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The Political Dimension of Counterinsurgency Operations: A Comparison of Two Counterinsurgency Operations in Afghanistan

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The USSR intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 and the current Allied US-led intervention in the same country have many different characteristics but also a lot of common features. The causes and the final goals for setting them in motion differ as much as their initial approaches but with the passage of time they have both grown into counterinsurgency operations. Both of them have gone into their tenth year, although the respective political elites have expected a quick and short intervention. Equally so, although militarily superior, the intervening forces have soon become operationally inferior, so that due to misunderstanding the environment, insufficient coordination and weak interior allies, with inadequate political framework, insufficient engagement of resources and inaccessible ground, all in all, finally limited to maintaining status quo. The political part has failed in the first place. The withdrawal has had devastating consequences for the Soviets. The present American withdrawal is a two-edged sword because the majority of tasks have not been fulfilled and there can be no doubt as to whether the long term deployment is not the right solution. It is important to analyze and compare the two operations in order to be able to detect the successful steps as well as the opportunities missed and draw conclusions on the continuation of the allied operation; for the Allies, as stated correctly by the historian Paul Robinson, have found themselves in a position quite similar to the Soviet case. The purpose of the research is twofold. First, to analyze the essential characteristics of the political dimension of counterinsurgency operation through the activity of the intervening force towards counterinsurgency operation centers of gravity; the second is to offer recommendations for the correct use of the principles of counterinsurgency operation.

Keywords: counterinsurgency operation, USSR, US, insurgents, local population, allies, centers of gravity

1. Introduction

Afghanistan's geostrategic position has always been important for the country and the majority of events in the country have been directly connected to its geographic position. Situated in an area where decades have followed with undisturbed calm and with unexpected eruptions of tectonic force, Afghanistan has within a

short period of time repeatedly become the key battlefield of the contemporary world. The first instance was the event of the Soviet-Afghan War and the second time the present "global war on terror". Both of these cases have in common the specific feature which shows that complex challenges generated in Afghanistan prior to the interventions and later in their course have presented a threat to the future of the country, as

well as a threat to global security. The mentioned wars differ considerably in their initial goals; the results achieved, their legitimacy and the relation to people and space, though with a considerable number of common features. In both cases the intervening forces have tried to establish and develop a model of counterinsurgency operation as a pivotal element of overall policies aimed at inflicting a defeating blow upon the enemy. It is of additional interest to note that due to the short time span between the Soviet and the American intervention – the terrain has remained unchanged, as well as the level of the insurgent technological resources – so that both forces fought a similar enemy and in some cases even the same one. To this statement we must add a remark that the sides in conflict today know one another much better because the Americans have been training and financing some of them during their counter-Soviet struggle.

For the Soviet Union (the previous Russian and the following experiences included) Afghanistan has been and has remained the most difficult experience of a counterinsurgency conflict which has entangled it in an exhausting and long-lasting conflict. After numerous Afghan government requests for assistance in their fight against the Islamic insurgents, in December 1979, the Soviet Union Politburo passed a resolution on the intervention in Afghanistan (Lyakhovski, 2009). They have instantly put into power their follower Babrak Karmal, have attempted to stop faction struggles within the ruling party and have attempted to stabilize the state institutions in order to make them capable of defeating the insurgents. In their view, the duration of the intervention was projected at several months but eventually the Soviets stayed there for almost ten years. Since domestic security forces have proved incapable of preventing the spread of counter-government rebellion throughout the country, the Soviet Army and the Afghan army opened up operations against the insurgents. Initially, they were successful fighting the insurgents, but the insurgent unification and with the help of foreign aid (US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran) the insurgents (*mujahedin*) grew stronger and began achieving noteworthy operational goals. In the course of operations the Soviet Union came to realize that the amassing of great military formations was not efficient against small guerilla groups so that it consequently changed tactics and reorganized their forces in order to make them more efficient (Bogdanov, 2005). In May 1986 Babrak Karmal was dismissed for a number of failures and Mu-

hammad Najibullah, the then head of Afghan intelligence service KHAD (*Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati*), replaced him. Najibullah took the course towards national reconciliation, as well as negotiating with the insurgents. The previous reforms drive got more lenient, a multi-party system was introduced and the overall level of state repression within the state was reduced. A new constitution was passed in November 1987 and the country's name was changed again from Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to Republic of Afghanistan. In April 1988 multi-party elections were held only to be qualified as fraudulent and boycotted by the *mujahedin*, with the consequence of the reopening of conflicts (Tabak, 2001). The Soviets withdrew completely on 15 February 1989, although they have continued the financial and technical support of the Kabul regime for several years to come. In general, the Soviets have underestimated the situation and the opponent and have moved into Afghanistan without any kind of counterinsurgency doctrine which then had to be developed in the field, in an ad hoc manner (McMichael, 1989; Robinson, 2010). However, they have not been successful. The reason for this lied in the fact that their major lever of operation was the military apparatus employed in a conventional manner which came from their preoccupation with Europe and the European manner of warfare so that the previous counterinsurgency experiences have never become essential components of their military institutional memory (McMichael, 1989; Cassidy, 2006).

Not long after the Soviets experienced "their own Vietnam" in Afghanistan, the US also undertook a military intervention in Afghanistan. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US formed and lead an antiterrorist coalition in Operation Enduring Freedom which had a fundamental counterterrorist orientation. The coalition quickly managed to achieve its primary goals: the deposition of the Taliban, the destruction of the Al-Qaeda structure in Afghanistan and its banishment from the country. Al-Qaeda has been prevented from conducting global terrorist attacks. The greatest success of the operation has been the liquidation of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on 2 May 2011. Almost simultaneously with the conduct of the antiterrorist operation, the US and the Allies developed a political framework for Afghanistan. This has been made possible through the results of the Bonn Conference (December 2001) where the decision on the establishment of a provisional Afghan administration under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, as well as the employment of international forces under UN mandate

was passed – the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. NATO took over an active part in the field operation in August 2003 by assuming the ISAF mission command which caused a mandate change in accordance with the UN Charter Chapter VII which provides for the use of force in support of peace. From this point on, Afghanistan has in many NATO leaders statements become the Alliance's strategic priority and its major goal. We need not put any special emphasis on the fact that the US has the main say and the leading role in both the operations. It is however paradoxical that with the passage of time no de-escalation and stabilization in the country has taken place and that the situation has become ever more complex and lethal. For this reason the US have changed their strategy several times although progress has always been doubtful. In 2009, when it became apparent that the defeat of the insurgents is not in prospect, the turn in the approach has come about, mostly as a consequence of the new administration in the White House. The essential difference between President Barack Obama and former President George W. Bush is in the approach to Afghanistan, as well as to Pakistan. President Obama has placed Afghanistan and Pakistan into the very center of his foreign policy, while confirming the concept of one battlefield, encompassing both countries. The new strategy for Afghanistan is based on two key elements: on the change in the war-fighting culture with increased attention to population protection, on the relations with the population and on the transformation of the Allied forces into a more trained and efficient force. Special emphasis has been put on Pakistan because the Afghan challenge could clearly not be resolved without its cooperation. The arrival of General Stanley McChrystal, an experienced practitioner of counterinsurgency operations as commander-in-chief of all American and NATO forces has marked a beginning of a period of application of a modern military counterinsurgency operation model in the Afghan area of responsibility. However, the final results still cannot be predicted. Part of the reason for the US wandering is in the statement brought forward by Steven Metz, that the US security community has kept neglecting counterinsurgency operations from the end of the Cold War all the way to 2001. The subject has been taken out of military education curricula due to the general loss of interest in developing new plans and capabilities (Metz, 2007). For this reason the US have gone into Afghanistan in very much the same manner, with-

out an appropriate military counterinsurgency approach which then had to be developed in the course of operation.

2. The Basic Counterinsurgency Operation Model

Counterinsurgency operations which proved successful in a specific area and time need not be equally efficient in another space and time. This fact is therefore to be kept in mind whenever one attempts to study any counterinsurgency operation. The lessons of the previous operations are therefore of exceptional value and most importantly, save lives. It is also important to note the essential difference of the former and the present operations. The primary difference lies in the fact that the former operations have predominantly been conducted for the sake of colonial and/or imperial power and against self-determination or a separatist movement. Such operations have, taking into account all other participants, been distinctly military in orientation. Regardless of the fact that military commanders conducting them have always been displeased with the numbers of units assigned. The essence of the issue has been however that other social instruments have not been sufficiently developed or have not existed at all or have not been used in an appropriate manner. Present-day theoreticians and practitioners (Eliot Cohen, John Nagl, David Kilcullen, David Bayley, Robert Perito) consider an approach employing dominantly military factor as old-fashioned and therefore call it traditional. Present-day challenges require much more synergy and effort. More than ever, a view that the military constitute a highly essential tool is prevalent, though just one of several, so that victory or defeat can be achieved through an all-inclusive approach where a political role is the most important one. Such operations are therefore called modern counterinsurgency operations and happen to be syntheses of political, economic, military, police, intelligence, psychological and civic actions (Cohen et al., 2006; Kilcullen, 2010; Bayley and Perito, 2010). Since political action constitutes the most critical part of counterinsurgency because it defines other components further, it should be given the greatest possible attention. As an example of a modern counterinsurgency definition we highlight the following:

“Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency” (NATO, 2008: 2-C-18);

“Comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances” (US The Department of Defense Dictionary, 2010: 79); “Those military, law enforcement, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat insurgency, while addressing the root causes” (UK British Army Field Manual Counter Insurgency, 2009: 1-6).

Modern counterinsurgency operations comprise principles, imperatives and paradoxes (Counterinsurgency, 2006; Cohen et al., 2006). The elements of the quoted categories are in a complex relationship and in certain situations they act so as to be complementing one another, though they are equally capable of becoming obstacles in another situation. For example, the case of the tactical level decisions often made during counterinsurgency operations which are essential for strategic development of events would stand as an operational imbalance in relation to classical conventional operations. These principles represent the outlines of a counterinsurgency operation while imperatives and paradoxes complement the picture of the situation. The principles are to be explained in the following text. Imperatives are a group of measures and actions which are guiding for the intervening forces and which are reflected in the following values: information and expectation management, use of proportionate force, learning and adaptation, strengthening of the field position of final executors, support to the government and the people in the country of intervention (Counterinsurgency, 2006; Cohen et al., 2006). Paradoxes are, as the term states, controversies to a generally accepted statement, position or conclusion. In the case of counterinsurgency operations, controversies are reflected in the fact that actions and deeds which are justified and logical in conventional operations sometimes (even quite frequently) turn counterproductive, or even damaging. The basic paradox of a counterinsurgency operation lays in the fact that victory, even if the intervening forces respect all the principles and imperatives and makes the right moves, is in no way guaranteed. This is namely what makes the counterinsurgency operations different from all other interventions. Quite a number of authors agree upon a list of most significant paradoxes of modern counterinsurgency operations:

- Sometimes, the more you protect your forces the less secure they come to be.
- Sometimes, the greater degree of force you apply, the lesser effectiveness you

achieve.

- The more successful the operation the fewer force are to be engaged and greater the risk to be accepted.
- Sometimes, the best reaction is to have no reaction.
- One of the strongest weapons of counterinsurgency forces is not to apply fire.
- Sometimes, it is better when the domestic administration conducts a specific activity tolerably well than when the intervening forces perform the same task much better.
- If tactics work this week it may not function the next week; if tactics work in one province they need not work in another.
- The success at the tactical level does not guarantee anything.
- Many important decisions are not made by generals (Counterinsurgency, 2006; Cohen et al., 2006; Bayley and Perito, 2010).

David J. Kilcullen is right in stating that:

“Insurgencies, like cancers, exist in thousands of forms, and there are dozens of techniques to treat them, hundreds of different populations in which they occur, and several major schools of thought on how best to deal with them. The idea that there is one single ‘silver bullet’ panacea for insurgency is therefore as unrealistic as the idea of a universal cure for cancer” (Kilcullen, 2010: 1).

The author then goes on to state that “there are no standard templates or universal solution in counterinsurgency” (Kilcullen, 2010: 26). He also holds, what a group of experienced practitioners and theoreticians formulate, that “while every insurgency is different because of distinct environments, root causes, and cultures, all successful counterinsurgency campaigns are based on common principles” (Cohen et al., 2006: 49). Our goal is to build a basic counterinsurgency model which could enable deliberation, analysis and conduct. This would be a model which would be “neither a standard pattern nor a universal solution”, but rather a framework around which one could initiate a discussion and build plans. So, to refine our observations and combine them with personal empirical knowledge, we hold that the basic counterinsurgency operation model is composed of the following basic principles: intervention preparation; defining centers of gravity



connected to the area of operations; the application of political, military-police and social-economic mechanisms towards the centers of gravity; constant adaptation appropriate to challenges and the changes which affect the development of events and ensure conditions for a successful exit strategy.

3. The Preparation for Intervention

RAND expert Seth G. Jones has analyzed all insurgent uprisings from 1945 on (90 in total) and has discovered that successful counterinsurgency operations have approximately lasted for 14 years while the unsuccessful ones have had an average of 11 years, while many conflicts have terminated without any victor (Jones, 2008). This conclusion points to the fact that an intervening force on entering the conflict must expect a long, expensive and unpredictable war. For an intervening power to be ready to activate the necessary resources, it is imperative to keep developing a culture of readiness of all social components. Both the USSR and the US in Afghanistan have most directly witnessed the fact that this process presents a rather imaginary and fluid area. At the period of intervention the USSR has had the largest conventional army in the world while the US is the greatest military power in the history of mankind, but instead of an easy and swift victory over an incomparably weaker opponent, both powers got stuck in the wilderness of Afghanistan.

Geopolitical discourse which has led the Soviets in their assessment of the situation has been preset by the Brezhnev doctrine of obligatory assistance to any socialist country where socialist revolution was in danger. The Politburo has been weighing the issues of intervention for a long time for reasons of possible international community judgment which has later taken place. The Soviet Union (including Russia's experiences as well) has always based its counterinsurgency operations very strongly on the conventional use of armed forces (Zhukov, 2010). After the decision to intervene in Afghanistan, the leadership of the USSR has defined the Afghan mission in very much the same manner. Andrei Doohovskoy has described that the Soviet leadership has expected to conduct a short war, very much in the pattern of interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Doohovskoy, 2009). So much so, that in February 1980, two months after the beginning of the intervention and when the Soviets could have already had first hand insight into the situation, Dmitriy Ustinov, the minister

of defense presented his belief that the Soviet army would stay in Afghanistan for another year or year and half (Lyakhovskiy, 2009). Doohovskoy stated further that "while the Soviet 'Limited Contingent' was clearly not ready for the mission in Afghanistan, it is an oversimplification to fault the Soviet security forces for the overall failures of Kremlin policies in Afghanistan" (Doohovskoy, 2009:7). The Politburo has misjudged the social and political dynamics in the country and has held that the main threat was coming from foreign opponents, insurgents hailing mostly from Iran and Pakistan. Instead, they very soon had to face fierce resistance of local insurgents (Doohovskoy, 2009; Lyakhovskiy, 2009). General Alexander Lyakhovskiy, a participant of the conflict in Afghanistan, stated that the purpose of the intervention was to replace the inefficient president of the country and not to suppress the insurgency. They have planned to stabilize the situation, occupy military installations and assist Afghan authorities while national security forces would be engaged in fighting the insurgents (Lyakhovskiy, 1995, according to Grau, 1997). Lyakhovskiy also brought forward the recollections of the army general I. G. Pavlovskiy who laid all the blame for the intervention on the chairman of the KGB Yuri Andropov, who has been misinformed of the situation in Afghanistan; the minister of defense Dmitriy Ustinov whom Pavlovskiy considered a good minister of defense but a bad politician who has mistakenly assessed that the entry of the Soviet forces into Afghanistan would secure Soviet borders and improve Soviet relations with Iran and Pakistan. Ustinov has been under the illusion that the intervention would attract Iran to their side. He finally also blamed the secretary general of the Communist Party Central Committee Leonid Brezhnev whom he considered temporarily incapable of assessing the situation correctly and producing decisions, as well as of being under the overwhelming influence of the assassination of his friend Taraki (the president of Afghanistan Hafizulah Amin has organized the liquidation of his predecessor Nur Muhammad Taraki). Pavlovskiy held that the invitations to the Politburo sessions with important Afghanistan agenda issues have not been extended to all those not in favor of intervention, including himself (Lyakhovskiy, 2009). The USSR has mustered intervention support from socialist countries but has in no way counted that the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan would get directly involved in the conflict by supporting the enemies. In relation to the US, the Soviets have also made a wrong assessment. They have not expected any such stormy reac-



tion because they considered the US to be pre-occupied with the hostage crisis in Teheran to the extent of not paying attention to the events in Afghanistan. Within the US, after the initial shock there came a sobering and the awareness that the case could be an opportunity not to be missed – in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski – to lure USSR into a “bear trap”. The only regional country with a partner orientation towards the USSR has been India which supplied the Soviets with significant intelligence data on Pakistani aid to the Afghan *mujahidin*. The specific level of cooperation was also established with the Baluchistan Separatist Movement that looked towards separating Baluchistan from the rest of Pakistan (Bradsher, 1999 and Mitrokhin, 2002, according to Evsikov, 2009: 51). All the stated elements witness to the mistaken supposition and poor intervention preparation. The Soviets have intervened in support and for the purpose of upholding the communist system in the country where such a political concept could have hardly found any fertile ground. Zamir Khabulov, Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan at the period of the intervention has very openly compared the Soviet and the present Allied goals by saying: “We have attempted to impose communism. You attempt to impose democracy”, and goes on by saying that “there isn’t any mistake committed by the Soviet Union which has not been repeated by the international community” (Afghanistan: How to avoid the Russian mistakes, 2010: 1).

The reasons for the American intervention are much closer in terms of time and more obvious. After the 9/11 mega-terrorist attack on New York and Washington, the US leadership has opted for an expedient response. They set in motion a global war on terrorism while transforming the notion of terrorism in the way which has enabled them to proclaim war to another state in a conventional manner (Chandiramani et al., 2010) and open a search for the perpetrators of the attack. On 2 October 2001, the American leaders have presented the results of the investigation on the attack to the NATO North Atlantic Council while stating the conclusion that the terrorist network of Al-Qaeda is responsible for the attacks. Since Al-Qaeda has used Afghanistan as its base country, the US have required that the Taliban regime extradite Osama bin Laden and his collaborators which the Taliban leader Mullah Omar has refused on the pretext that he should first be presented evidence after which he would allow negotiations on the possibility of extradition. The United States have not accepted this explanation. During this time all NATO member states

have agreed upon an activation of the Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, it being the central clause of the basic NATO charter providing for the principle that an attack on any member state is to be considered an attack on all members. On 4 October NATO members also brought a whole number of measures that supported the American move against terrorism. The measures included exchange and cooperation among intelligence services, as well as general over-flight permissions and the access of American and other Allied units to all sea and air installations within the framework of the antiterrorist operation (NATO Transformed, 2004). Having activated the Article 5 not all of Alliance member states were ready to accept the seemingly inevitable field operation so that the Allied readiness for real military force contribution in the Afghanistan was put to test. The US have therefore along the lines of cooperation with its closest ally (UK) undertaken a formation of an antiterrorist coalition only to embark upon the attack on Afghanistan on 7 October, only 25 days after the terrorist act. In the course of the days following 9/11, the US have been closing its strategic perimeter round Afghanistan by ensuring transport corridors and supply airports in the neighboring countries, by introducing specialist teams in the interior of the country which established connection with the members of the opposition Northern Alliance. The American intervention has however been rash and burdened with specific insurmountable disadvantages. The intervention has begun with distinctly military goals and methods, with minimum force in the field and insufficient political framework. In addition to all this, numerous allies have not initially responded to the alliance’s call to arms in a manner expected by the US and in the face of less than unconditional support, the US have moved out with the available forces. Also, the available US resources have been comparatively limited and have not been employed to a sufficient degree. American civilian mechanisms designed for the sort of tasks have considerably thinned after the end of the Cold War because all other institutions except the Armed Forces have stopped keeping alive the culture of readiness. They have predominantly reacted only after the outbreak of the crisis. Furthermore, the major institutions of the American security architecture which were formed in a different period to meet different challenges, have also been too hierarchic versus a dispersed enemy with lateral networking and increasing capability of individual synchronization of its actions. Bob Woodward has brought up an interesting fact that the US have well-developed

intervention war plans against many states that have been out of their favor. In the beginning of the 21st century the US have had 68 operational war plans (Woodward, 2004). Judging by the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, many of these plans should undergo revision. Specific recommendations for the intervention phase:

- Keep developing the readiness culture.
- Apply lessons learned in previous counterinsurgency operations.
- Intervening force must enter the area of operation with the clear vision of goals and means to achieve them. It is necessary to establish also a clear political framework for the conduct of operations.
- Ensure the widest possible international support for the intervention.
- Establish cooperation with the neighboring and regional countries.
- All the intervention force elements should be very familiar with the country of intervention situation, culture, customs, tradition, features and differences.
- Regardless of the size and the power, the unity of effort and the employed resources is of exceptional importance because in spite of the potential, no country has got limitless resources at its disposal.
- The intervening force must take into account the multidimensional state of the affairs and the players in the field, be familiar with all the subjects in the space and their roles and maintain as many as possible number of contacts and coordination with the interested subjects/parties in the area of operation (media, various humanitarian and development agencies).
- It is essential to inform national general public of the goals and processes in the field as well as to ensure the national public support for the national forces.
- Be prepared for the casualties and long and costly intervention (Mikac and Buntak, 2011).

4. Centers of Gravity

In his classic *On War* Carl von Clausewitz described a center of gravity as an object of aspiration (e.g. persons, places, objects or capacity) of opposing sides. It is necessary to recognize and understand them as manifold subjects for the sake of one's own action towards them. Centers of gravity are sets of knots towards which all power, energy and directions of action are

directed and whose overpowering is directly related to everything else (Santos, 2011). NATO's Glossary of Terms and Definition defines centers of gravity as following: "Characteristics, capabilities or localities from which a nation, an alliance, a military force or other grouping derives its freedom of action, physical strength or will to fight" (NATO, 2008:2-C-3). US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms defines centers of gravity as following: "The source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act" (US Department of Defense Dictionary, 2010: 46). When the intervening force arrives at a decision for intervention it is necessary to determine centers of gravity towards which the intervention will be directed. The basic model detects five centers of gravity, namely – local population, opponent, local government, Allied forces and resources, outside opponent support. There are two basic approaches to the model in regard to the focus of operation: the population-centered and the enemy-centered paradigm. With the first approach, the population is the primary target of the operation and the strategic center of gravity while all the other centers of gravity are of operational character. With the second approach, the destruction of the enemy is the strategic center of gravity while the exploitation of the operational centers serves the purpose of achieving the primary goal. It is important to note that there is no precise line of demarcation between the two approaches and that it is essential to establish a gravity of approach (Mikac and Buntak, 2011). The number of centers of gravity and approaches may depend on more than just time and space, but for the purpose of this article these five will suffice.

At the very beginning of the intervention, the Soviets have selected the top level of the Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) as their strategic center of intervention. They eliminated President Hafizulah Amin and put Babrak Karmal in his place. Then they went to stabilize the party which was divided by the faction conflicts. This proved to be quite a difficult task because to many participants the conflicts within the party had more importance than fighting the common enemy (Robinson, 2010). This attitude has continued for years. The interparty conflicts have also influenced the Afghanistan armed forces that have also become an area for factions conflict (Bogdanov, 2005). With the outbreak of more serious engagements and with the increasing number of Soviet Army casualties, the Soviets transferred their focus on insurgents, making them strategic center of gravity while

they continued to instruct the top level of PDPA who then got the status of operational center of gravity, together with national security forces. After several years of misuse of the operational focus on destruction, the Soviets realized that military measures would not amount to any significant outcome and went on to repeatedly change the strategic center of gravity and turn towards the top of the government. Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1985. Although he has not been in favor of the Afghan War he has nevertheless allowed the supporters of war methods some more time to try and find the right road to victory. After a year, having realized the fact of a status quo in the Afghan area of operation, he arrived at a decision to terminate the operation. In the very same year the Soviets changed Karmal for Najibullah and started seeking a political solution. Therefore the negotiations to end the war were given advantage (Robinson, 2010). Within three years, the Soviets have changed their strategic center of gravity three times while their central approach has primarily had the same enemy-centered orientation.

The present situation with the Americans in the Afghanistan is somewhat more complex. They are the leading nation in two parallel operations with simultaneous, yet different strategic centers of gravity. Operation Enduring Freedom has had a counterterrorist orientation from the very beginning and the opponent has been the strategic center of gravity all the time. The basis of this operation is the enemy-centered approach which has special priority of conduct all the time. At the same time, they have opened the Operation ISAF in a much more reluctant manner, leaving it up to a certain point to European allies. In ISAF and around ISAF the establishment of national government has from the beginning been the goal with greatest allocated resources which has therefore had the primacy of strategic center. Despite of the recognized problems, the non-functioning of the political system and the ever stronger insurgent attacks, the Americans have kept supporting their political favorite Hamid Karzai, although they have shifted their strategic orientation to the conduct of the armed segment of operation. The Allied forces and their resources became the most important center (all the exterior elements and national security forces). They have set out to build national security forces by reforming the national security sector so as to make them capable of getting to grips with the majority of challenges. Though the stated approach has not produced results with-

in the allotted time it is nevertheless in power and equally so is the support to president Karzai in spite of the loss of general Afghan support, the strategic center of gravity has moved once again on the local population. Also, in the recent years maximum effort has been invested into training of national security forces and taking over of the initiative from the opponent. No less, the American messages in regard to the need of finding political solution are getting ever louder which has been unthinkable only a year or two earlier. We could therefore state that the Americans have after the initial wondering and search finished tracking the adequate direction of operation within the ISAF and they have opted for the conduct of a counterinsurgency operation with population centric approach. The Americans have therefore demonstrated the trend of changing the center of gravity with the simultaneous acceptance of existence of two or more strategic centers because of the conduct of two different operations. At the same time there is a considerable degree of similarity with the Soviet intervention in terms of selection and relation to the centers of gravity.

5. The Political Dimension of the Relation to Centers of Gravity

Once those centers of gravity are defined and the intervention itself is set in motion, it is necessary to equally apply political, military-police and social-economic mechanisms on the centers of gravity. This step is the very heart of the model. Special emphasis has been put on the political aspect of the counterinsurgency operation since it determines other mechanisms.

The recommendations of the military-police and social-economic aspect/dimension in regard to the centers of gravity:

- In regard to military-police operations it is primarily necessary to protect the native population, ensure public safety and separate the insurgents from the population as much as possible. When the population starts to feel secure and protected for a longer period of time it is going to be much easier to collect quality intelligence information on the insurgents from them. Since all the insurgents are of local origin and everybody knows everybody, the population is the most important medium for intelligence collection.
- All the operations must be conducted according to intelligence data.

- The attempt should be made to defeat the enemy in the battlefield even though a decisive battle will almost never come to pass. It is important not to use force excessively because it is most frequently counterproductive, even when induced by enemy provocation from the insurgents.
- The foreign forces will in the long term help the home government best if they follow their policy of conflict resolution, ensure all the requirements for quality training and supervising of national security forces and if they take over some functions and tasks for which national force may not have sufficient capacity and/or knowledge/expertise.
- The Allied forces must have sincere and open relations while supporting one another and engaging their resources on subsidiary principle.
- External aid to the insurgents must be limited to the lowest possible degree. If political actions fail to prevent the exterior aid it is necessary to prevent any deliveries of aid to the insurgents and disrupt their assistance in the border areas by the use of joint military-police tactics and techniques.
- The conduct of operational decentralization should be introduced into areas of military-police mechanisms and the field commanders should be given resources, responsibility and authority to conduct them.
- The local population should be given a chance of realistic and sustainable, improved living standard, should be given alternative choices, should have basic civilization requirements, should have real needs satisfied, should have improved infrastructure and local projects to participate in. They should not be made dependent on humanitarian assistance. The youth should be offered international grants, the most needy should be internationally accepted for specific periods of time as well as all the wounded and the sick who should have foreign medical treatment in all cases of more complex medical treatments which cannot be carried out in the country.
- National government should be assisted in major infrastructure projects, their fiscal and budget sustainability ensured, as well as the support of all the social programs. The total amount of financial investment in this area should be increased considerably (Mikac and Buntak, 2011).

The stated part has been given in a form of recommendations and a comparison of the manner which the intervening forces have adopted. The recommendations have not been presented in the order of importance since they are all of equal significance.

Clear, honest and open relations to the local population are exceptionally important. The local population should constantly be informed of the goals, of the manner of conduct; one should bring to their attention that the intervening force is deployed to their country to assist them and their government in defeating the insurgents after which the intervening forces would withdraw. The primary principle of failure or success is the protection of the population. The satisfaction of their basic needs, separation from the insurgents and winning them for the cause are the key variables of success. One must never underestimate the local population or the enemy.

Kilcullen holds that "the majority of the Afghans simply wants security, peace and prosperity and would take the side which is most likely to prevail and fulfill their expectations". In view of this Kalev Sepp points out that the major goal of the counterinsurgency forces is to get victory over the convictions of the local population and ensure their support to the local government (Kilcullen, 2009: 66; Sepp, 2005, according to Doohovskoy, 2009: 55). The USSR and the US have both had specific intentions for their presence in this area, which have been more or less successful. To what degree is present-day Afghanistan not covered by the intervening forces and their initiatives but also frozen in time in its rural areas, has been the experience of Seth Jones who has travelled throughout the country during the current intervention. He has discovered Afghans who have never heard of Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan and who also hold the Americans to be Soviets since they are ignorant of the fact that the Soviets have withdrawn in 1989 (Jones, 2009).

The Soviets soon discovered that the local population has been under a growing influence of Islamist factions and have invested a lot of effort to win them over to their side i.e. to the side of the Afghan government. The Soviets embarked upon a considerable number of social programs in the field of education and culture in towns where the ruling nomenclature enjoyed a greater degree of popular support (Doohovskoy, 2009) while in rural areas with the support of the Afghan army they opened a number of infrastructural projects which covered house repairs, road and irrigation channels construction

(Bogdanov, 2005). The cooperation was established through sponsorships of Afghan areas by neighboring Soviet areas. The Soviet sponsors financed all life necessities of neighboring Afghan area – from the purchase of basic food stuffs to building schools and constructing infrastructure. However, the problems with organization and coordination in field activities appeared which resulted in the lack of expected success. This model was very expensive for the USSR and its paradox lies in the fact that insurgents in the Pakistan border areas managed to top the supply levels of both the Afghan government and the Soviets (Gromov, 1994). The events in the field were described by field marshal Akhromeyev in the following way: “Kabul and the major provincial centers are under our control but everywhere else the regime has no authority. We have lost the battle for the people of Afghanistan. The military can maintain the existing situation continually but they cannot resolve it” (Ewans, 2005: 120).

The Americans today have at their disposal the knowledge and numerous instruments which they make good use of. The problem, however, lies in the fact that the opponents with better knowledge of the local customs, culture and language make very good use of the capabilities of modern technology and beat the allies using “their own weapons” (Fisk, 2010; Santos, 2011). This is where we arrive at the point of individual views and understanding of the questions like the perception of reality, the range of expectations and the limits of progress. According to the field research conducted biannually by the Asia Foundation on the pattern of several thousand Afghans, at the beginning of the intervention a great number of Afghans have considered the country’s general direction good, the security situation satisfactory and life generally better in terms of economic situation than in the times of Taliban rule. But with the passage of years there has occurred a loss of Afghan confidence into the correct direction of the country’s development and international intervention (Asia Foundation Publications 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010).

The opponent should be studied continually, equally so the strong points of his cause to fight, his strength, final goals as well as ideology which he uses. Propaganda activities and psychological operations are important factors in this area. Political mechanisms should be put to use to destroy insurgent actions, to maintain a constant initiative and pressure over it in order to try to curb their goals. It is rational to offer the opponents to open the peace process, reconciliation and reintegration but these all have to be

the processes led and owned by the national authorities.

In both cases, however, the opponent has been drastically oversimplified, unified under a common political denominator and neglected in terms of goals of his struggle. The opponent has however in both cases been a complicated amalgam of various ethnic-religious components, not always sharing the same political goal, of transnational terrorist networks, of exterior ideological fighters, of organized criminal groups as well as of paramilitary formations headed by the local war lords. All of them are most frequently qualified as insurgents. The fight against such a diverse structure of enemies cannot be won by military means – which both of the intervening forces have primarily attempted – and should be achieved through an overwhelming approach where the political role is crucial, albeit with the indispensable factor of a functioning police and justice apparatus.

The Soviets have had major opponents in the *mujahidin* with the ideological-political goal of struggle against the pro-communist government in Kabul and the exterior enemy which supported the regime. The Soviets were not able to suppress enemy activities by political means so that after the enemy unification they decided to open negotiations. They had no success in applying military measures so that they were forced to “liberate” certain areas several times. The unification of *mujahidin* factions has taken place in mid-1980s. Seven insurgent Sunni factions founded the *Ittehad-i-Islami Afghan Mujahidin* (Islamic Union of Afghani Mujahidin) in Peshawar in 1985. Similarly, in 1987 under Iranian sponsorship the foundation of *Hizb-i Wahadat-i Islami* (Islamic Unity Party), the association of eight insurgent Shia groups has taken place (Tabak, 2001). The negotiation process was headed by president Najibullah but the insurgents did not accept it to any considerable degree (Gromov, 1994; Robinson, 2010; Tabak, 2001).

The present opponents are Taliban, Al-Qaeda, local military leaders, Hekmatyar’s *mujahidin* group *Hizb-e Islami*, various armed gangs and smugglers – a group more complex than the one once facing the Soviets. Although some of the factions wage war against each other, all of them have a common goal of expelling the Allies and the defeat of the Kabul regime. The opponents have strengthened their positions with time and have become significant security and political subjects. The perception of this enemy shows a too “Taliban-centered” approach, which then prevents any significant progress. The Afghan Taliban (main factions are the Quetta Shura Tali-

ban – Kandahari faction; Haqqani and Mansur network and the Tora Bora Front) have specific links to Al-Qaeda and the Pakistan Taliban and as confirmed by latest information, not only the political-ideological orientation but also the inclination to use their infrastructure for profit which has then become primary to some of them. The challenge is so much greater because the analyses point to the existence of contacts and specific degree of cooperation among the insurgents (Taliban), terrorists (Al-Qaeda) and organized crime groups on one side and some government representatives (corruption). In a cross-section perspective, the situation is quite similar to the one encountered by the Soviets. President Karzai has been among the first to launch an initiative on the need for all-Afghan reconciliation as perhaps the only possible solution of terminating the war. He has repeated it some ten times. The Americans have refused to listen to the first proposals of the sort but recent years have demonstrated their gradually growing awareness that some kind of “reconciliation” cannot be avoided as the part of the solution of the exit strategy.

The national government leaders should be assisted in their actions, additional international aid should be ensured, donation conferences organized for their sake, they should be assisted in all critical areas and obligations of a long-term alliance given. Their correct political activity should be encouraged, assistance in reforms should be given, support in the conduct of free and independent elections offered, legitimate election results should be acknowledged, while pointing to corruption problems and inefficient administration, as well as enabling the leadership to own key processes. It is necessary to assist the native government in behaving responsibly, in getting ready to take over responsibilities and in being capable of convincing the native population to fight for the common cause to the best of its capabilities.

Since the fundamental instrument of counter-insurgency operation is a political solution – the establishment of a self-sustaining legitimate local government is the goal of all goals (Bayley and Perito, 2010). It is, however, exceptionally difficult to transfer values of a different civilization, ideological and organization cultures into a pre-modern society like the Afghan one, where the major part of social life revolves around the tribal community. Individual authors have reported that Soviet leaders have created many successful policies for Afghanistan which could not have been applied for several key reasons. One of them was the continual conflict in the ruling

NDPA party which could not be stopped despite all the efforts. Fractions have had the primary support of Karmal personally through his placing of his supporters, the *Parchamists*, on all essential position in the administration. He refused to listen to his Soviet advisors and kept persecuting all dissenters while all the time trying to transform *Halqists* into *Parchamists*. Such an approach further induced a rift within the party and led the Soviets to the decision on his deposition as early as late 1986. Also, many of these policies were poorly conducted, with insufficient coordination between the military and the political effort and due to political reasons with the ever present lack of available resources. The military commanders often used to point out that there has hardly been a task which they have or could not have carried out but that military victories have unfortunately had no political support. The Soviets instructed the NDPA party leadership of the need to create a political base in as many social groups as possible. Kremlin strongly suggested to the Afghan leadership that it was imperative to behave openly and friendly towards Islam, to include tribal and religious leaders into political dialogue, to improve life conditions in the rural areas, to discontinue the economic discrimination of the Shia community and to generally increase the development of soft programs (Doohovskoy, 2009; Gromov, 1994; Robison, 2010). Martin Kipping holds that the Soviets have, while cooperating with the Afghan government, been successful in building a system and institutions in areas secured by security forces, most frequently in towns. The best illustration of the national system functioning was the survival of the local administration for several years after the Soviet withdrawal (Kipping, 2010). Almost all the authors point out that one of the key challenges and problems which undermined many projects was corruption of native members of the administration.

As of 2002 the US have engaged in establishing regional initiatives, bilateral strategic partnerships with Afghanistan and provincial reconstruction teams in the security sector reform and in the process of building the Afghan political institutions, which was carried out first through parliamentary, then presidential and finally provincial elections. They have been strongly supporting Hamid Kharzai from the beginning and still keep supporting him although an increasing number of cracks damage this partnership. They predominantly played the card of a powerful central government in Kabul. But, president Karzai's position suffers from loss of support

in the country, as well as abroad, his influence outside Kabul is constantly decreasing while the greatest error for his and his sponsors' cause has been his 2010 statement when he twice repeated that should foreign pressures continue he himself would join the Taliban. The statement made by US ambassador to Afghanistan Carl W. Eikenberry (ambassador to Afghanistan from April 2009 to July 2011) very clearly illustrates all the complexity of the situation in the country. Ambassador Eikenberry has in the course of December 2009 twice written to the State Department and as this US embassy official correspondence has been leaked to the public it has become common knowledge that the ambassador thinks that the US overestimate the capabilities of the Afghan security forces while they underestimate the time required to build civil institutions. Karzai was qualified as an inadequate strategic partner while there is an almost total lack of an Allied civil-political framework for Afghanistan (Eikenberry, 2009). The insider Peter W. Galbraith offered dark forecasts regarding the efficiency of US policies towards Afghanistan, as well as the future of the country. He has stated that Karzai is the leader of the country which is the second most corrupt country in the world according to Transparency International. He stated that many Afghans consider the country's government to be an institution engaged in plundering in cooperation with numerous local power players. He also warned that the Karzai family has been observed in many activities which have damaged the country's security, as well as its development prospects. In regard to the US counterinsurgency strategy he thinks that since it relies on the support of a reliable and efficient local partner while being in cooperation "with the corrupt, ineffective, erratic, and illegitimate Karzai government in power, the US counterinsurgency strategy simply cannot work. Karzai has not yet lost Obama, but he is in danger of losing his country" (Galbraith, 2011: 12).

In regard to the cooperation with the Allied forces, the leading intervention power must establish political coordination at the highest level and ensure engagement of additional resources without hidden intentions of any of the participants. The consensus is necessary also in the area of building critical systems of the country of intervention so that local allies would in time become capable of taking care of the challenges that are being generated within their environment. It is necessary to provide a sufficient number of civilian expert advisers for long-term assistance to the local government.

Jones thinks that the possibility of the national security force to defeat the insurgents and establish the rule of law is the key to the success of any counterinsurgency operation (Jones, 2009). Although the Soviet contingent during the intervention reached the figure of 130 thousand soldiers for the reasons of a mistaken approach, the engagement of inadequate units, as well as slow adaptation, their strategic advantage was operationally not exploited. As an external force they predominantly operated in the field unilaterally and had no coordination and communication problems with the external elements of the operation of the interface nature that the Allied forces experience today. But, they had problems within their own operational entity. Kipping is in possession of data that the Warsaw Pact countries have participated in the intervention with a limited number of civilian experts and political advisors and have trained Afghans in their respective countries. (Kipping, 2010). General Makhmut A. Gareev held that "[t]he Soviet political and military leadership from the very start, in truth right up to the very end, had no definite political, strategic plan and single conception of how to use military forces in Afghanistan. There was no responsible person to whom all the institutions carrying out various tasks were subordinate" (Robinson, 2010: 21). In the area of cooperation with the national security forces, Soviet military and the civilian advisors have had a primary focus on the strengthening of the Afghan armed forces which has in general Vladimir Bogdanov's description been qualified as the building of totally new Afghan armed forces. He has noted the success in abolishing party conflicts which also spilled over to the army from the NDPA party (Bogdanov, 2005). It is also of interest to note that general Lyakhovski is rather critical of the armed forces reconstruction and states that little was done in the area (Lyakhovski, 2009). During this period much less effort was put in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the police force while the establishment of the local self-protection groups was supported (Bayley and Perito, 2010). The establishment of the Afghan security system was done in a number of phases (Ewans, 2005) and had a lot in common with the present situation. The relatively most efficient segment was that of the secret service KHAD (Kipping, 2010) which was established and operated by the Soviet KGB. The paradox of building the security sector in Afghanistan (which is the same model that the Allies face today) lies in the fact that various faction figures, Karmal and Najibulah included, obstructed Soviet attempts of strengthening the

Afghan army (Lyakhovski, 2009; Kipping, 2010). Metz has offered a simple explanation for this. For many weak and unstable regimes the insurgents are less dangerous than an organized and efficient security forces. For, many more regimes have been toppled in military coups than by the insurgents (Metz, 2007). The collapse of the Afghan security architecture and regime began with the discontinuation of Soviet aid and supplies. So that looking at the Soviet effort from this point of view, we could say that they have been comparatively successful in building the Afghan security forces but that the forces in question have not been able to defend the regime against the insurgents.

On the other side, the US has stepped in with minimal force while relying on technological superiority, the alliance with local para-formations and a quick achievement of primary goals. The Allied situation in regard to the operational engagement of human resources is a constant point of contention among Euro-Atlantic allies on both sides of the Atlantic. Partners outside the NATO contribute as much as they can. The main Washington reproaches go to major European NATO countries (not the UK) because of insufficient engagement in the field, insufficient number of the deployed soldiers, national mission caveats, presence only in the responsibility sectors, etc. But, they themselves have not deployed any impressive numbers since the opening of the Iraq front has made Afghanistan a forgotten battlefield with few deployable forces being sent there and for which reason they have pressured NATO to assume a more active role. There is, however, a deep strategic paradox in regard to the NATO engagement. The challenges and the problems arise from the fact, as elaborated by Sean Kay and Sahar Khan, that "NATO's strategic value is undermined by its own institutional rules and procedures. Moreover, while NATO has adapted considerably to the post-Cold War environment, it has not focused serious attention on tactical assets needed for counterinsurgency... NATO has no historical experience of or capacity for directly engaging such movements, although by summer 2006 it had been placed at the center of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan" (Kay and Khan, 2007: 163).

In fact, just with the change of the White House administration in 2009 Afghanistan has once again become of American primary interest for which reason it has been given complete attention and greater resources. The education and training of the national security forces have always been among the key Allied goals in

Afghanistan and in the recent years they have been made a strategic center of gravity. For the reason of this approach the national security forces have experienced an "explosion" of training, education and engagement and have begun taking over responsibility for the provincial order and security from the Allied forces by the first half of 2011. The handing over of responsibility would have to be completed by the year 2014. The police have been given much less attention and resources than the armed forces within the framework of the security sector reform. Bayley and Perito hold this to be one of the key Allied failures. For, the police force is an ever present face of the national government and the only mechanism among the security sector institutions capable of winning over the native population to the effort and for goals common to the members of national institutions and the international community (Bayley and Perito, 2010). The Americans have attempted, like the Soviets before them, for reason of public security, to establish legitimate para-police forces from tribal militias. Throughout the operation the trend of great reliance on private security companies has given ground for concerns.

What has been identical in both the cases, have been the field operation military commanders' requests to the national political elites to increase the respective force numbers and resources in order to fulfill the tasks when resources have been curbed. Equally so common to both the cases has been the lack of perception on the importance of political, social and economic component of the Afghan security, with the insufficient and discontinued coordination and investment into non-military projects which has been too small in comparison to the extent of the military effort.

All the studies of the insurgency show that the crucial element of their development and efficiency is the external support. It is essential that all political means are exploited to make the countries supporting the insurgency discontinue their assistance.

The Soviet leaders have at once realized the importance of Pakistan for the Afghanistan internal process and have issued specific directions to the Kabul regime to open transparent talks with the official Islamabad in order to limit their participation in the conflict and normalize the situation with the Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Doohovskoy, 2009). The situation has developed differently. Pakistan has become the source of everything what the Soviet opponents have only wished for. The location of safe haven, a place to regroup, recruit new members,

for training and education, planning and also for financial and logistic support. The situation with Iran has only been little better. Many in fact agree that Pakistan has been one of the major causes of the Soviet failure in Afghanistan. The Soviets could have done very little because the US has very strongly backed Pakistan. When political means produced no result, USSR has decided to engage in limited secret special force operations on Pakistani territory and also to intensify effort of closing as much as possible of the Afghan-Pakistani border (Gromov, 1994). The attempt to close down the border of 2430 km in length which is inaccessible in many places has turned out to be impossible.

Soon after the beginning of the Allied attack on Afghanistan in 2001 when the Taliban were toppled from power and Al-Qaeda expelled from the country, the majority of the Taliban and almost the whole of the Al-Qaeda command structure have found refuge in Pakistan which then exposed Pakistan to serious challenges. The initial operation implications have been numerous and have to a greater degree determined the further continuation of the conflict. The years have gone, public security in Afghanistan has not been achieved, the border has not been under control and Taliban and Al-Qaeda have relatively easily kept coming from their Pakistan hideouts and have kept entering Afghanistan to attack the Allies. Numerous top-level American figures have pointed out many times to the insufficient engagement of the Pakistan security forces against international and "Pakistani" terrorists, extremists and insurgents, as well as that the high-ranking Taliban have had freedom of movement and activity in big cities of Quetta and Peshawar, including even their councils (*Shuras*). Regardless of how many times have these examples been brought up, one of the major reasons for the American leniency towards Pakistan is to be found in the fact that more than 80 percent of the total Allied logistics in Afghanistan relies on the incoming Pakistani land lines of communication. The Pakistani top state level is not capable of a nearly complete control of all the armed forces elements, the armed forces cannot control the activities of the ISI military secret service (Inter Service Intelligence), which in the final resort is not capable of managing various militant groups that have been created mainly for anti-Indian activity. The US cannot have prevalent influence on Pakistan as long as the Pakistani strategy has kept its basic India-centric orientation. This approach is the reason for limited results in the counterterrorist and counterinsurgency fight. For

fear of India, Pakistan does not want to restructure its armed forces from conventional to more modern counterinsurgency units that would have considerable prospect of a more efficient suppression against the opponents on its own territory and in which way they would considerably assist the Allied effort (Mikac, 2011).

6. Adaptation

A counterinsurgency operation is a struggle of ideas (Counterinsurgency, 2006; McChrystal, 2009) and requires innovative thinking and a constant verification of approach (Grau, 1997). The USSR and US have rushed into Afghanistan without any serious caution and have attempted to achieve victory through a predominantly military approach but have soon come to realize that they lack quite a number of mechanisms for which reason they have begun ad hoc development of counterinsurgency model of operations. The additional problem was caused by the fact that no matter how hard tried they could not escape the military matrix. Robinson arrived at fascinating data to support this thesis. The same percentages of resources have been allocated for military and non-military goals and the same had counted for ratio of military resources allocated to humanitarian activities. The Soviet Army absorbed 94 percent of the total Soviet expenditures (investments) in Afghanistan, in the very same manner of the US Ministry of Defense today. Even the ratio of soldiers reassigned to the projects of "winning hearts and minds" of the local population is approximately the same (Robinson, 2010).

The Soviet adaptation included initiatives in three key areas: political, economic and military. The political and the military leaders "have developed counterinsurgency strategy which has covered all the three categories, including initiatives to win the Afghan people support through political means" (Doohovskoy, 2009: 32). The strengthening of the stability of the Kabul regime, as well as increasing its respect and influence has been a constant Soviet effort. In all the safer areas of the country they invested into the country's economic modernization (increased industrialization and the exploitation of the natural resources), with the consequence of opening new jobs (Kipping, 2010). Najibullah and the Soviet advisors have jointly developed a policy of national reconciliation which covered a wide range of actions and a declaration that the government had no further intention of continuing with the building of socialism but that it has got every intention to

rule in accordance with the Islamic tenets (Evsikov, 2009; Ewans, 2005; Gromov, 1994). Gromov termed this period the stage of national-democratic revolution which has included: a temporary termination of armed conflict, the people's right to the democratic organization of local administration, the attempts to solve the refugee problem (the number of whom amounted to some 4,5 million predominantly in Pakistan and Iran), the sending of advisors into rural areas for the purpose of improving life conditions, the signing of the cooperation agreements between the government and opposition leaders, the actions of bribing village *mullahs* and tribal leaders. In spite of all the efforts, the politics of national reconciliation has not been adequately developed and neither has the passive NDPA managed to get sufficiently active to carry out the tasks. Also, the insurgents have perceived the government policy as a sign of weakness on the part of the state leadership and have intensified their actions with the final goal of creating the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The policy of national reconciliation was planned as a "special form of political compromise where three specific tasks of introducing the democratic order, of ending the war and of fast social-economic development, on the basis of the term used in Afghanistan at the time, of political multiparty system" (Gromov, 1994: 294). The analyses of the military area demonstrate that the Soviets have not been able to transform their armed forces completely, their primary instrument of the overall effort and to move from centralized and conventional approach towards a more dynamic and more efficient system (Doohovskoy, 2009) leaving the one which clearly belonged to the past. Jones thinks that in spite of everything the Soviets have had an essentially incorrect understanding of the nature of counterinsurgency warfare (Jones, 2008).

The US often emphasize that Afghanistan is not only an American war but since many of the Allies turn a deaf ear to this sort of messages, the US are justified in raising the issue of their loyalty and of their support in the coming period. Having lost many years and having led two parallel wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, they have learned that the change of approach has become necessary for fear of losing both of them. By evaluating the field situation, by taking into account the dynamics of challenge and on the basis of national and foreign counterinsurgency experience of the major powers, in 2006 they have published the Army and the Marine Corps handbook FM 3-24 (MCWP 3-33.5) under the title *Counterinsurgency*. The introduction of the manual states that

when conventional forces face the insurgents and try to defeat them by using only the conventional means, they rarely succeed. The manual goes on to state that the majority of insurgencies require a political solution. It is pointed out that the side to the conflict which is capable of faster learning and of adapting to the field conditions usually wins. The whole of the handbook is population-centered with a dominant view of the positive attitude to the population of the country of operation. It has been pointed out that victory will be achieved when the local population accepts the legitimacy of its country's government and stops active support of the insurgents. For this reason, the primary task of a counterinsurgency operation is to speed up the development of the legitimate government and its efficient management (Counterinsurgency, 2006). But the execution has not been as planned. The constant problems have been: inadequate quantity of resources engaged, insufficient coordination and lack of political will for any kind of decisive action. Further, many have qualified the present results as unsuccessful. Richard Holbrooke has very harshly stated that "the present American policy in Afghanistan is a failure" (Holbrooke, 2008: 7). The adaptation has taken better course, as we have stated, with the change of the White House administration and deployment of additional forces to the field. One of them has been General McChrystal. McChrystal has started his mission with a document titled *COMISAF'S Initial Assessment*. This document offers a very good and deep analysis of the situation in the battlefield while not choosing any fine phrases to describe the limits and the results of his forerunners and Allies; it has requested a real conduct of counterinsurgency strategy and taking over of initiative from the opponent. The Afghans have accepted him well because he has insisted on a population-centered approach and the primary protection of the population. He has also advocated a change in the way of thinking and acting and has recognized as critical the weak point of relations between the central government and the local communities, especially so in the rural areas of the country; he has requested the strengthening of the local forces so that they would be capable of accepting future challenges (McChrystal, 2009). His request for an additional 40 thousand troops in order to be able to carry out the planned tasks has created a huge burden for President Obama who has been skeptical in respect of the new increase in the number of soldiers for Afghanistan. Obama has been stretched between military advisors who have



suggested literal conduct of the counterinsurgency doctrine and a raised number of soldiers, as well as civilian advisers who have proposed a different approach. Eikenberry has expressed concern towards the counterinsurgency strategy which he has not considered to be the only and the most efficient method to achieve goals because it has been set too narrowly. He did not support the requests of the colleagues from the Ministry of Defense on engagement of several new thousands of soldiers since he has held that the key to success did not lie with the expanded military presence (Eikenberry, 2009). A similar position was shared by Holbrooke whom Obama nominated special presidential representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Holbrooke had doubts about "the right road" of war in Afghanistan and considered military victory to be out of reach and the reconciliation the key to the success.

7. Exit Strategy

The decision on the termination of the operation is brought by politicians in the same manner as of the conduct of counterinsurgency operation. Because of the duration of the operation compared to a much shorter time in cabinets, what happens most frequently is that one group sets the operation in motion while the other group takes over its place when the operation has to be brought to its close.

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan has been discussed for the first time as early as several months after the beginning of the intervention. As the time passed, the Soviets have come to realize how damaging the intervention has been for their international reputation but were able to formulate an efficient exit strategy. Their concern has been that withdrawal without the goals achieved would make them losers in the eyes of the international community and the intervention would be called the Soviet Vietnam. Besides, they had concerns about the security of their own borders because of the insurgent Islamist threats and since the second task of the intervention, stabilization of the Afghanistan situation, has not been reached. They have therefore decided to withdraw once the situation in Afghanistan gets stable. After several rotations at the Soviet top, the head position was assumed by Mikhail Gorbachev who after a year-long consideration decided to end the then six-year conflict and lead his forces out of it. This approach has not been to Karmal's liking because he got used to all forms of Soviet aid, from military to economic. He has hoped that the Soviets would

stay in Afghanistan "long if not forever" and did agree to the option of withdrawal. This view cost him his position. His successor Najibullah concluded that the change in the NDPA politics was imperative and participated in the creation of politics of national reconciliation and agreed to negotiations which have resulted in the Soviet withdrawal (Ewans, 2005; Gromov, 1994). Under the auspices of the UN on 14 April 1988 the conference on the termination of war in Afghanistan was held in Geneva. The representatives of the UN, the US, the USSR, Afghanistan and Pakistan took part in the conference. The termination of the conflict and the withdrawal of the Soviet forces were agreed in the following nine months and the use of the same route which they have used to come in. The withdrawal began on 15 May 1988 and ended on 15 February 1989. With the termination of the Soviet-Afghan war the civil war which has grown into the "total conflict" between the NDPA government and mujahidin as well as interethnic conflict of the well-armed ethnic factions who have fought for the control of territory and the control of roads, has been continued. The Geneva agreement "expelled" Soviet forces from Afghanistan but the war was not stopped, the form of government in the country was not agreed upon nor was there agreed a termination of aid to the warring sides in Afghanistan. US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on one side and Iran on the other have continued to aid the *mujahidin*, while the USSR kept supporting the government in Kabul.

The American exit strategy, together with the exit strategies of many other players, have been set by president Obama. His position on the American wars was known even before his entering the White House. When as president of the US he got his chance, he decided to terminate the wars. Iraq took him only a shorter period of time to conclude which then allowed him to concentrate on Afghanistan. At the end of 2009 he published a *Survey of State of Strategies for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan)*. The most significant elements from the *Survey* put emphasis on the position that Afghanistan is not lost but that rather the Taliban have full swing in their operations. Such status quo is not sustainable and acceptable while Al-Qaeda is repeatedly qualified as the greatest threat to regional and global security. He underlined three major areas of strategy: military effort towards transition, significant increase in civilian component and effective partnership with Pakistan. But, he announced that the withdrawal of combat units from Afghanistan is to begin in

the summer of 2011. He refused to go any further over several years of deployment in Afghanistan while focusing on the goals which are beyond capabilities and reach and which would be too expensive to satisfy US national interests in Afghanistan. He is however determined in regard of the continuation of aid to Afghan institutions after withdrawal but has sent a message that the destiny of Afghanistan falls within the responsibility of the Afghan government and primarily of the Afghan people themselves (Remarks by the President..., 2009). The results of the NATO Lisbon Summit can clearly be considered a success for American politics of 2010. Except for the *New NATO Strategic Concept for 21st Century*, great attention has been given to Afghanistan. A long-term partnership agreement has been signed with Afghanistan, several standard pillars of relation to the country and the people emphasized: the Afghan leadership and the Afghan property, counterterrorist struggle and the comprehensive approach. The position on the support to all-Afghan reconciliation and reintegration has been repeated. The training of Afghan security forces has been given sufficient space. The most significant detail could easily be the agreement on handing over Allied control and supervision over the provinces to Afghan security forces which will have been completed by 2014. The Allies have taken responsibility to assist beyond that date. It is significant that this has produced a unity on Alliance level which would for some time silence the requests for individual exit strategies from Afghanistan. The majority of the countries would therefore withdraw in accordance with the American schedule.

8. Conclusion

The US-led Allies, very much like the USSR some 30 years ago, have at present intervened in Afghanistan rashly, without adequate preparation and without understanding the nature of Afghan politics, culture, faith and the mentality of the local population. The superpowers have committed mistakes which are identical in every phase of the operation. Although set in motion for completely different reasons, both interventions have demonstrated success in achieving its initial goal of changing the top set of Afghan political sphere to their advantage in record time. But, already the next step has proven a failure for the powerful USSR as well as for the greatest global superpower, the US. Although they have gone to Afghanistan as technically and operationally superior to the "barefoot" opponents, a

final success was achieved. Among other reasons, for the external support to the insurgents, mainly from Pakistan, as well as for insufficient resources at all the levels, for the mistaken approach, though we find the main reason in the initial lack of counterinsurgency strategy and later, in its slow ad hoc formulation and adaptation to the situation.

Jones has very correctly observed two present essential and interconnected challenges of the US in Afghanistan. The Soviets have been in the same situation in Afghanistan. First, the rural communities are the place where victory would be achieved or the defeat suffered in the counterinsurgency operation and not in the urban centers (Jones, 2008). Second, "United States has crafted its Afghanistan strategy on a fatally flawed assumption: The recipe for stability is building a strong central government capable of establishing law and order in rural areas. This notion reflects a failure to grasp the local nature of Afghan politics" (Jones, 2009: 1).

The problem of the mistaken discourse lies in the fact that the superpowers have failed to observe that the support of the local population which predominantly lives in rural areas of Afghanistan is crucial for the success of the intervention. While the USSR has supported Babrak Karmal and has engaged in the faction struggle within the NDPA, the insurgents have won the majority of the Afghan population to their side. A similar situation has happened to the US in their support of Karzai and while building state institutions and national security forces, have judged the possibility of their independent influence on the population incorrectly for which reason they have neglected the work with the local population. Both powers have been learning on the run and have been changing strategy from the enemy-centered to population-centered, with the population in the first line. In the case of the first intervention, with the passage of intervention time, the Soviets have begun focusing on the population and with the key change coming when Karmal has been deposed and Najibullah put in his place when the policy of national reconciliation was created. Although this policy has not come to be exceptionally successful, the Soviets were on the right track which then raises the question on the final outcome had they stayed in the country and had their own state not collapsed. The key moment for the US has been the working out of a population-centered strategy in the later years of the conflict whose final results are still to be seen.

Unfortunately we are able to conclude that both superpowers did not learn much from their mistakes, as well as from the mistakes of their predecessors. Russia applied the same failing strategy in Chechnya in 1994. While comparing Afghanistan with Chechnya, Lyakhovski points out that the operation has again not been given adequate preparation time while the intervention itself was marked by an equal lack of clarity in terms of political and strategic goals, as well as uncoordinated institutional steps in assessing the character, significance and ways to resolve the conflict (Lyakhovski, 2009). On the other side, the US who has been supporting the Afghan insurgents against the Soviets for almost a decade and has studied the Soviet strategy, at the time of its own intervention entered the conflict relatively unprepared and repeated Soviet mistakes. The Americans, as well as the Soviets before them, have taken too much time to realize that the winning of support of the local population should be the key of the success of the counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan.

In conclusion, in this analysis we have primarily determined the model of a counterinsurgency operation in general and have, through phases, compared the Soviet and the American approach toward the central elements of the model, the centers of gravity. The primary focus has been put on the analysis of the political dimension of a counterinsurgency operation because it determines all other mechanisms. We have established, taking into account the full complexity of the situation in the field, that the intervening forces have not sufficiently exploited their comparative advantages over insurgents and have not timely recognized the necessity of having and applying a model of counterinsurgency operation and its development through stages. Therefore we present the model proposed here as the frame upon which further considerations could be undertaken on the necessities of a continued Allied operation in Afghanistan.

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Politička dimenzija protupobunjeničke operacije: usporedba dviju protupobunjeničkih operacija u Afganistanu

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Intervencija SSSR-a u Afganistanu od 1979. do 1989. godine i trenutačna saveznička intervencija pod vodstvom SAD-a u istoj zemlji u mnogočemu se razlikuju, ali imaju i puno toga zajedničkog. Uzroci i krajnji ciljevi zbog kojih su započete razlikuju se, kao i početni pristupi, no protokom vremena obje su prerasle u protupobunjeničke operacije. Obje su ušle u desetu godinu, iako su političke elite očekivale brze i kratkotrajne intervencije. Isto tako, u oba slučaja vojno superiorne, intervenirajuće snage ubrzo su postale operativno inferiorne, pri čemu su, zbog nerazumijevanja prilika, nedovoljne koordinacije, ali i slabog unutrašnjeg saveznika, uz neadekvatan politički okvir, nedovoljno angažirane resurse i nepristupačan teren, osuđene tek na održavanje *statusa quo*. Zakazao je u prvom redu politički dio. Povlačenje je za Sovjete imalo razarajuće posljedice. Danas započeto povlačenje Amerikanaca, dok većina zadataka nije ispunjena, dvosjekli je mač, no dugotrajni vojni boravak na terenu nije rješenje. Važno je analizirati i usporediti ove dvije operacije kako bismo detektirali uspješno provedene korake kao i propuštene prilike te izvukli zaključke za nastavak savezničke operacije jer – kako povjesničar Paul Robinson ispravno zapaža – saveznici se danas nalaze u sličnoj poziciji u kojoj su bili Sovjeti. Svrha je istraživanja dvostruka. Prva je analizirati bitna obilježja političke dimenzije protupobunjeničke operacije, ponajprije djelovanje intervenirajućih sila prema centrima gravitacije protupobunjeničke operacije, a druga dati preporuke za pravilnu primjenu načela protupobunjeničke operacije.

Ključne riječi: protupobunjenička operacija, SSSR, SAD, pobunjenici, lokalno stanovništvo, saveznici, centri gravitacije