

WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

By the same author

SOVIET LAND POWER

War in Afghanistan

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Second Edition

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For my brother Stuart

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List of Abbreviations

AGSA	Afghan government intelligence service, May 1978–September 1979
APC	armoured personnel carrier
BMD	<i>bojevaya mashina desantnika</i> , (airborne combat vehicle)
BMP	<i>bojevaya mashina pekhoty</i> , (infantry fighting vehicle)
BTR	<i>brontetransporter</i> , (armoured troop carrier such as BTR-60)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (of USA)
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency (of US military)
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
<i>dushman</i>	meaning ‘enemy’, Soviet soldiers’ word for guerrilla
DYOA	Democratic Youth Organisation of Afghanistan
DWOA	Democratic Women’s Organisation of Afghanistan
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye, Main Intelligence Directorate (of Soviet General Staff)
IUAM	Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahadeen, resistance group. Same as IUAL
IP	Islamic Party, resistance group, with Hekmatyar and Khalqis factions
ISA	Islamic Society of Afghanistan, resistance group
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistani military intelligence
IM	Islamic Movement, resistance group
IRM	Islamic Revolution Movement, resistance group
IUAL	Islamic Unity for Afghan Liberation, resistance group
<i>jihad</i>	Holy War
<i>jerga</i>	council or meeting
KAM	Afghan government intelligence service, September–December 1979
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvenoy Bezopasnosti, Committee for State Security of Soviet Union
KHAD	acronym for State Information Service, Afghan

	government intelligence service, January 1980– January 1986 (replaced by Ministry of State Security)
LCSFA	Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan
MRL	multiple rocket launcher
<i>mujahadeen</i>	fighters of God, anti-government guerrillas
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennost Del, USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs
Nasr	The Word, resistance group
NFF	National Fatherland Front
NIFA	National Islamic Front of Afghanistan, resistance group
NLF	National Liberation Front (of Afghanistan), resistance group
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
Sarandoy	Kabul Ministry of the Interior Armed Forces
Shura	acronym for Council of the Union, Hazara guerrilla party
TVD	Teatr Voyennikh Destviy, Soviet Theatre of Military Operations
UNGOMAP	United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan
WAD	acronym for Ministry of State Security, Afghan government intelligence service after January 1986
VDV	Vozduyushno Desantniki Voisk, Air Assault Forces (Soviet)
VTA	Voyenno Transportnaya Aviatsaya, Military Transport Aviation (Soviet)
VVS	Vozduyushno Voorezhenie Sil, Air Forces (Sovet)

Preface

This book is a description of the military struggle for Afghanistan. It concerns the objectives, operations, tactics and effectiveness of the forces involved in that struggle. The aim is to describe the war as objectively and in as much detail as possible.

Truth is an elastic commodity in Afghanistan. Both sides resort to exaggeration and plain dishonesty to publicise their cause. Behind the rhetoric there is, however, a surprising amount of common ground in guerrilla and government accounts of many incidents. For example *mujahadeen* reports that they had crushed enemy forces at Zhawar in April 1986 were in themselves an admission that the Afghan army had, as reported by Kabul, succeeded in fighting its way through to the fortress.

This book has been written from a very wide variety of sources. It is one of few books about Afghanistan that exploits Kabul and Moscow sources as well as those publications produced in Pakistan by the resistance. An enormous amount of detail has been disclosed by 'the other side', but unfortunately most writers in the West digested the guerrilla view too uncritically to make any use of it.

The book also makes use of many eyewitness accounts – some published, others related to me. Often these provide vital corroboration of the claims of one side or the other. In preparing this new edition of *War in Afghanistan*, I was able to exploit the conditions of *glasnost* and travel with the Soviet army in Afghanistan. I also went to Pakistan to talk to the *mujahadeen* and went into the country with them. Soviet paratroop regiment officers and guerrilla commanders have been interviewed in the field. A wide range of direct participants on both sides have been questioned, something which few other books on the conflict contain.

The chapters of the book are intended to provide an account of events with a certain amount of analysis. The key military actions are described and background is provided. Examinations of trends, development of forces and so on are built into the chapters – so that Chapter Four '1981' contains a great deal

more than just the main battles of that year. I have tried to confine my opinions to the sections 'Prologue to 1978' and the concluding 'Analysis'. Statements and opinions within the chapters are attributed, as far as possible, through the notes collected at the end of each chapter.

Much of this book was written before June 1986. Those chapters extending up to 1985 have not been changed in any major way. The first edition was criticised by some reviewers for being too generous in its appraisal of the Afghan army and too damning of the *mujahadeen's* military capability. But the survival of the Kabul government for many months after the departure of the Soviet army came as a surprise to analysts versed in the conventional wisdom produced by 'Western diplomatic sources'. The answer to the question 'how did the Afghan army hold out at Jallalabad in March 1989?' can only be found by looking back at its gradual improvement from about 1984. Readers have written to me pointing out that the first edition of this book was one of the only works to describe these developments.

The most important error in the first edition was a faulty appraisal of Mikhail Gorbachev's intentions. Also, I was too sceptical of Yuri Andropov's attempts to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1983. But in 1986, like many other people, I had not discovered just how different Soviet policy was going to be under Gorbachev. This has now been put right.

I would like to thank the many people who have given interviews for the book – their names are in the notes. I would also like to thank the staff at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Nabi Mizdaq at the BBC External Services, Julian Gearing of Afghanistanid, Vincent Dowd for reading the manuscript, and the people in the Soviet Army, Afghan forces and *mujahadeen* who helped me.

Mark Urban

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