington.[291] This response by Afghanistan's allies mirrored earlier instances in which the Taliban could have been engaged with diplomatically.

In the international conferences and meetings held between 2001 to 2003 to construct an Afghan government, the Taliban were left out despite the readiness of some leaders to participate in the talks.[292] Likewise, in January 2007, when President Karzai expressed willingness to "open the door for talks and negotiations" without mentioning the Taliban by name, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said, "You can't negotiate with them. I can't imagine that NATO would negotiate with people who kill children or teachers in school."[293] As a result, by failing to shift to political means after the failure of military operations, the U.S. and their allies departed from Clausewitz's war aims framework. Considering it was not until 2010 that the U.S. expressed any willingness to pursue peace talks, this could potentially be responsible for the extension of the conflict.

Further evidence of this can be found in the many public statements made by senior U.S. military officials around the time of the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point. Despite widespread disillusionment with the war effort, the U.S. and its allies continued to present the counterinsurgency and state-building efforts as successes. In September 2008, while privately asking for larger troop deployments to stem the number of insurgent attacks, Major General Jeffrey Schloesser said, "We're making some steady progress."[294] By intentionally not allowing

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[291] Ewen Macaskill and Simon Tisdall, "White House shifts Afghan Strategy Towards Talks With Taliban," *The Guardian,* July 19, 2010, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/19/o bama-afghanistan-strategy-taliban-negotiate.
[292] Whitlock, "Stranded Without a Strategy," *Washington Post.*
[293] Sayed Salahuddin, "Karzai Offers Talks with Taliban to End Bloodshed," *Reuters,* January 29, 2007, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghan-reconciliation-idUSISL23475200701 29.
[294] Whitlock, "At War With the Truth," *Washington Post.*

non-military means to take precedence after multiple military failures to counter the insurgency, the U.S. prolonged the time it took for both peace negotiations to become a viable option, and for war aims to be reduced to match the reality on the ground.[295] While both of these results occurred after the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point, the "holding out" period was not a strategic effort to better position the U.S. and allies against the Taliban. Instead, it signified a procedural failure to appropriately assess the progress of military and political objectives, which Clausewitz's framework requires.

Conclusion

Both Soviet and American war aims in Afghanistan suffered from incompatibility with the progress – or lack thereof – that was occuring in each conflict. The Soviets incorrectly expected the DRA army to handle the insurgency on two occasions: when they first invaded, and when they committed to withdrawal. As Clausewitz's war aims framework suggests, their own efforts at achieving broad military objectives – controlling all parts of the country, sealing the porous border – proved unsuccessful, leading to the war's evolution to a more political conflict, marked by negotiations and diplomatic *quid pro quo*. Unlike the Soviets, the U.S. did not expect their Afghan allies to lead the military operations once the insurgency began to spread throughout the provinces, but they failed – or refused – to recognize when their own COIN efforts were not making genuine progress. The reluctance to pursue non-military means of

[295] While outside of the scope of this project, there is clear evidence of further reduction of U.S. war aims after the counterinsurgent acceptance point: In 2009, President Obama publicly stated his intention to pass military objectives over to the Afghan army: "The days of providing a blank check are over… It must be clear that Afghans will have to take responsibility for their security and that America has no interest in fighting an endless war in Afghanistan." Barack Obama, Speech, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, December 1, 2009, accessed April 20, 2020, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president- address-nation-way-forwa rd-afghanistan-and-pakistan. Furthermore, in 2009, the French ISAF forces announced that their military objectives in Kapisa province could not include "any idea of wanting to militarily control the entire zone." Griffin, *From Limited War to Limited Victory*, 460.

conflict resolution, and the influx of aid during and after the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point may have prolonged the trend suggested by Clausewitz's war aims framework, and seen in the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Beyond allowing us to better understand shifts within the Soviet and American war plans that may not be apparent without a conceptual framework, the Afghanistan case studies support a different perspective on Clausewitz's major contribution to the study of war: the view that armed conflict is a continuation of policy by other means. The wars in Afghanistan show the bidirectional nature of his observation. War is an extension of politics, but when war does not go in one's favor, a return to politics is – or should be – attempted. While this concept may appear simple, in the U.S. war the denial and concealment of military failure prevented the pursuit of negotiations at the CAP, which likely contributed to the prolongation of the conflict.

Conclusion

"Guerilla war does not fit into the popular image of high-tech future war, but it may well be the future war that a high-tech country finds itself fighting." - Brigadier General Theodore C. Mataxis[296]

Summary of Findings

By viewing the concepts in *On War* in connection to modern conflicts, we can see contemporary expressions of timeless principles about warfare and international relations. Seeking to connect current scholarship about Afghanistan and other insurgencies to Clausewitz can bolster more recent analyses that offer explanations for these conflicts. There is a lot of research that investigates the cultural, political, and military problems that have plagued Afghanistan for decades, but as Clausewitz said himself, "Whoever relies purely on the perspectives of his own times is inclined to treat what is most recent as best."[297] This study sought to bridge the gap between today's research and classical military theory. Since *On War* is an unfinished text, extracting its conceptual frameworks required an intensive study of its many parts and the interpretations of experts on Clausewitz's life and views. The three aspects of Clausewitz's theory of war that were tested in this study revealed where the Soviets and Americans erred, and also where contemporary war outstripped Clausewitzian theory of its use.

In Chapter 1, I identified the potential culminating point – defined as the furthest point of defensible extension within a campaign or an entire war – for the Soviet and American forces in Afghanistan. I concluded that the armies were militarily best situated in February 1980 and December 2001, respectively. These dates marked when prospects for both counterinsurgents were at their peak, but they also signified when the insurgency became a viable threat and

[296] Theodore C. Mataxis, "Foreword," in *The Soviet-Afghan War*, xiii.
[297] Thomas Waldman, "Clausewitz and the Study of War," 367.

unsuccessful COIN operations commenced. Since culminating points are not applicable to insurgent warfare, I presented an effectual equivalent called the Counterinsurgent Acceptance Point (CAP), defined as the point in time when the counterinsurgent first publicly announces a willingness to negotiate with the insurgent faction. Since the CAP signifies an important departure from the initial objectives to defeat the insurgency militarily, it represents the denial of the counterinsurgents' will by the insurgents. I concluded that January 1987 and September 2007 were the CAPs for the Soviets and Americans, respectively. Taken together, these four dates allow for a standardized model for comparative analysis that identifies when the U.S. and Soviet Union were similarly positioned in Afghanistan.

In Chapter 2, I evaluated Clausewitz's view that invading forces require overwhelming mass and concentration at a "decisive point" to have the best chance at defeating their enemies. I argued that this view applied to Afghanistan. Both culminating points represented the decisive point opportunity, and both counterinsurgents failed to deploy enough troops at this time against the opinions of Grand Marshal Ogarkov and General Colin Powell, the leading military officials. Instead, troops were kept in the most stable parts of the country, and brief forays into rebel territory did not lead to the collapse of the insurgency, as the resistance fighters would return to the area upon the departure of the counterinsurgents. Analysis of troop deployments and associated factors between the culminating point and the CAP revealed how both superpowers escalated the conflict only after the insurgencies became larger, better trained, and well funded.

In Chapter 3, I considered the decisions made by the U.S. and USSR in the context of Clausewitz's instructive war aims framework, which called for a strict parity between means and military and political objectives. The spectral framework also suggested an increase in the political nature of a conflict as the aims and means became more limited. Paul Schuurman's

articulation of the war aims framework summarizes the intended flow of conflict, as detailed in *On War*: "Politics is the context for a series of escalating and de-escalating mechanisms that can drive the intensity of war upward and downward."[298] I concluded that the Soviet Union initially underestimated the military aims when they invaded in December 1979, only to later revise their objectives while keeping the number of troops committed below the necessary amount. In contrast, the U.S. initially overstated their objectives while also devoting insufficient resources. Furthermore, whereas the Soviet Union began to negotiate soon after the CAP, the United States withheld its support for negotiations after the political arm of the counterinsurgency, the local government, announced it was willing to hold talks with the Taliban.

Clausewitz was correct in his descriptions of inter-state military relations. For both the Soviet and American leadership, the war in Afghanistan did not transcend into the rare type of conflict that would cause one state to wholly adopt another's cause as its own. Ultimately, the Soviets knew that while there would be negative consequences for the spread of communist ideology, the instability and even downfall of a neighboring communist regime would not threaten their own sovereignty. The U.S., along with its international coalition of allies, remains concerned for the stability of the Afghan state, but has wavered on the amount of aid and length of time it is willing to commit to the troubled regime. In these contemporary conflicts, it appears that the term "asymmetry" has defined not only the type of warfare that is seen on the ground, but also the differences between the motivations of intervening powers and client states.

Beyond Clausewitz

This study sought to compare the Soviet and American wars in Afghanistan in order to evaluate Clausewitz's applicability to contemporary conflicts and better understand both wars.

[298] Paul Schuurman, "Clausewitz on Real War," 2014, *Peace Review* 26 (3): 376.

False equivalencies and parallels often plague events that bear regional or contextual similarities to one another. Seeking to avoid overstatement of the congruence between both wars, the parallels and divergences of how the Soviets and Americans waged war in Afghanistan were emphasized only when the historical record profoundly indicated them.

The findings suggest that a more sober initial assessment of the force size necessary to handle a conflict with the potential of becoming an insurgency could have led to different outcomes for the Soviets and Americans. Or, it could have led to the adoption of more limited war aims. Ultimately, the policy of responsive (as opposed to preemptive) escalation – indicated by the aid and force size increases that occurred after the growth of the insurgency – put both superpowers behind the insurgent's operating curve. However, an adherence to Clausewitz's theories was not out of reach for either the Soviet or American leadership. In both instances, military generals strongly advocated against small footprint models and escalatory strategies. The disregard given to Generals Colin Powell and Nikolai Ogarkov is perhaps indicative of a larger lack of attention paid to the informed opinions of military leaders when it is not politically expedient.[299] While what is known about Ogarkov's views is less detailed than Powell's, at their core both plans shared an adherence to a Clausewitzian model of force size.

Additionally, both nations had prior experiences with rapid interventions that achieved their military objectives. While the First Gulf War was an immense military success that included the use of a decisive force, the best example for military intervention that led to regime change was the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989. The effort was led by then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell, who utilized decisive force by sending in the Air Force and 20,000 U.S. troops to overthrow Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and install a new government.[300]

[299] See *Areas for Further Research.*
[300] Lafeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," 74.

For the Soviet Union, their prior experience was the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Technically a Warsaw Pact intervention, the largely Soviet force presence consisted of approximately 250,000 troops that successfully quelled a civilian uprising.[301] Granted, both the Panama and Czechoslovakia interventions had significant differences from the Afghanistan insurgencies, such as the absence of a sanctuary and support foreign support. However, some of the same Soviet and American leaders who would endorse – or acquiesce to – light footprint approaches in Afghanistan accepted the need for relatively larger force sizes in these conflicts.

Afghanistan, therefore, represented a departure from military policies that were previously successful. While a thorough investigation of the reasons for this is outside of my project's scope, a preliminary appraisal suggests two other wars heavily influenced the decision making that led to insufficient Soviet and American force presence in Afghanistan. The USSR's thinking was guided by the U.S. experience during the Vietnam War:

> By restricting the size of its occupying forces, Moscow attempted to escape entanglement of the kind which had led Americans to commit more than half a million men in Vietnam...The Soviet contingent...was unable to compensate for the weakness of the Afghan army, especially since the Soviet troops, who had little taste for combat as well as being ill-equipped and underfed, were restricted to 'useful' Afghanistan: the cities and main axes of communication.[302]

The erroneous view that large force size was the reason for military failure in Vietnam may have also influenced the Bush administration's policy towards Afghanistan, but the main factor in Afghanistan's light footprint approach appears to have been the Administration's intention to invade Iraq:

> Even before the United States attacked Bin Laden at Tora Bora, the U.S. government began downsizing its commitment of resources to Afghanistan. While U.S. policymakers had been hesitant to provide assistance to Afghanistan from the beginning, the U.S. invasion of Iraq

[301] Yousaf and Adkin, *The Bear Trap,* 46.
[302] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending,* 187-188.

ensured that Afghanistan would take a backseat in money, policy attention, and military and nonmilitary aid.[303]

The repercussions of not prioritizing Afghanistan in the first years of the war are still being felt today. In both conflicts, the failure of later escalations in troops and resources indicate that "catching up" is a difficult endeavor. As a military policy, it should be avoided.

The many offensive counterinsurgent operations in Afghanistan have also revealed the ineffectiveness of seizing territory without the requisite number of troops to hold it. From the Soviets numerous invasions of the Panjshir Valley and Zhawar to NATO's Operation Mountain Thrust, tactical successes often failed to translate into long-term victories because troops were withdrawn. While Clausewitz could not have offered such insurgency-specific advice in *On War,* the experiences of numerous commanders in Afghanistan indicate that any temporary occupation of land is merely a Pyrrhic victory.

Limitations

Clausewitz did not write *On War* with the intention of creating a field manual, but he did want it to be an instructive guide for military and political leaders.[304] As Roger Ashley Leonard observed: "Shortly before his death, [Clausewitz] pointed out that he held at least the 'ruling principles' (*Hauptlineamente*) of his work to be true; in fact to be universally and internally true, since they were possessed of an 'inherent necessity.'"[305] This study and many others affirm the validity of some of his concepts, but the centuries since *On War* was published have seen developments that Clausewitz did not envision. The evolution of armed conflict has inevitably produced some limitations to his theory of war.

[303] Jones, *Graveyard of Empires,* 127.
[304] Griffin, "From Limited War to Limited Victory," 451.
[305] Roger Ashley Leonard, *A Short Guide to Clausewitz: On War*, (Capricorn Books: New York, 1967), 5.

The debut of weapons of mass destruction in the 20th century took warfare into what Clausewitz would have only viewed as the theoretical realm. Nuclear weapons, for example, provide the kind of wholesale destruction that Clausewitz considered only possible in the abstract and philosophical "absolute war," where no sphere of society was safe from annihilation.[306] While no nuclear weapons have ever been used in Afghanistan, the nature of insurgent warfare – paired with modern weaponry – has led to massive humanitarian crises in which civilians and their livelihoods have become both purposeful and incidental targets of war.

Contemporary war has also seen an expansion of the use of humanitarian aid and state-building support in conjunction with military operations. *On War* suggests that Clausewitz had a more limited view of the support that one state can provide another. Both the Soviets and Americans invested heavily in developing Afghanistan's infrastructure and civil society. This was done alongside active military operations as part of a grand – if vague and unmanageable – plan to shape the country in its image. Understandably a reflection of his time, Clausewitz's writings on armed conflict do not address the military implications of humanitarian support and institutional development. Perhaps most significantly, the dual-role of soldier and aid distributor played by modern armies does not factor into Clausewitz's theory of war.

Yet, despite the historical constraints that are evident in a modern analysis of *On War,* it appears that Clausewitz may have foreseen a future in which irregular war would be more prevalent: In Book Six, Chapter 26 ("The People in Arms"), he wrote that guerilla warfare was "not as yet very common."[307] This prescient allusion to a future defined by unconventional conflicts is one of the many intriguing comments that one can find in Clausewitz's writings. It serves as a reminder to the reader that he knew there would be changes in the future his theories

[306] Schuurman, "Clausewitz on Real War," 378.
[307] Clausewitz, *On War*, 583.

could not account for. This study showed the benefit of identifying culminating points in evaluating the success of counterinsurgents, but the nature of irregular conflict made them inapplicable to insurgents. My concept of a Counterinsurgent's Acceptance Point, however, built on Clausewitz's attempts at identifying critical junctures in wars. By complementing culminating points, CAP is an expansion of Clausewitzian analysis that identifies a key moment counterinsurgents have often experienced.

Areas for Further Research

"Everything then depends on discovering the culminating point by the fine tact of judgment.," wrote Clausewitz.[308] While he probably meant this in regard to the military tacticians who lead armies, it applies to scholars who consider wars after they have occurred as well. Culminating points and Counterinsurgent Acceptance Points could be identified in other contemporary conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq and Syria, providing a standardized model for comparative conflict analysis. One potential area of research is a quantitative evaluation of when culminating and Counterinsurgent Acceptance Points occur in order to assess if there are any trends or patterns. In the case studies that were the focus of this project, the culminating points occurred 2-3 months after the initial invasion. The CAP occurred 6 years and 11 months after the culminating point for the Soviet Union, and 5 years and 9 months after the culminating point for the United States. The creation of a database with culminating points and CAPs for other wars would allow scholars to investigate whether there is statistical significance in the temporal location of either point.

Another area for further research concerns the adoption or dismissal of the opinions given by senior military officials regarding armed interventions into other states. Both wars in

[308] Clausewitz, *On War*, 639.

Afghanistan saw the implementation of strategies at odds with the advice of four-star generals. Are these anomalies? Or are they commonplace occurrences that can lead to tragic consequences? Further research into intervention deliberations is required.

Carl von Clausewitz's enduring legacy is a result of the ideas contained in *On War.* This study explored only a small portion of the dynamic and compelling theories found in the book. The text remains a valuable source of military theory that should continue to be studied by scholars and policymakers alike. The knowledge contained therein offers everyone an opportunity to evaluate the armed conflicts of the past, and be prepared for the ones of the future.

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