



Low Intensive Conflict and Military Force Failure:

- The Soviet War in Afghanistan -

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Abstract

This study analyzes the field of low intensity conflict from a different angle. Its primary goal was to examine how the gaps between the degrees of preparation of a military force towards low intensity conflict and high intensity conflict could be filled. However, the data sources for this study were scarce and new critical questions which have been neglected in the literature has risen: why does this type of war become so common in recent years, and why did the armed forces rarely win? This study leads to the conclusion that low intensity conflict has been perceived as inferior compared to high intensity conflicts, which is the main reason why regular military forces repeatedly find themselves unprepared for this type of conflicts.

Key words: low intensive conflict, military force, Soviet, Afghanistan, Mujahidin

1. Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, and in parallel to the out break of the cold war, most conflicts throughout the world were characterized as Low Intensity Conflicts. This was not a new form of war, as this phenomenon existed since the dawn of history, especially in the context of asymmetric conflicts between countries and non-state organizations. These conflicts were labeled and named in different ways changing with place and time, yet the general interest in this kind of war and the attempt to develop

military theories accordingly is a relatively new field. The increasing interest in the importance of low intensity conflicts is due to the decrease in the spread of conventional high intensity conflicts among countries, yet this is not the sole reason for that interest. Changes in the international system (the disappearance of the new world order), in world culture (mass media and changes in the moral relation to war), in technology (miniaturization of weapons and communications), have all dramatically increased the importance of low intensity conflicts and their effectiveness as a mean to victory in a violent conflict.

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As said, during the last 60 years, low intensity conflicts became more often, and their sides were, in most cases, countries with military and economical power opposing far weaker and smaller subversive organizations. Despite the obvious asymmetry, the stronger side of the regular armed forces found it difficult to defeat the organizations (in certain cases countries triumphed at the tactical level, but lost at the strategic).

This research will try to answer the question – why do regular military's find it difficult to win in low intensity conflicts, while presenting the special characteristics of those conflicts as opposed to high intensity conflicts. The research will further focus on asymmetrical conflicts between countries and non-state organizations.

This research reaches several conclusions regarding the question at hand. Low intensity conflicts, despite their name may be very intense and bring disaster upon the involved peoples; moreover, they threaten world stability and pose a serious question regarding the political value of the use of force. Regardless of all that, the common conception in many military's is to treat low intensity conflicts as an inferior genre of war, when opposed to the more dangerous and complex war or high intensity conflict. As a result of this ill treatment, not only did military's suffer a real lack of study and training of this form of warfare (while clearly prioritizing high intensity conflict), but also statesmen and their military's leaders are finding it difficult to understand that they are actually engaged in this kind of conflict. The results are devastating – fighting with unsuitable goals, methods and tools resulting in failure. This research's conclusions by no mean suggests that

there is a need for a new and separate system of theoretical rules to analyze these conflicts and come up with the ways of dealing with them, rather says that the existing theoretical tools in the field of war and strategy (like the principles of war) still apply, yet their application needs to be modified and adjusted to fit the characteristics of low intensity conflict. Moreover conclusions drawn from one conflict are, not to be duplicated to another without proper attention to the differences in theatres.

The research method is built around a case study – the Soviet War in Afghanistan in the 1980's. The analysis of the factors that caused the Soviet defeat to the much inferior in military and economic strength– Mujahidin organization, and further on, Soviet collapse as a super–power, in comparison to similar conflicts and in light of the characteristics of low intensity conflict, are all a very good set of tools to examine the fundamental question of this work.

II. Low Intensity Conflict – characteristic and decisive factors

The term 'Low Intensity Operation' first used in the 1960's and changes to Low Intensity Conflict in the 1980's (Yarborough, 1993). This form of war has different characteristics in comparison to total and limited war (High intensity conflicts). But Prior to defining the characteristics of Low Intensity Conflict (hence LIC) and the factors through which conflict decisiveness is achieved, one must position this dispute in the war–conflict spectrum.

1. The place of LIC in the spectrum of conflicts

The phenomena of war involves the use of force in order to achieve goals – usually, yet not exclusively, of a political kind. War can be looked upon as a continuum of violence levels and the other side, which countries are at conflict with, can be another country, or group of countries, but it could also be an organization representing a group in the population (IRA–The Irish Republican Army) or different peoples (PLO–The Palestinian Liberation Organization). In–fact since the end of the Second World War, the vast majority of wars (70–90% according to different researchers) were not wars between two rival countries, but wars in which one side (and sometimes both sides) were ‘Non state actors’, using force for political goals (Van Creveld, 1991: 20). The British Army, as an example, took part in 34 operations after Second World War, only 4 of them where High intensity conflicts (hence HIC)(Kitson, 1971: 1).

Military conflicts are of broad diversity, thus it is customary to divide war to three basic levels of intensity, deriving from the levels of violence used (IDF, 2005). At one end of the spectrum, a conflict in which a country exerts all of its military, economic and social resources, this is the Total War (such were the world wars). In between lies limited war, as was the first Gulf War (1991). In a limited war, the forces act as in Total War, but the goals of the war are more limited and the use of military power will usually be limited, in strength and in time. At the other end of the spectrum are all limited conflicts we do not consider as conventional war (OOTW–Operation Other Than War or PKO– peace keeping)(Jandore, 1995: 55–67) that from now on will be labeled as

– LIC. A LIC is any violent or potentially violent dispute that exceeds the state that is regarded as peace, but hasn’t actually escalated to conventional war (as defined above). This kind of conflict is usually characterized by the fact that sides use force (or use the threat of force) as means to a political end, yet other political means are used at least at the same amount as armed force. It is true that war, including limited war, is intended to achieve political goals, and is conducted within a frame of political boundaries and guidelines; but the dominant set of considerations regarding the actual course of the war is a military–operational one, while the political considerations are secondary, or have only indirect influences. Unlike conventional war, the LIC is political not only in goals and boundaries but, in the actual nature of its efforts. Thereby the methods of military operations, even at the lowest scale and level will be dictated directly from the political considerations, while military–operational considerations will only be a distant second.

In LIC, we can distinguish between the routine every day activity aimed at all forms of enemy activities, and larger scale operations in which more power is used for a limited amount of time, but still in the limits of a LIC.

At a glance, the distinction between different forms of war is a clear and simple one, yet reality is hardly that simple. Knowing exactly when a conflict crosses the line from a LIC to limited war or from limited war to total war is harder. As an example, the U.S. Army’s tardiness in adapting to the changing operational imperatives of the Phase IV of the war in Iraq (which is LIC) was indeed a contributory factor in the Coalition’s failure to

exploit the rapid victory over Saddam achieved in the preceding conventional warfighting phase (which was HIC). Furthermore, its approach during the early stages of Phase 2 exacerbated the task it now faces (Aylwin-Foster, 2005).

The characteristics of Low Intensity Conflict

One of the most prominent characteristics of LIC's of all kinds, is the relatively slow pace of violent events - the method used to achieve supremacy (at least by the side dictating the nature of the war to its opponent), is the gradual wearing down of the opponent's will to fight, usually using a continuous series of small attacks accompanied by a psychological warfare effort, designed to amplify the impression caused by each attack (Dannreuther, 2013: 3). This basic distinction can be further deduced:

- The scale of forces active in any given time is relatively small, though short large-scale operations initiated by either side are possible.
- Even when masses take part in the violence, the level of violence will be limited.
- Measures are taken or initiated in order to attack military or civilian assets of the enemy, yet territory is not taken, or at the most very minute occupations are performed.

In most low intensity conflicts between a country and a non-state organization, non-regular forces will be operated by the non-state organization (in a LIC between two countries one will prefer, for various reasons, to use non-regular forces rather than its military). Levels of violence are bound to change and non-regular forces will use several methods among which: Insurgency, Guerrilla warfare and Terrorism. Naturally an organization

or a country can move from one method to the other or use combinations of methods in different phases of the conflict.

It is possible to identify the factors that determine the true balance of power and constrain the strategic, operational and tactical concepts and thinking of both sides in a conflict between a country and a non-state organization. The sum of these factors derives from a basic situation of asymmetry (Dannreuther, 2013: 10) in the balance of power. This asymmetry is in favor of the country, in terms of basic fighting capabilities - in relation to the country, the organization is inferior in the scale and nature of the resources at its disposal. But this does not mean that this substantial advantage cannot be balanced, since the asymmetry exists in many other fields, this time to the benefit of the organization. As an example, there is a factor of asymmetry in the relative intelligence capabilities of the two sides. This difference is a product of the fact that the country and the organization have very different visual signatures. The country is a huge organization with large, known and visible assets. On the other hand, the organization, up to the point when it gains power and control of territory, is a small body whose assets are hard to trace. Unlike soldiers and policemen in a country, the fighters of the organization do not wear uniforms and are easily assimilated in the surrounding innocent civilian population. They do not need large bases, and their weapons of war are usually small and easily concealed.

Hence the use of asymmetrical warfare is a sophisticated and beneficial way to overcome its natural disadvantages (deriving from the country's

military and economical power) while exploiting its relative advantages to the fullest. By doing that, the weaker side in the conflict switches the conflict to other dimensions, which he has advantages, and avoids HIC, which will give the state the opportunity to use her advantages.

2. Major decisive factors in Low Intensity Conflicts

Among the many LIC's that took place over the past two centuries, several factors can be pointed out as crucial in determining the results of conflicts between countries and organizations, as well as the asymmetrical warfare.

The vision or goals of the two sides - The success of the organization in producing a vision of the future will give enthusiasm and determination to those joining its ranks, as well as create a will in the general public to support and aid in its actions, is a crucial factor in the organization's stamina and in the determination of the limits of its actions. This vision is formed as a political manifest of a religious apocalyptic vision. The spread of belief in this vision gives the organization great stamina, since a true believer will look beyond what he actually won or lost. For him any price is worth paying for the greater apocalyptic vision he is fighting for. The country's ability to counter the vision of the organization with its own vision, while undermining the validity of the organization's vision in the eyes of its supporters, is crucial for a successful campaign. This factor was the main reason for the superpowers being defeated (USA and USSR) in Vietnam and Afghanistan; both of them failed to create a persuasive vision and goal to the war(Borer, 1999: 231-235).

Political and psychological warfare - the special

characteristics of LIC and the modern international theatre gives a substantial significance to the political activity that accompanies any confrontation. In the context of LIC it is even possible to say that the political activity is an integral part of the fighting, and can be looked upon as a form of warfare in which defensive and offensive measures are taken in close coordination with military action. The results of political warfare determine the ground rules for the conflict and thereby the level of freedom in the use of force with regard to each side. Political warfare is on the one hand aimed directly at the governments of other countries asked to offer their support to one side and to restrict the activities of the other, while on the other hand, persuading public opinion in the relevant countries, and thus push their governments to support that side. The current international situation, in which the vast majority of leading countries are democracies, greatly increases the importance of the fight for public opinion - hence the overwhelming significance of mass media. When a democracy is engaged in a LIC, both internal and external political and psychological struggles are not enough. Internal public opinion and a relative political consensus must be reached(Borer, 1999: 235).

The Intelligence struggle - The asymmetry in this field has been introduced earlier. In addition to that asymmetry, the nature of the modern state and the size of its security agencies, confine it to the use of bureaucratic procedures and fixes working patterns. All this, makes it difficult to rapidly change methods of operation, for security forces - if only for the period of time it takes to clear new procedures in a modern state and

assimilate. As opposed to the stiffness of the country, the small organization is not obligated by these rules, thus can easily change procedures and methods as necessity arises. Furthermore the size of the security forces makes it difficult to avoid security and classification breaches, while the comfortable size of the organization allows effective classification and makes unmonitored foreign agent penetration very difficult.

This aspect of asymmetry carries grave implications for the country – its assets and forces are exposed to attack at all times and directions, yet the country itself finds it difficult to find and attack the organization as long as it does not initiate action.

The “Safe haven” – A geographic area or a field of action, in which the organization can activate freely, with practically no threat from the country’s security forces(Sloan, 2012: 23).

Technological balance – The miniaturized military technology of the 21st century and the increased sensitivity for casualties in western societies has substantially reduced the states technological superiority(Broom, 1997). This technology allows the organization’s fighters or terrorists to minimize their exposure to enemy fire and still cause casualties. In light of the asymmetry in intelligence described above, it becomes obvious that those phenomena greatly increased the capabilities of guerrilla and terror organizations, narrowed the retaliation capabilities of regular military forces and made them more vulnerable. Yet it still seems that regular military forces enjoy an overwhelming technological superiority, only they have fighter aircraft, helicopters, tanks, heavy artillery etc, but the value of these weapons is relatively

limited in LIC as a result of the necessary caution when fighting in proximity to non-fighting civilians. Furthermore most capabilities of these weapons are designed and fitted for high intensity war(Cordesman & Wagner, 1990: 363).

An alliance between a country and a non-state organization – Such an alliance is very beneficial for both sides against a mutual foe: The organization enjoys a significant increase in the quantity and quality of the materialistic resources in his disposal (thus increasing its fighting power), and the defense of his supporting country (limiting the enemy country’s ability to wield its fighting power); The country enjoys the ability to engage in a non direct conflict, being fought by a proxy, thus narrowing the danger of its forces and assets becoming targets for enemy retaliation. Some researchers point this factor as the most significant one when balancing an organization’s ability to confront a country.

The time factor – The concepts of time effecting wartime operations are:

1. The defined length of the operation – The time frame for a military operation is set by two groups of considerations: political and military. Generally, any country would rather end the fighting as soon as possible as a result of the high expenses it involves. On the other hand, terror and guerrilla organizations aspire to prolong the campaign, assuming that they have no chance of victory in a short conflict, but the longer the fighting, the more likely it is that war-weariness will push the other side to compromise or to a complete acceptance of the demands of the organization.

2. The pace of events - In LIC, between a country and a non-state organization, the military tries to increase the pace of fighting in order to bring forth its advantage in numbers and crumble the organization. On the other side, the organization, usually aspires to slow the pace down. When under the impression that the pace of events is too fast, the organization's fighters will evade to a "safe haven", there they will hide, rest and regroup until the dust settles. The organization itself cannot however be satisfied with a pace of events so low that the country will be forgiving about or even ignore.

3. Speed of response - The agility of a military force can be a substantial edge for it if it exceeds that of its rival. An agile unit can sometimes overwhelm its opponent, even if the opponent is larger, by dictating the pace of events and engaging only portions of the rivaling unit at any time, thus not allowing the larger unit's full potential to be effectively exerted. LIC is special in that, the activation of small units by the organization and the fact that it has the initiative gives the organization an advantage in the quickness of response to any event. To deal with this fact the military has to spread its forces and allow a substantial freedom of operation and decision making at local levels, thus enabling the engaged unit to respond quickly without the need of lengthy clearance procedures. The speed of response is important also for the politicians during policy management due to the events rapid occurrence in the new world of the 21st century (Toffler & Toffler,

1993: 275). In light of the disproportional political importance of every military incident in this kind of conflict, low-ranking commanders need to be well trained for the understanding of not only the low tactical level, but the basic operational considerations, strategic considerations and even political consideration, all linked to their micro-tactical decisions in that incident (the strategic corporal phenomenon) (Krulak, 1999: 18-23).

4. Timing - doing the right thing at the right time. In LIC the timing of an operation is considered mainly in the political context. While in limited or total war the issue of time is dealt with only in the context of not wasting it or picking the right moment to make a move, the same issue in LIC leads to entirely different decisions.

The territorial factor - Territory has a different meaning in LIC as opposed to total war. Basic concepts like front and rear change their form and meaning. Moreover, there is a difference in the way the military perceives territory and the way the organization does. For a country, land is one of the basic elements of its existence. Therefore the control of land and the presence of symbols of this sovereignty are of importance for the country. But this is not the case for the organization, for its sovereignty over territory is meaningless during the campaign - even if its political goal is control of the territory at the end of the conflict. The organization's operational goal is hitting the country's assets regardless of the position of the official border. The organization will only hold territory for short times, and only when required for the attack of an asset, after which the

territory will be left. Furthermore, when the military initiates an offensive move in a territory usually used by the organization for camp; the organization's forces will rather abandon that territory and move to a different location.

Regional and professional expertise – regional and professional expertise includes two components:

1. An on going and profound knowledge of the method of war (small warfare) and the specific theory of war for this kind of warfare and for this particular territory and conflict.
2. An on going and profound knowledge of the intelligence issues (enemy, land and terrain and other factors) specific for this form of warfare and the area in which it takes place.

The expertise of a fighting force depends on the time invested in specialized training, the period of time it has been fighting in a given region and in the proper and suitable equipment supplied for this specific way of fighting and specific area. The organization usually has an advantage in these fields. The organization is usually occupied with lifetime volunteers, and it usually has only one enemy at any given time and it will stay the same enemy for a long period (It is possible that over a long period of time, enemies will change – the Vietnamese communists fought continuously for over forty years, first versus the French, then the Japanese, then the French again and eventually the Americans)(Borer, 2015: 232). Moreover, the organization's entire campaign will all take place in roughly the same theatre. These facts allow the organization to gather experience and expertise in identifying the enemy's capabilities and limitations, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the significance of the influential factors of the single

combat and whole campaign for this particular conflict.

One of the conditions for the improvement of the military's general quality of performance is the investment of extra resources and more time in the training of the forces for this particular kind of fighting, even at the expense of other missions. Yet for the military, this is a tough call– unlike the organization, that has only one form of fighting and one fighting theatre, the military usually has many more assignments. Due to its limited resources, the military cannot exert all its power, resources and energy to the exclusive expertise in the field of LIC, since this will mean neglecting other war theaters for which this expertise is useless. Moreover some of the military's other missions demand a military theory, training, means and even a state of mind completely contradictory to the ones needed in the LIC assignment. During the Vietnam War one of the American generals grouched that he has no intention to ruin the traditions and establishments of the American army to win this “Crappy” war (Sloan, 2012).

The combined result of all these factors is an eminent compromise over the combative readiness of the regular military's soldiers to engage in a specific conflict – the military will usually prefer the readiness for regular war, which is perceived as potentially much more threatening, over readiness for LIC. After the Vietnam War some critics claimed that as a result of the frequent exchange of soldiers and officers in Vietnam, the American army didn't have 13 years of experience in fighting but one year experience, 13 times(Logan & Ramsay, 2012: 91).

We can summarise the decisive factors as being mainly characterized by the asymmetry between the country and the non-state organization. In most cases, when the organization knew how to take advantage of this asymmetry it is turned from a disadvantage to a substantial advantage.

III. The USSR – Afghanistan Conflict – Battles Unfinished

At the end of 1979 the Soviet Army was sent to Afghanistan, its objective was – as defined by the Soviet government – “to provide international support to our friends, the Afghan people, and to create better conditions for the prevention of possible hostilities by neighboring countries against Afghanistan” (Grau & Gress, 2002: 25). Actually, beside this vague objective, the goal of the Soviets was the strengthening of their communist influence over their Afghan neighbors, whose leadership seemed to be moving towards the US. With this vague cause, the advance mechanized and technologically superior Soviet military forces fought for 9 years, in a bloody battle that cost them over 25,000 lives. The USSR was one of the only two world superpowers, it made a tremendous effort to prevail, it enjoyed an overwhelming aerial supremacy, and spent substantial national resources and lives while fighting a poor organization with little means and no sovereignty – the Mujahidin rebels, despite all of this, the Soviets eventually retreated from Afghanistan, defeated and humiliated.

1. The history of the Soviet–Afghan conflict and Mujahidin

During the 20th century changes in the relations between the USSR and Afghanistan were visible,

Afghanistan was among the first countries that the infant communist state established diplomatic ties with (Chun, 2013: 112). After World War two, Afghanistan received American aid that stopped when the Afghans refused to join the Baghdad pact. This move accelerated the cooperation with the Soviets, and gradually Afghanistan became a part of the soviet influence dominion. In 1973 the monarchy came to an end in a “silent revolution” and the former Prime Minister Daud announced himself as the president of the Afghan republic. Daud started taking a more balanced approach towards the two superpowers while trying to push the country forward, with little apparent success. His complex relationship with the Soviet–Union eventually cost him his life when he assassinated in the 1978 military coup, performed by the Soviet supported communist opposition. Thus began a new complex phase in the history of this country, climaxing with the Soviet invasion. The new ruling party headed by Taraki, under Soviet influence, started a series of far-reaching reforms, trying to swiftly establish a socialist regime over a backward feudal society, an unsuitable transformation for Afghan reality. These revolutionary steps led to serious unrest throughout the country. During 1979 local uprisings multiplied and an armed rebellion against the central government began to rise. The new regimes anti-religious positions gave rise to a wave of religious uprisings in the country, quickly making the struggle take the form of an Islamic religious resistance (Jihad) to the secular regime. Still in 1979 Taraki was pushed out of power and later killed, his deputy, Hfizula Amin, took his place. Despite the total economic and

military dependence on Moscow, Amin tried to present a more independent line, but the public was not persuaded, the resistance continued and with it the religious uprising. The estimate in Moscow was that the regime will not hold for much longer, and eventually the country will fall to the opposition. Along with the aspiration to replace Amin with a more favorable leader, on December 1979, with the defeat of the rebellion in Hungary in 1956 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in mind, the Soviet Union decided on a military invasion to Afghanistan (Grau & Gress, 2002: 28). On the 27th of December the Soviet military took over the capital Kabul with little resistance. Within a few days, the invaders took over most of the Afghan cities and presented Babrek Karmal as the new ruler of the country. It seemed that the vigorous invasion was a success. Karmal proclaimed a more open policy; he did not persecute Islam, was not corrupt and pushed for progress and brotherhood the same communist recipe used successfully in Vietnam. But this was a scheme that convinced no one since Karmal had “hump” he could not disguise: he was brought to the country on the wings of a foreign army. The country will now be run by the Soviets, and this will only heighten the resentment of the regime while strengthening the rebels – the Mujahidin.

Throughout history, foreign invasions were Afghanistan’s share for several times, this fact has shaped the tradition of fighting for freedom and independence for centuries. This history, combined with Islamic religious extremism and the harsh physical conditions in the country, brought forth the tough Afghan warrior, adapted to fight well alone and in small groups. Every tribe had its

own reasons and motives for armed resistance, while the unifying cause of the different fighting groups was the armed struggle against a government that stands against the values of Islam and for the invading Soviet forces. The Mujahidin were not united as a fighting force or as ordered units, but split over tribal rivalries and internal disputes. Only a handful of them had any professional military experience beyond compulsory military service. Unlike the communist guerrillas in China and Vietnam, the Mujahidin did not fight to impose an ideology or a new revolutionary regime in their country, but to defend their families, religion and values against a foreign oppressor (Grau & Gress, 2002: 38).

The Mujahidin’s armed resistance grew continually in size and power, stretching to 150,000 men in 1985. The tactics used by the Mujahidin are based on a few notable guerrilla warfare principles (Borer, 2015: 230–232).

1. The rebels avoided direct contact with superior forces that might destroy them in combat (avoids the strong and attack the weak).
2. They never conducted static fighting and tended to abandon their position whenever a risk of encirclement by a Soviet force aroused (constant mobility).
3. In all battles, the rebels tried to hold the element of surprise (Urban, 1990: 294).
4. The rebel’s methods of operation were characterized by “hit and run” techniques, ambushes and sneak attacks alongside terror and indoctrination.
5. Fierce fighting for the defense of bases or when encircled was done at close range, rendering the Soviet fire and air support ineffective.

All this was further based on an acute knowledge of the terrain and natural born scouting and reconnaissance capabilities. They were able to quickly convey messages about hidden movement of Soviet units using primitive signaling devices. Their flexibility and excellent night activities gave them a substantial edge over the heavy slow moving and ill adapted Soviets.

2. The course of the war

Ever since the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan rebels were at war with the Soviet reliant central rule. The front was everywhere, in the far mountain passes and in the markets of Kabul. Both, the Soviets and the Mujahidin, divide the war to roughly the same four stages.

Stage one – the invasion and the following months (December 79 – February 80):

The Soviet Army entered Afghanistan completely unprepared for this kind of war (Urban, 1990: 287). This phase of the war was characterized by the Soviet strengthening and securing of their bases, without further military actions despite the Mujahidin attacks. This was a rough Afghan winter for the Soviet soldiers, hoping that the Afghan army will do the main fighting against the rebels. This hope faded along with the hope that the invasion and the sheer presence of the Soviet military will deter the rebels and cause the resistance to perish. The main Soviet advantage derived from a rebel mistake, fighting in big groups and not refraining from direct confrontation with the Soviets. This mistake enabled the Soviets to destroy many of these groups. The Mujahidin realized that if they went on fighting head-on with an army superior in every parameter, they

will be defeated, thus the tactics of smaller guerrilla forces was adopted.

In the following months the Soviets, operating in large joint units, failed repeatedly in reacting to the highly mobile offensive actions of the Mujahidin. They were crippled by their poor preparations for this kind of conflict and their dismissing of the experience of other armies (the Americans in Vietnam), and even their own (Another counterinsurgency campaign fought by the Soviets against the Basmachi in central Asia 60 years earlier) (Dickson, 1985: 29–44) experience in counter-guerrilla warfare. In their despair, the Soviet commanders turned to the training books and field manuals, but those did not provide any answers, so operations were run in a “trial and error” manor, that only increased incompetence and casualties. Moreover, the rate of Soviet forces dealing with the defense and security of the newly acquired Soviet assets rose to about 85%, making it impossible to assign forces for offensive action to eradicate the rebels, who as a result gained the initiative.

The second stage – the main stage of fighting, when both sides rearranged their forces and methods (1980–1985):

This is the main phase of Soviet fighting in Afghanistan, characterized in large-scale offensive action. The first year of fighting led the Soviets to two conclusions: activating small forces rather than divisions and a growing dependency on aerial support. The rebels, after suffering heavy losses as a result of their wrong tactics, fall back to the mountains (towards the “safe haven”). The mountains made reaching the rebels practically impossible, and especially, undermined the Soviet’s

technological advantage – the use of modern arms. They disappeared among the local population while using various guerrilla methods as described earlier. Apart from all that, the Mujahidin reorganized their command posts structure, their weapons purchase and distribution system and their guidance and training.

The Soviet's inability to overwhelm their opponents, despite several tactical successes, leads them to conclusion that only the annihilation of the Mujahidin's regional bases will prove to be decisive. Battalion battle groups were activated, raiding towards the mountains and trying to encircle the guerrilla forces and push them to killing zones. Yet these tactics did not accomplish the anticipated results, since raiding forces were spotted from a distance, while the opposing guerrilla forces, activating in small elusive units, took much better advantage of the terrain for mobility, cover and camouflage. Soviets attempts to have agents infiltrate the ranks of the rebels, thus increasing the effectiveness of the raids, failed due to the many double agents (that did more harm than good when defecting) and the difficulty to penetrate the Mujahidin. At this point it also became clear to the Soviets that their heavy fighting equipment was not suited for rough mountain fighting, which further limited their action.

At this point the Soviets reached the conclusion that the center of mass of the Mujahidin was their support from the local population. Thus, in their eyes, only the attack of that linkage may lead to victory. The implications of this conclusion were catastrophic – the transfer and mass-murder of entire populations, becoming refugees in their

country and in Pakistan. The Soviets, knowing Mao Zedong, the leader of the People's Republic of China, and his comparison of the guerrilla fighters to "fish, swimming in the water of supporting population", tried to drain the waters in order to kill the fish (Chun, 2013: 150–155). The tactics of economical infrastructure destruction and the demolishing of villages achieved most of its goals. The banishing of the population proved to be very difficult for the Mujahidin, who had to rely on logistics from Pakistan and establish its bases there.

It is odd that the performed atrocities did not raise public opinion at the time. This could be explained by the Soviet communist regime closing the fighting to media reports and criticism.

The third stage – the decisive year – change of power in the Soviet-Union and the decrease in offensive action (1985–1987):

In the beginning of 1985 the Soviet military in Afghanistan was at the peak of its power, this was the decisive year. As far as the Soviets were concerned, this was the most efficient force in structure and methods since the beginning of the invasion, but even this did not bring the surrender of the rebels. Although it seemed that the Mujahidin were on the verge of collapse, given a technological offensive (combining ground planted sensors, accurate and lethal artillery, effective mines, night vision equipment and advanced use of air support) and the use of Special Forces of the paratroopers (Spetsnaz), which caused many casualties and had a substantial effect on moral. But despite Soviet intense efforts to achieve victory, the Mujahidin did not break, American supplied stinger missiles changed the dynamics of

the fighting and made the Soviet airplanes and choppers fly higher and thus lose some of their efficiency, and damage Soviet technological supremacy (Cordesman & Wagner, 2014: 171). This was a crucial turning point, since with the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev to power in Moscow, it was decided that the main military burden of the fighting will be left for the Afghan Army, with the narrowing of the scale of Soviet offensives. And so, for the first time since the invasion, the Soviets began removing troops from Afghanistan.

The fourth stage - The decision to withdraw (1987-1989):

By the end of 1986, the ruling communist party adopted a policy of national reconciliation along with the reduction of military activities. To implement this policy, an agreement that will ensure the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was essential. The Soviet Union demanded the ending of all military support from Pakistan and other countries to the rebels as a condition for such a withdrawal. On April of 1988 the Geneva agreement was signed and brought a political end to the conflict.

During this time, the Soviets effectively ceased all offensive initiatives, conducting only retaliatory action to Mujahidin's attacks. While the Mujahidin rejected any call for reconciliation, and declared that the Jihad will continue as long as there are Soviet troops on Afghan soil.

On the 7th of April 1988 the USSR decided to remove all forces from Afghanistan. On the 15th of February 1989, humiliated and defeated, the last Soviet soldiers left Afghanistan.

IV. The analysis of the Soviet failure and its aftermath - discussion and analysis

The Soviet failure in Afghanistan was a significant turning point in the course of the cold war. For the first time in its history, the communist state admitted military defeat and for the first time ever another communist regime was abandoned (Chun, 2013: 150-155). The failure is of a dual nature, and it should be examined in both the military and the political fields, in order to provide a good grounding to draw conclusions.

1. The factors that led to the Soviet failure

The difference in the level of determination, deriving from the strength of the two visions - This factor repeatedly appears, as one of the most substantial factors, in all historical examples of LIC. The seeds of Soviet failure lay in the misunderstanding of this factor - the fact that the objectives of the war were obscure. This emphasizes the disregard of other country's experiences and lessons, especially of the US in Vietnam (Summers, 1985: 43-49), since one of their foremost lessons was the need to make a serious effort to define and explain the objectives of the war and their value to the society. Moreover, if the society back home is not recruited in the support of the war's goals, failure in that war is almost assured, and it must not be embarked.

The Americans were not alone in offering relevant lessons of LIC fighting; the French had accomplished an astonishing tactical victory in their war against the Algerian resistance but lost the war. This loss was a result of the absence of the necessary discussion between the political and

the military levels, in order to reduce the country's national goals to military objectives (Grau & Gress, 2002: 28). As said before, this discussion did not take place between the Soviet relevant levels as well. The results of this were catastrophic for the moral and determination of the Soviet army and society. As soon as the true nature of this war became obvious to the Soviet public, voices were raised throughout the USSR against the war's heavy toll and against the lack of real benefit from this involvement in Afghanistan. Above all that, this war caused complete demoralization in the ranks of the Soviet Military, soldiers were told they were embarking on a mission to fend off an imperialist attack; but soon enough, they found themselves taking part in such an attack (some of them were sure they were about to fight the Chinese or the Americans) (Chun, 2013: 150–155). Unlike them, the Afghan rebels were much more obligated to their cause – in the national, religious and ideological aspects – thus making their fighting spirit, moral, decisiveness and determination far greater. Along with the simple will to push back an invading enemy (these popular feelings of identification with the rebel's goals were only reinforced by Soviet atrocities), all led to victory, despite absolute military inferiority.

Political and psychological warfare – the magnitude of Soviet defeat can be estimated when inspecting this decisive factor. Even though this conflict took place at the end of the 20th century, the Soviets enjoyed almost complete control over media coverage in Afghanistan, therefore avoiding the need to explain atrocities on the field to their public opinion or to the world. Compared to the war in Vietnam, where the media played an

important role in shaping the American public opinion, which eventually led to the decision to leave Vietnam, the Soviets enjoyed a substantial, even if immoral advantage. But this advantage was not enough in light of the stamina of Afghan society.

Intelligence warfare – despite Soviet long familiarity with Afghanistan, and the fact that Soviet agents infiltrated the Afghan ranks, the level of their intelligence throughout the war was inadequate. The information relayed back to the forces was hardly ever adequate, a fact that severely affected the results of Soviet battles. The Afghan rebels however, used the asymmetry of the situation to the fullest. The highly developed military infrastructure established by the Soviet army, as well as the need to use the main roads, was an easy prey for the Mujahidin's intelligence, enabling successful attack and forcing a large portion of the Soviet Military to be bound to defensive activities. This had a tremendous influence on the Soviet soldier's morale, since they didn't only suffer from the attacks but felt vulnerable at all times.

The "Safe Haven" – here too the Mujahidin had an advantage. The "foundations" of this safe haven were built on the support of the local population and the ability to assimilate in it (although severely damaged when the Soviets started clearing villages). It continued with the mountain hideouts, Russian inability to sufficiently enlarge the magnitude of their army as a result of the poor logistical infrastructure, and the shelter provided by Pakistan.

Technological Balance – the Soviets tried to win the war using their technological supremacy over

the Mujahidin, who, quite successfully, evaded and bypassed this advantage and achieve technological balance or sometimes even a local advantage of their own. Soviet equipment was designed for a different war in a different environment, and did not function optimally in the harsh terrain of the mountains and deserts, and against guerrillas. Even when it seemed like the technological factor is about to bring the war to an end, the rebels managed to balance the odds again using American supplied anti-aircraft missiles.

An alliance between a country and a non-state organization - In this case, it seems obvious that without Pakistan's support and the American aid, the rebels could not have survived for long, much less triumph. After the deportation and murder of the supporting population, it was Pakistan that gave the rebels a logistical rear. And as said before, it was the American supplied missiles that helped balance the technological asymmetry, right on the verge of the collapse of the rebels.

The time factor - after over nine years of fighting the war in Afghanistan, the Soviets were finally exhausted. For them, the political and economical price was unbearable, while the rebels had time, being used to the harsh living conditions and as a conquered people with nothing to lose. The rebels realized that the longer the war was, the more likely the Soviets were to decide they had had enough, and return home. The rebels also had an advantage of great agility, when compared to the convoluted Soviet war machine. Naturally, the bureaucracy of the Soviet Army, being a regular army under the control of a country only increased this lack of agility, when compared with the rebels

who were not bound by any of these procedures.

The territorial factor - aside from the fact that conducting classical war operations in accordance with Soviet Doctrine was impossible due to the rough terrain, the rebel seized their advantages as a local guerrilla organization. First, they saw no importance in holding an area in which the Soviets had an advantage. The territorial control of their country was a long-term objective, which was eventually achieved. Second was the fact that the Mujahidin dragged the Soviets to fighting in the mountains, where the Soviet technological advantage was lost.

Regional and professional expertise - the Soviet Military, while fighting in Afghanistan, was supposed to be ready for fighting the American Military in Europe or anywhere around the globe, in completely different manor and conditions. So, bound to the doctrine, strategy, operational concepts and tactics suited for a completely different theater, the Soviet Military had to rush and develop fighting methods that were suited to fighting Afghan guerrillas (Grau & Gress, 2002: 20). But what became their disadvantage was the fact that, like any regular Military, they had to rotate units and officers, as the war prolonged, while the Mujahidin obviously used the same personnel through the war. The rotating soldiers, who returned to the USSR, caused a loss of knowledge and expertise but also caused a severe demoralization of the Soviet society. The doubts of the soldiers regarding the value of this war became eminent for everyone (Grau & Gress, 2002: 21).

Other factors - The targeting of the Soviet center of gravity. The rebels identified the Soviet center of gravity as the link to the central

government in Afghanistan, and succeeded in harming it throughout the war, while rendering the central government illegitimate and rally supporters to oppose it.

2. What can be learned from the Soviet failure about LIC

The Soviet failure derives from the fact that neither the political nor the military levels were ready for a conflict of this kind – a low intensity conflict.

The Soviets prepared their army to fight high intensity, large scale offensive battles in the plains of northern Europe and China. In this kind of war, tactical discipline is preferable to tactical flexibility, and the war is won at the operational level. The Soviet Military's structure, equipment, tactics and logistical infrastructure were all designed to support this operational conception (Jalali, 2002: 72–87). According to the scholar Lutwak, in LIC, there is a vacuum at the operational level, as a result of the lack of large military operations. The central nodes of activity are at the strategic level on the one hand, and on the tactical level on the other. Yet in between, the operational level is practically unfelt (Lutwak, 1996: 33–44). Thereby, the problem of the Soviets was that their entire concept of conflict was wrong and inappropriate for fighting against the guerrillas in Afghanistan. They never understood their enemy or the neighboring country they were fighting.

Today, a HIC, or war, has disappeared from the horizon; yet Russian officers are still dedicating their time to study these wars in their military academies. Despite taking part in conflicts that resemble the war in Afghanistan, like in Chechnya,

the lessons of Afghanistan are yet to be assimilated (Grau & Gress, 2002: 328).

But they are not alone – although these lessons are not unique for the Russians, rather are relevant to any modern Military, using technologically advanced equipment and trying to coupe with guerrilla warfare, fought by an organization on its own land, and aided by the local population, and despite multiple conflicts of this kind in recent years – still academies in Military's like the American, the British and in Israeli, all are involved at present in a low intensity conflict, dedicate most of their time to the study and training of a HIC.

During the Vietnam War one of the American generals complained that he has no intention to ruin the traditions and establishments of the American army to win this “Crappy” war. This represents a common perception in many Military's today as well – LIC is not considered to be “the real thing” (Naveh, 2005), rather is the conventional, high intensity war, which is more complex, dangerous, difficult to fight at all levels and challenging. Low intensity conflicts should be taken more seriously, being as common as they are in today's international system.

But still despite their spread, and after the Soviet failure and several other echoing military defeats, apart from being dismissive, countries and Military's find it difficult to even realize that they are engaged in a LIC and do nothing to prepare for it.

There are two basic principles for counter insurgency – firstly know your enemy and secondly is defeating it before it moves to guerrilla fighting (Thompson, 1974: 50). The Soviets failed

in implementing both principles in Afghanistan. Yet more than 20 years later, the Americans in Iraq are experiencing similar failures. The sluggishness in the American Army's adaptation and understanding of the necessary changes in the move from the first phase of high intensity fighting to the second one, of low intensity, is the main reason for their continuing failure in counterinsurgency and the war against terror, and in not taking advantage of the swift victory in the first part of the war (Aylwin-Foster, 2005). This sluggishness caused subversive factors not to be defeated before moving on to guerrilla warfare, along with the fact that the Americans did not know the separatist reality in Iraq and the enemy they are facing, it is a good example that the Americans, even after Afghanistan and Vietnam, did not learn the lessons of these wars. But once again they are not alone - it took the I.D.F quite a few years to realize that what it was doing in southern Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, were not "actions of constant security" - a thing you do while preparing for the real big war - but a kind of conflict that requires more serious attention.

It is clear then, why the phenomenon of low intensity conflicts demands a different and more serious approach. Despite their name and despite the tendency to describe them as less dangerous than high intensity conflicts, they may be very intense and bring disaster upon the peoples engaged. Moreover, these conflicts are a threat to international stability, like the conflict in Afghanistan contributed to the collapse of the Eastern Block (Borer, 2015: 231), and the conflicts in Iraq and Israel. These conflicts pose serious question regarding the value of the use of forces

as a political means, and may affect the future of the national state (Kober, 2002: 15-38).

This does not mean that a new and special system of separate theoretical tools is needed to analyze this phenomenon, and offer ways of dealing with it, nor does it suggest that a new set of concepts is needed. It all can and should be done within the existing set of general theoretical tools in the field of war and strategy (Kober, 2002: 15-38), much like the principles of war which apply to limited conflict as well, and implement these tools differently, while learning from earlier conflicts like the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

In addition, one must be careful in drawing conclusions from one conflict to another without taking the difference in theaters into consideration along with the objectives of both parties.

As an example, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is substantially different than LIC's such as the Vietnam or Algeria. On the one hand, the two conflicts took place across oceans separating the national infrastructure and the population centers of the US and France from the conflicts theatres, and the fighting never threatened the existence of these two countries. While on the other hand, Palestinian terrorists are organizing and performed inside, or in close proximity, of Israeli centers of infrastructure and population, thus paralyzing cities and causing tremendous moral and economic damage, up to the level of a real threat to the existence of Israel.

Much can be learned about LIC's, and about the Military's difficulties in winning this kind of war, from the Soviet failure, but like in any conflict, and especially in LIC, a discussion of the unique characteristics of the conflict must be made, and

then conclusions can be drawn and implemented accordingly in a different scenario.

V. Conclusion

The Soviet war in Afghanistan and its aftermath is an example of a Low Intensity Conflict, with characteristics and lessons that can tell us a lot about the differences between LIC, and HIC and about the reasons Military's find it difficult to win these conflicts.

The Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, despite their military and economical superiority, contributed to the collapse of the Soviet block, and of the Soviet Union as a global Superpower. This defeat was a result of the strategic and operational level's inability to fully understand that this conflict was fundamentally different than the war in Europe they were training for throughout the Cold War, and that this was a low intensity conflict of different characteristics. Their other failure in clearly defining the objectives of the war, and in making the Soviet society identify with these objectives, substantially contributed to this defeat.

Yet despite this failure, and despite the fact that the influence of LIC's on the international system is so profound and obvious, neither the Russian military (which still has difficulties today in another LIC in Chechnya) or other military forces truly assimilated its lessons.

In light of the importance and the spread of these conflicts, the dismissive approach to it, and the regarding of it as less important than HIC, is unexplainable. This dismissive approach, leads to

American difficulties in its war in Iraq, not knowing how to use its victory in the first, high intensity, phase of the war for the transfer to the second low intensity phase. At the end of this war, in case America fails, history will give no significance to the glorious triumph at the first stage of the war, in early 2003. The United States inability to differentiate the two phases and be properly prepared to the second phase (even better prepared than for the first one since it proved to be decisive) can lead to that.

The difference between HIC and LIC is substantial. The asymmetry along with other decisive factors creates the differences that separate these two forms of war. But nothing indicates the need for a different language and for the writing of new theories and doctrines of war. The tools we use today, like the principles of war, are relevant for LIC's as well. It is but the way we implement them that must be changed in accordance to the understanding of this form of war, and the experience of others. Naturally, this studying must be done while bearing in mind the differences between theaters and the difference in the parties' objectives, which limit our ability to apply the lessons as they are given.

Human nature, global instability, alongside the advance of technology and communications, will all make LIC more wide spread and more efficient for achieving political goals than HIC. The investigation, study and training towards low intensity conflicts, must be in the center of preparations for any Military who wishes to win these conflicts.

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저강도 분쟁과 군사력의 한계

– 구소련의 아프가니스탄 전쟁 –

국문초록 본 연구의 시작은 저강도 분쟁을 조금 다른 시각에서 접근하려는 것이다. 그 첫 번째 논의는 군사적 대비태세에 있어 저강도 분쟁과 고강도 분쟁 사이의 간극을 살펴보려는 것이다. 아직 이 분야 연구의 자료가 부족하지만 최근 들어 더욱 잦아지는 이런 형태의 전쟁에서 군의 완전한 승리는 왜 어려운 것인가, 그리고 이러한 형태의 전쟁은 제한적인 것인가 하는 근본적인 물음을 제기하려고 한다. 본 연구의 결론은 이러한 연구 주제가 결코 우연히 생겨난 것이 아니며, 저강도 분쟁에 대한 정확한 이해는 적어도 이런 유형의 분쟁이 지속되는 한 결코 저강도 분쟁이 고강도 분쟁의 하위 개념일 수 없다는 것을 지적하고자 한다.

주제어 : 저강도 분쟁, 군, 소비에트, 아프가니스탄, 무자히딘

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