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The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost

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the American defenses, one must anticipate a devastating nuclear reply. This strategic fact is bound to affect anyone who is not merely suicidal. Therefore, on the prospect that the defense might work well enough, and given the certainty of a powerful response, a nonsuicidal enemy will have considerable hesitation about attacking. That hesitation is increased—it is in no way decreased—by an in-place ballistic-missile defense. As a consequence, strategically speaking, the issue of “perfect” defense is a phony one. Moreover, the author shows no understanding whatsoever of the power of separate layers of defense. The fact that a three-tiered defense in which each tier has 80 percent effectiveness has an overall system effectiveness in excess of 99 percent goes completely unremarked.

Also, much is made here of the notion that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) sought to make nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” This is closely related in the book to the ridiculous notion of “perfect” defenses. In his speech of 23 March 1983, however, President Reagan called upon the scientific community to “give us the means of rendering those nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete.” The strategic argument—that it is when one is convinced that an attack could not succeed that those weapons become “impotent and obsolete”—has totally escaped FitzGerald.

Most serious, however, is the failure of FitzGerald to understand that the Reagan administration set out deliberately to return, after the debacle of the Carter administration, to an active containment of Soviet imperialism and to accelerate the erosion of the Soviet system from within. The SDI was part of this overall strategy, which was set forth in National Security Decision Directive 75, dated 17 January

1983, entitled “U.S. Relations with the USSR.” Although this document—originally classified “Secret Sensitive”—was declassified and released in 1994, the book makes no mention of it. Clearly this information was available to FitzGerald, and one is left to speculate as to reasons for its absence. Perhaps it is because NSDD-75 says clearly that the United States “should continue to resist Soviet efforts to return to a U.S.-Soviet agenda focused primarily on arms control.” That, of course, offends the very essence of *Way Out There in the Blue*.

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Russian General Staff. *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*. Edited by Lester W. Grau, translated by Michael A. Gress. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2002. 364pp. \$45

This book, edited by Lester Grau of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is the last of a trilogy that covers the Soviet-Afghan War of 1979–89. His translator, Michael Gress, served in the Soviet Army in Afghanistan. Volume 1, *The Bear Went over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*, was an early translation of original Russian documents prepared by student-officers—who had direct combat experience in Afghanistan—at the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow. It was first published in Russian in 1991, then republished in English in 1996 by the National Defense University. For the second volume, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahedeen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (1996, U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, Va.), Grau had the valuable assistance of Ali

Jalali, a former colonel in the Afghan army.

The third volume was written by a team of Russian military academicians led by Colonel Professor Valentin Runov, with contributions from officers who had served during the war. It is a systematic critical analysis from the perspective of the Russian General Staff, providing a significant amount of information regarding the type of conflict the Soviets faced in Chechnya and Central Asia. It describes how the relatively high-technology Soviet troops fought in a protracted war of attrition with a low-technology, ill-disciplined, but highly motivated guerrilla force until the Soviets were forced to withdraw. In contrast to volume 1, on Soviet combat tactics in Afghanistan, this volume provides an in-depth analysis of how different branches of the Red Army interacted and fought in specific raids and ambushes. When Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in 1979, they applied textbook techniques for launching a mass linear blitzkrieg attack against Nato forces in Europe. However, they found these techniques of little use against the Afghans and switched to nonlinear tactics, increasing their use of high-precision weapons, which are better suited to the treacherous mountainous terrain. Grau describes well the three visible tactical improvements that the Soviets applied in the field: the combined-arms brigade; the materiel support battalion; and the smallest units, *bronegruppy*, consisting of three to five tracked or wheeled armored vehicles. There are also discussions on the role of the *Spetsnaz*, the special reconnaissance and commando units, and air assault techniques using helicopters, which were widely employed until the Afghans began effectively using Stinger missiles.

Although the Soviet-Afghan war has often been compared with the U.S. war in Vietnam, it was very different. While American strength rose to over 500,000 troops, who were employed in sizable operations, the Soviet "Limited Contingent" (its official title) varied from 90,000 to 120,000 troops, packed into the Fortieth Army's four divisions, five separate brigades, three separate regiments, and smaller support units, which were stretched to the limit to provide protection to more than thirty provincial centers and industrial installations. Moreover, up to 20 percent of its strength went to man over 860 picket posts throughout the country, and much combat strength was further drained by convoy duties.

In spite of valuable critical comments provided by the American editors at the end of each chapter, some important aspects of the war are hardly discussed. Only four pages are devoted to the role of loyal Afghan (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) forces, which were about the same size as the Soviet Fortieth Army. We learn almost nothing about the special DRA Ministry of the Interior troops (*Sarandoy*), the military units of KHAD, the dreaded Afghan secret police, or the panoply of tribal militias intermittently cooperating with the Soviets against the guerrillas.

However, one should appreciate the revelations found in this book, such as the correct number of Soviet casualties since the 1979 invasion. Despite Mikhail Gorbachev's trumpeted *glasnost*, his official number of 13,833 dead was apparently about half the actual number. The third volume also confirms earlier findings that, in spite of the systematic penetration of the military and administrative infrastructure of Afghanistan prior to the invasion, Soviet intelligence—especially

when trying to penetrate the *Mujahedeen*—was very poor.

Even with the shortcomings mentioned, this volume must be rated as one of the best in providing a systematic analysis of the Soviet armed forces on the tactical level. In addition to twenty photographs of soldiers and their weapons, there are about thirty maps illustrating various tactical operations. The translation from Russian to English is excellent. The book will be indispensable to students of military tactics, as well as area specialists, as its lessons continue to be pertinent to conflict in Central Asia.

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Connaughton, Richard. *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines*. New York: Overlook Press, 2001. 394pp. \$35

In the dark days following the onset of the Pacific War, American military successes were few and far between. The gallant, albeit unsuccessful, defense of the Philippines, however, captured the national spirit and made General Douglas A. MacArthur a national hero. His triumphant return to Manila three years later seemed to confirm his status as a commander of extraordinary military genius. Largely forgotten was his abortive defense of the archipelago in 1941 that ultimately led to the surrender of the largest number of American troops in history. In his prequel to *The Battle for Manila*, British author Richard Connaughton examines MacArthur's early campaigns and concludes that his subject was a courageous general but a deeply flawed man.

Connaughton begins his story with a brief narrative outlining America's involvement in the Philippines since the 1880s, the same decade that witnessed MacArthur's birth. Switching gears, he then follows MacArthur's career from his graduation from West Point in 1903 through his multiple tours in the Philippines. Connaughton pays special attention to his subject's activities in the years immediately preceding World War II, when MacArthur held the rank of field marshal of the Philippine Commonwealth. The MacArthur who emerges during this period was the kind of military planner whose strategic vision was based on the enemy's presumed intentions rather than the foe's capabilities.

When the Japanese attacked in December 1941, MacArthur's defensive plans proved hollow. Connaughton severely criticizes MacArthur for allowing the destruction of his air force on the ground at Clark Field and speculates that MacArthur, alone of the other senior Allied commanders who suffered defeat in the first days of the war, was not sacked but promoted to the temporary rank of general because he was "untouchable both politically and militarily." In his assessment of MacArthur, Connaughton joins a growing number of historians who find fault with the "Far Eastern General."

Nor is Connaughton laudatory about MacArthur's static defense of Lingayen Gulf, which he characterizes as "among the most lackluster, uninspiring defenses conducted throughout the duration of World War II." Within a week of the Japanese amphibious assault at Lingayen Gulf, MacArthur declared Manila an open city and withdrew the majority of his forces to the Bataan Peninsula and the island fortress of Corregidor. Unfortunately the garrison was ill equipped,