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# **The Afghan Army: The Soviet Military's Poor Student**



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**A Research Paper**

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*NESA 85-10006  
January 1985*

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# **The Afghan Army: The Soviet Military's Poor Student**

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**A Research Paper**

This paper was prepared by  Office of  
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a  
contribution by  Office of Central  
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and may be directed to the Chief, South Asia  
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**The Afghan Army:  
The Soviet Military's  
Poor Student** 

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**Summary**

*Information available  
as of 26 December 1984  
was used in this report.*

Five years after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Afghan army remains an ineffective military force and an unreliable Soviet ally. The Afghan army is tactically inept, poorly trained, and commanded by officers with minimal skills and leadership abilities. It is plagued by poor intelligence, frequent desertions, and a history of battlefield defeats. Regime forces need substantial Soviet support even to make small gains against the resistance. We judge the regime's prospects for gaining the loyalty of large numbers of Afghan soldiers—a key factor if the resistance is to be defeated—will be low through the next decade.

The army's capability to fight the insurgents is unlikely to improve significantly over the next few years:

- Desertions, insufficient conscription, and casualties will severely limit military manpower growth.
- An inability to absorb new equipment and low equipment readiness rates will continue to impede operations.
- Political indoctrination efforts will probably remain unproductive. Afghan soldiers have shown an increasing tendency to mutiny or not participate in operations in recent months.

The continued deficiencies of the Afghan army and the growing effectiveness of the insurgents will oblige the Soviets to assume an even larger share of the military burden in Afghanistan. As a result, the economic and military costs of the war to the Soviets probably will increase over the next few years, but not to a level the Soviets will find unacceptable.

Moscow undoubtedly will continue its efforts to rebuild the Afghan forces. The Soviets eventually hope to leave the burden of the war and responsibility for security in the country to the Kabul regime, although they have no cure for the problems of the Afghan army. The Soviets probably believe that, as in Eastern Europe, they can use training and propaganda to mold a new generation of Afghans that will form the backbone of a loyal Communist force.



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Figure 1



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**The Afghan Army:  
The Soviet Military's  
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The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to assist the beleaguered Afghan military against the growing resistance to the Marxist regime in Kabul. Over the last five years Moscow has increased its efforts to build the Afghan army into a reliable and effective fighting force so that Soviet troops can leave the burden of the war and responsibility for the security of the country to the Kabul regime. Although Afghan forces have been subordinate to and directed by the Afghan Ministry of National Defense through the General Staff since the Communists seized power in 1978, direct Soviet involvement in all aspects of the Afghan military has increased substantially. The basic structure and organization of the Afghan military now resemble its Soviet counterpart.



Figure 2. Deserters from the army aim a gun at a government position in Konarha Province. Wide World ©

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The Soviets have restructured the Afghan army, but their efforts to build a national military force that can carry out its primary mission of suppressing the insurgents have failed.

**Performance**

We believe Soviet commanders are increasingly reluctant to rely on Afghan army units during joint operations.

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After half a decade and little progress, Moscow must recognize that rebuilding the Afghan army and instilling the will to fight for Communism in large numbers of Afghan troops will be a long process, possibly requiring more than a generation.<sup>2</sup>

Soviet commanders distrust Afghan forces and take extensive precautions to minimize the chance that Afghan informants will pass operational information to the insurgents. In some cases, the Soviets do not tell Afghan unit commanders their destination until two hours before the units move, or lie about the target area until the operation is launched. Soviet troops usually follow Afghan forces in combat, in part to ensure that the Afghans will not desert.

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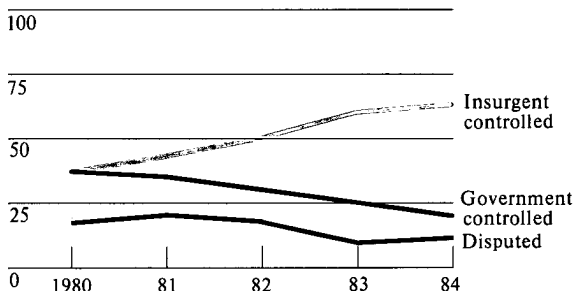
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Afghans on their own have proven generally ineffective in operations against the insurgents. Major offensive operations without Soviet participation most often

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**Figure 3**  
**Afghanistan: Estimated Local Districts Controlled**



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end after little enemy contact but numerous desertions. In one of the army's worst defeats of the war, insurgents ambushed and destroyed the elite 38th Commando Brigade in Paktika Province in May 1983, [redacted]. A relief operation in August 1984 failed to reduce significantly insurgent pressure on regime garrisons in Paktia Province. Afghan units currently garrisoned in the Panjsher Valley cannot counter guerrilla attacks and continue to suffer losses. [redacted]

Afghan troops cannot respond effectively to insurgent ambushes of road convoys, [redacted]. Their tendency to slow down or stop when under fire—without returning fire effectively—leads to high casualties; and a lack of coordination among convoys, main garrisons, and the Air Force makes matters worse. [redacted]

Afghan units also cannot or will not counter insurgent attacks in the main urban areas. In our view, the army's unreliability has allowed the insurgents to increase pressure on Kabul and forced the Soviets to divert their own troops to tighten security. Only major



**Figure 4.** Insurgents with captured Afghan soldiers. [redacted]

Liaison ©

Soviet efforts have brought the second and third largest cities—Qandahar and Herat—under tenuous government control. [redacted]

We believe the Afghan army's poor capabilities would allow the resistance, if it chose, to overrun many small Afghan posts almost at will. Insurgents have besieged the Afghan garrison at Khowst in Paktia Province for months but are reluctant to overrun it because they hope to avoid Soviet reprisals and prefer to continue attacking resupply convoys in the area. According to US Embassy sources in Kabul, the situation in Qandahar is so bad that insurgents regularly inform Afghan soldiers when they plan to attack regime facilities, giving the troops the opportunity to join the guerrillas before the fighting begins. [redacted]

In some areas, army units exist because garrison commanders have made arrangements with insurgent groups to ensure survival. Travelers into the countryside report that garrisons provide regular supplies of arms and ammunition to the insurgents in exchange for noninterference. A large number of nonpolitical career officers, particularly those in the northeast, have become collaborators or active supporters of the insurgents, [redacted] it is not unusual for these officers to assist the insurgents. In Balkh Province officers have arranged for guerrillas to use army trucks to transport men and equipment. [redacted]

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Figure 5. Afghan soldiers on duty in front of Kabul Palace—note the discipline in the ranks.

UPI ©

[Redacted]

**Constraints to Effectiveness**

The poor performance of the Afghan army reflects the force's low morale, the difficulties in recruitment, and problems in training and logistic support. Serious political factionalism complicates efforts at resuscitating the army. [Redacted]

**Low Morale.** The regime has been unable to improve the morale of its forces. Afghan soldiers are growing increasingly rebellious and are more likely to mutiny or refuse to participate in operations than during the past few years. Many soldiers sympathize with the resistance and are upset by the continued Soviet occupation and heavyhanded supervision of the Afghan forces, heavy casualties, and chronic failure in combat. Many soldiers are reluctant to remain in the army because of the isolation of many garrisons, shortages of food and other supplies, the failure of some commanders to provide regular pay, and poor medical care. Poor morale influences many Afghan conscripts to avoid action against the insurgents, [Redacted]

[Redacted] Party members and regular army personnel fire at the guerrillas, but conscripts often fire away from them or over their heads. [Redacted]

**Insufficient Manpower.** The overall manpower of the Afghan military, in our judgment, is not increasing at the rate necessary to improve its combat capability. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the official present-for-duty strength for all branches of the Afghan armed forces in mid-July 1983 was about 89,000, with about 62,000 men in the Afghan army. We believe,

**Table 1**  
**Afghan Armed Forces:**  
**Estimated Assigned Personnel Strengths <sup>a</sup>**

Total	88,900
Army	62,000
Air Force	6,000
Border Guards	8,900
Defense of the Revolution Units	4,200
Militia	2,700
Military students	5,100

<sup>a</sup> These figures represent men assigned to units, not actual (on-hand) strengths.

[Redacted]

however, that the official manpower figures are inflated and mask the continuing high rate of desertions and casualties. [Redacted]

we believe most divisions are operating at about 50 percent or less of their established strengths. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the actual strength of the army—not including border guards and paramilitary units—is about 50,000 men, an increase of some 10,000 to 20,000 troops since the first two years of the war when the army nearly disintegrated. [Redacted]

The inability of the government to secure the loyalty of its troops and to prevent large-scale desertions, in our judgment, is a primary impediment to increasing force levels. [Redacted]

[Redacted] we estimate that over 100,000 Afghan officers and soldiers have deserted since the invasion. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the barbed wire and minefields that surround some posts are installed more to keep recruits in garrison than to exclude insurgents. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Figure 6  
Major Afghan Military Units



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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] the army suffers an average of 800 to 1,000 troops killed or wounded each month in operations and insurgent attacks. We believe the regime has probably lost at least some 50,000 to 60,000 men—killed and wounded in action—since 1979. Increasing insurgent effectiveness in the use of weapons, especially mines, and improved tactics in attacking convoys, in our view, will raise regime casualties over the next few years. [Redacted]

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Even the best Afghan units are troubled by constant desertions, [Redacted]

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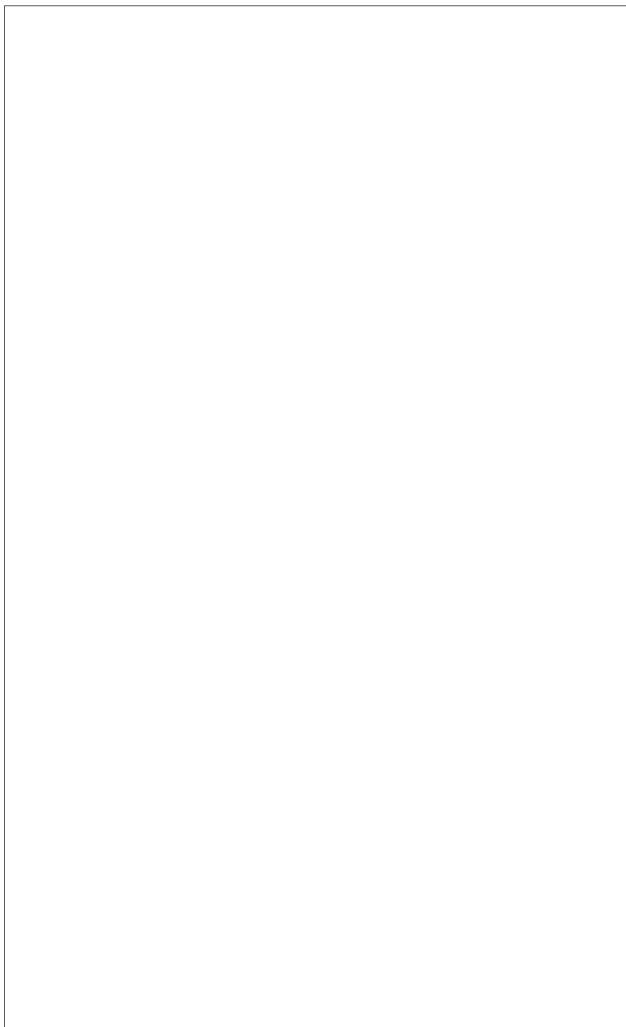
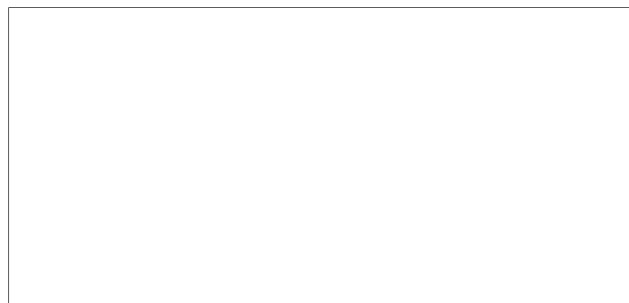


Figure 7. Afghan army deserters with Soviet 14.5-mm anti-aircraft gun.

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**Poor Training.** In our judgment, current Afghan army tactical military training, which was rudimentary at the time of the Soviet invasion in 1979, is still poor and has not appreciably increased military effectiveness. [redacted] the Soviets are becoming more reluctant to join in operations with unreliable, underage, and untrained Afghan troops who often desert in combat. [redacted]

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The regime's impressment drives have had only limited success and, because of increasing losses, have failed to bolster military manpower significantly. Pressure for additional manpower has led the regime to intensify its recruiting efforts and to recall a large number of reservists. [redacted] we estimate that there are at least 3 million men between the ages of 15 and 45 in Afghanistan. Soldiers nearing the end of their service are pressed to reenlist and offered monetary inducements, educational opportunities, and assignment preferences. [redacted]

Many Afghan soldiers, in our view, are poorly trained in small and heavy arms because the Soviets and the regime hesitate to give weapons instruction to unreliable soldiers. [redacted] the army sometimes issues weapons to conscripts only after the men have been in the service two or three months or when senior officers are confident the soldiers will not desert and give their weapons to the insurgents. Soldiers who are not party members often are not issued weapons at all during training, [redacted]

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**Table 3**  
**Afghan Armed Forces Permanent**  
**Training Installations and Establishments <sup>a</sup>**

Military Academy
Military High School
Air Force and Air Defense Academy
Technical Academy
Officers Advanced Course
Military Band School
Armor Training Center
Artillery Training Center
Logistic Training Center
Driver Training Center
Technical Training Center
Medical Training Center
Signal Training Center
Training Regiment

<sup>a</sup> These installations are all in Kabul Province.

[Redacted]

To compensate for severe manpower shortages, Kabul has reduced training time and, in our judgment, has thereby lowered the competence of its forces. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Afghan officers train conscripts for as little as 10 days, with instruction sometimes interrupted because the new troops are needed for combat operations. [Redacted]

[Redacted] actual military training for some conscripts consists of firing about a dozen rifle rounds or watching officers demonstrate equipment.

[Redacted]

Poor training has also impaired officer effectiveness. The military academy and high school—the main training schools for army officers—have enlarged their enrollments and shortened their curriculums, [Redacted]

[Redacted] in 1979 only 50 percent of the military university students graduated, but, by lowering standards, the government now graduates nearly all the students. [Redacted]

[Redacted] officers who graduated after 1979 were no longer competent to handle their duties and did not grasp the development and initiation of Soviet military operations at battalion or higher levels. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Kabul initiated a two-month officer



Figure 8. Military cadets training at the academy. [Redacted] ©

training course in 1980 to increase the number of officers, but the quality of graduating officers is so low that they cannot adequately train their subordinates. [Redacted]

Political indoctrination efforts have so far been largely unproductive. Although instilling troops with the will to fight for the government quite likely would lead to significant improvements in the development of the Afghan army as a counterinsurgency force, many Afghans are unwilling to forsake Afghan traditions or Islam to embrace the brand of Marxism-Leninism taught in Afghanistan. [Redacted]

[Redacted] a large number of the Afghan military—soldiers and officers—also hate the Soviets.<sup>3</sup> [Redacted]

Regime and Soviet attempts to emphasize party membership and political education have detracted from army effectiveness by reducing the time available for practical military training. [Redacted]

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**Afghan Military Traditions**

*Afghan military forces traditionally have been organized along tribal lines and have tended to emphasize individual and tribal achievements rather than national victories. Afghans draw on some 2,000 years of experience in guerrilla warfare but have little knowledge of and often no desire to serve in a modern army. During the past century, economic constraints, poor leadership, limited manpower, and internal and external subversion have also hindered the efforts of Afghan leaders to create a modern military.* [redacted]

*The Afghan army has undergone extensive reorganization since the late 1950s when the Soviets agreed to modernize and reequip Afghan forces. Until the 1978 coup, however, the Soviets lacked the influence to enforce their doctrinal views about training and operations among Afghan officers. In 1979 the army was poorly trained, badly supplied, and unable to carry out either of its basic missions: to defend the country's borders and to suppress internal dissent. Authorized some 100,000 to 120,000 troops, the army had only some 80,000 assigned and, we believe, could muster less than half that number, with desertions steadily increasing.* [redacted]

reports that many troops are illiterate and do not understand or are not interested in political education, but every soldier must attend at least four hours of political indoctrination each week—considerably more time than is spent in combat training. [redacted]

[redacted] political ideology courses account for six hours of the military school week, while only five hours are used for military instruction. Because the regime views political indoctrination as the most important part of military training, the quality of specialty instruction at the military academy has decreased to the point that officers are no longer qualified to handle their duties, [redacted]

[redacted]

**Party Factionalism.** Tension between members of the Afghan ruling party's Khalqi and Parcham factions saps the effectiveness even of the regime's supposedly

loyal officers.<sup>4</sup> [redacted]

[redacted] members of the Khalqi faction are reluctant to follow party orders to participate in operations against the insurgents. [redacted]

[redacted] in June 1983,

fighting between Khalqi and Parchami officers in the 25th Division raged for at least three days and resulted in the destruction of a large number of machineguns, as well as ammunition and petroleum.

Fighting also broke out between Khalqi and Parchami officers in May after an argument in the Afghan Revolutionary Council about the conduct and wisdom of the spring 1984 Panjsher Valley offensive, [redacted]

[redacted] Parchamis accused Khalqis of leaking plans for the offensive to insurgent commander Masood and causing army units to defect to the guerrillas. [redacted]

**Incompetent Leadership.** During the past five years, purges, combat losses, defections, and desertions have reduced the Afghan officer corps to a group of unreliable, ill-trained, inexperienced junior officers who cannot fulfill the responsibilities of command.

[redacted] the reduction

in training time has fostered a new generation of officers—rapidly promoted men referred to as *Mashini* (mass produced)—who usually are no more than 21 years old and are promoted to the rank of junior lieutenant after only six months of training. The most senior officers are often incompetent, in our view, because advancement is based on party membership rather than ability. [redacted] in

1983 the Ministry of National Defense chose a group of senior commanders and chiefs of staff of corps, divisions, and independent brigades to attend a special

five-month course in the Soviet Union after Soviet advisers noted that senior Afghan officers were out of

their depth. [redacted]

**Logistic Problems.** We believe acute logistic difficulties hinder army combat operations. Mountainous terrain, severe weather, poor roads, and inadequate communications make resupply a difficult task all

[redacted]

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year. Insurgent attacks against supply convoys compound these problems and deprive some units of needed equipment, materiel, and food. Landmines are a particular hazard. [redacted]

Most of the logistic support for the Afghan army is conducted by the Logistics Department of the Ministry of National Defense. The Logistic Troop Command delivers supplies to the army's divisions, which in turn are responsible for distribution of supplies to smaller units. [redacted]

[redacted] Only a small number of Soviet vehicles are used to support Afghan forces, and few fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters are available. [redacted]

Regime forces suffer from chronic problems of poor maintenance and low equipment readiness. Most Afghan soldiers generally cannot perform routine maintenance or repairs, and the army has few trained operating crews or repair personnel. [redacted]

[redacted] the army also is critically short of spare parts for trucks, aircraft, weapons, and other combat equipment. As a result, the equipment readiness rate of Afghan tanks and other tracked vehicles is probably only 50 to 75 percent, and the readiness rate of other large equipment, such as engineering vehicles, only about 30 to 40 percent of the total inventory. [redacted]

The army obtains much of its food and related supplies and all of its ordnance and petroleum, oil, and lubricants from the USSR—often a difficult and time-consuming process. Although the Logistics Department authorizes the local purchase of some food and other supplies by divisions, the local population generally fails to cooperate with the regime. [redacted]

**Soviet Efforts To Rebuild the Afghan Army**

The Soviets intend to build a reliable and capable Afghan army through political and military instruction—an ambitious plan that they probably realize will be a long-range effort. In our view, Moscow will be unable to find a reliable Communist cadre that would be a foundation for a loyal and effective army until existing training programs have produced a new generation of officers. [redacted]

**Training in the USSR.** The Soviets train at least 2,000 Afghan officers, soldiers, and military students in the Soviet Union each year, [redacted]

[redacted] Some political and military training for junior officers and cadets lasts from three to seven years, [redacted] Short courses of a few months to two years for officers of field grade or above cover subjects such as tactics, command and staff procedures, operations, and special staff operations. [redacted]

[redacted] Moscow also trains some troops for special combat units in the Soviet Union, probably in counter guerrilla tactics. [redacted]

[redacted] the Soviets hope that, with time and proper training, these units will make the Afghan army more effective by increasing the regime's counterinsurgency capability. [redacted]

Many Afghan students who study in the Soviet Union, even some who attend the Soviet General Staff course and senior military schools, complain about Soviet political indoctrination and the poor quality of most courses. [redacted] courses on military operations given by Moscow are not well prepared; attendees are mismatched in military experience; courses are sometimes geared to slow learners, causing boredom in other students; and a large amount of time is used in translation. [redacted]

[redacted] students must receive a passing grade in Communist ideology to graduate, regardless of performance or technical proficiency in other areas. Moscow does not require students studying in the USSR to be party members, but Soviet advisers on selection committees allow few nonparty members to be chosen for training in the USSR, [redacted]

In many cases, training in the USSR is unproductive because students become disenchanted with life in the USSR. [redacted] some Afghan military students—even party members—return from the USSR with anti-Soviet attitudes. Many returning students frequently are overheard abusing

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**Table 4**  
**Estimated Afghan Army Deliveries From the Soviets and Equipment Losses**

Equipment	Number
<b>Deliveries, 1980-June 1984</b>	
Tanks	290
Armored personnel carriers	445
Engineering vehicles	100-125
Trucks/miscellaneous vehicles	3,000-3,900
<b>Losses, December 1979-1984 <sup>a</sup></b>	
Trucks	1,500-3,000
Armored vehicles	575-850

<sup>a</sup> We believe these numbers represent the minimum figures for equipment delivered and lost. The Afghans, with Soviet assistance, most likely have repaired some damaged equipment.

[Redacted]

Lenin and the Soviets and stating that the Soviets consider all Afghans enemies, [Redacted]

[Redacted] Students continually complain of unsatisfactory living conditions, low stipends, daily fights between Khalqi and Parchami students, and harassment by the local populace. [Redacted]

**Soviet Military Equipment Deliveries.** So far the Soviets have been reluctant to increase military training or equipment deliveries substantially, most likely because they are wary of Afghan troops turning against them. Our comparison of Soviet military deliveries with estimated Afghan equipment losses indicates that the Soviets have been replacing losses rather than strengthening the Afghan army. We estimate that the Soviets have supplied equipment valued at over \$1.5 billion to the Afghan military since December 1979 [Redacted]

[Redacted] the Soviets have not provided the Afghans with large amounts of new ground force equipment. Our analysis also suggests that the Soviets have placed greater emphasis on supplying the Afghans with comparatively inexpensive trucks than replacing combat losses of armored vehicles. [Redacted]

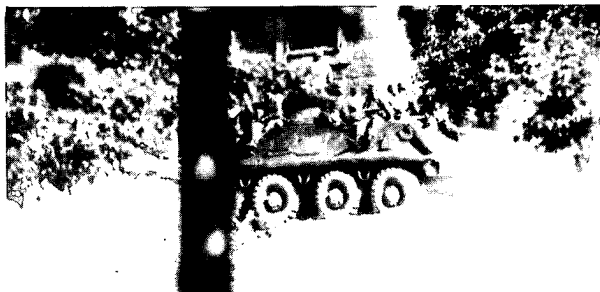


Figure 9. Afghan soldiers on a Soviet-made armored personnel carrier. [Redacted]

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The Soviets probably have been reluctant to augment their equipment deliveries to regime forces significantly without improvements in manpower and capabilities. Afghan units are unable to absorb large increases in equipment [Redacted] many vehicles remain in Afghan garrisons unused. [Redacted]

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**The Impact of Soviet Advisers on the Afghan Army.**

Soviet advisers are present throughout the Afghan military and directly supervise most of the army's activities in an effort to improve the performance of regime troops. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Soviet advisers have assumed all authority in the Ministry of National Defense. Some 20 to 30 Soviet officers also are assigned to each Afghan division and assist units down to the battalion level. The Soviets make all decisions concerning operations, organization, and the promotion and transfer of Afghan officers and provide advice on technical, financial, and political matters. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Afghan officers at the division level must even obtain Soviet permission to hold staff meetings. [Redacted]

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Despite the pervasiveness and authority of Soviet advisers, Afghan units rarely implement Soviet plans effectively. Junior and noncommissioned officers usually are not under direct Soviet supervision and, we suspect, fail to motivate their troops to perform well. Senior Afghan commanders, under more direct control by the advisers, often frustrate Soviet plans deliberately or through incompetence. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Afghan commanders sometimes

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refuse to obey Soviet orders, prompting advisers to appeal to their superiors to have their orders upheld or have the Afghan commanders replaced. [redacted]

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#### **Outlook and Implications**

High rates of desertion and casualties, combined with inadequate conscription, will severely limit the size of the Afghan army over the next few years. The regime's impressment efforts probably will increase military manpower only very slowly. The prospects of gaining the loyalty of large numbers of soldiers, even in the next decade, are dim because of failures in the regime's and the Soviets' indoctrination efforts. [redacted]

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Without large-scale material and manpower assistance from the Soviets, we judge that the Afghan army would disintegrate. Moscow apparently is willing to sustain the military and economic costs of assistance to the Afghans because it believes that the USSR eventually can use political and military training and indoctrination to build a reliable and effective Afghan army. We believe this process will be long—probably at least a generation—and difficult because of the poor quality of the training and the limited effectiveness demonstrated by even the best trained Afghan units. [redacted]

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The continuing ineffectiveness of the Afghan army will reduce Moscow's ability to consolidate control in Afghanistan and increase the economic and military costs of the war to the Soviets for at least the next few years. The Soviets will have to assume an even larger portion of the military burden in Afghanistan if the current trend toward increased insurgent effectiveness continues. Frustrated by the lack of success in Afghanistan, the Soviets have a number of options ranging from maintaining the status quo to sharply increasing their troop strength. We believe the Soviets most likely will choose to increase their forces slightly to reduce demands on unreliable Afghan forces and hold territory against possible insurgent gains. Moscow also may rely more heavily on new equipment to improve the performance of Soviet troops currently in the country. [redacted]

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## Appendix

### The Army as a Counterinsurgent Force

#### Command Structure

Afghan armed forces are controlled by the Ministry of National Defense, a body organized on the Soviet model. The Minister of Defense, Gen. Nazar Mohammad, directs the Ministry and reports to President Babrak Karmal. The main components of the Ministry are the General Staff, the Air Force and Air Defense Command,<sup>5</sup> the Border Security Command, and Military Intelligence. [redacted]

**General Staff.** Most Afghan army units are subordinate to the Afghan Ministry of National Defense through the General Staff—an organization structured along Soviet lines. [redacted] [redacted] the Chief of the General Staff oversees the operations of the Afghan army as well as some 17 directorates. [redacted]

Many of the directorates existed before 1978, but the Soviets, in an apparent attempt to control Afghan military planning and programs at all levels, have prompted the regime to add and restructure directorates. All have Soviet advisers. [redacted] [redacted] the reorganized planning and operations directorate, because it issues orders for military operations to all Afghan units, has become the most important component in the Ministry of National Defense. High-ranking Soviet advisers are always present, maintain effective control, and issue orders even to senior Afghan officers. The political directorate, newly structured after 1979, also has become an important addition to the General Staff. Political directorate representatives, who are responsible to the General Staff rather than to operational commanders, serve in almost all Afghan units and have broadly defined responsibilities not limited to propaganda work. [redacted]



<sup>5</sup> The Air Force and Air Defense Command will be discussed in a separate research paper. [redacted]

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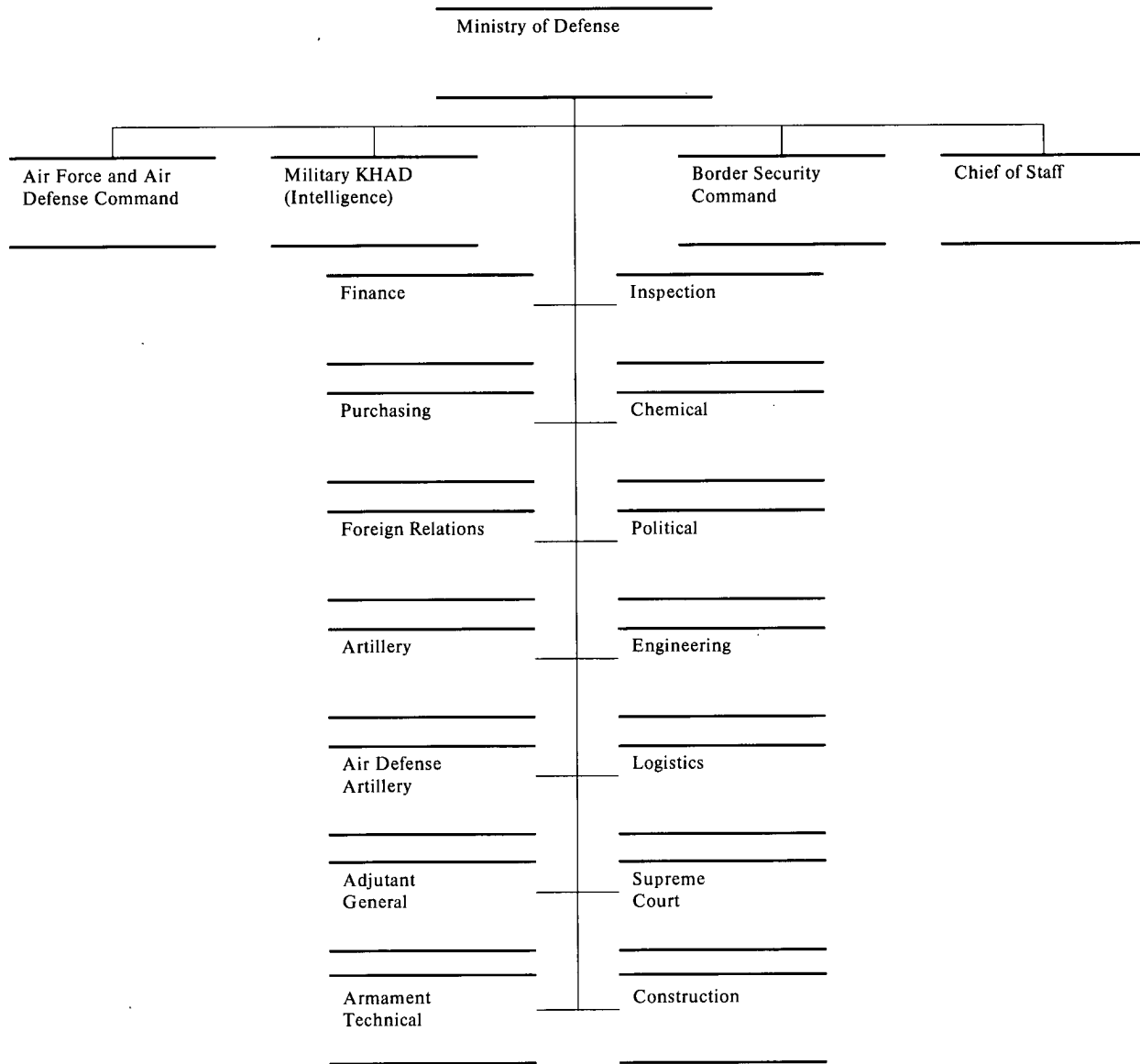
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**Figure 10**  
**Afghan Ministry of National Defense Organization**



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Figure 11. Afghan border guards at the Khyber Pass.



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**Organization of Forces**

Direct Soviet involvement signaled the reconfiguration of Afghan forces according to the Soviet pattern. Afghan units are organized along Soviet lines but are less well equipped, manned, and trained.

**Corps.** The Afghan army consists of 11 infantry and three armored divisions—sometimes called brigades—organized into three corps and five independent divisions and some smaller units subordinate to the Ministry of National Defense through the General Staff. The three corps are responsible for the geographic area bordering Pakistan and are headquartered in Kabul, Qandahar, and Gardeyz. The independent divisions are assigned to areas in northern and western Afghanistan. The independent 21st Mechanized Infantry Brigade is stationed in Farah Province to cover a gap between the 2nd Corps in Qandahar and the independent 17th Division in Herat. The 18th and 20th Divisions, also independent, are headquartered in Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh Province and Nahrin in Baghlan Province, respectively.

the regime considers the 1st Corps the best of the three and has given it priority in personnel, equipment, and training. The commander of the 1st Corps is usually in line to

become Chief of Staff or Minister of National Defense and is the government's most trusted officer. The Corps' 9th Mountain Division serves as an example of Soviet efforts to improve the Afghan army. Although it has been reorganized to respond more quickly to increasing security and counterinsurgency requirements in the Konar Valley, its performance has been poor.

The Afghans have also attempted to augment their 2nd Corps in Qandahar since 1978. Previously the Corps had only two major units: the 15th Infantry Division and the 7th Armored Brigade. After the Soviet invasion, the 7th Infantry Division, formerly part of the 1st Corps, moved to Moqor from the Kabul area to strengthen the 2nd Corps. The 466th Commando Battalion is also new to the Corps and has had an active though largely unsuccessful counterinsurgency role.

The regime upgraded the 3rd Corps by incorporating the formerly independent 14th Infantry Division from Ghazni into the Corps and adding the 477th Commando Battalion. The 12th and 25th Infantry Divisions continue to serve in Paktia Province.

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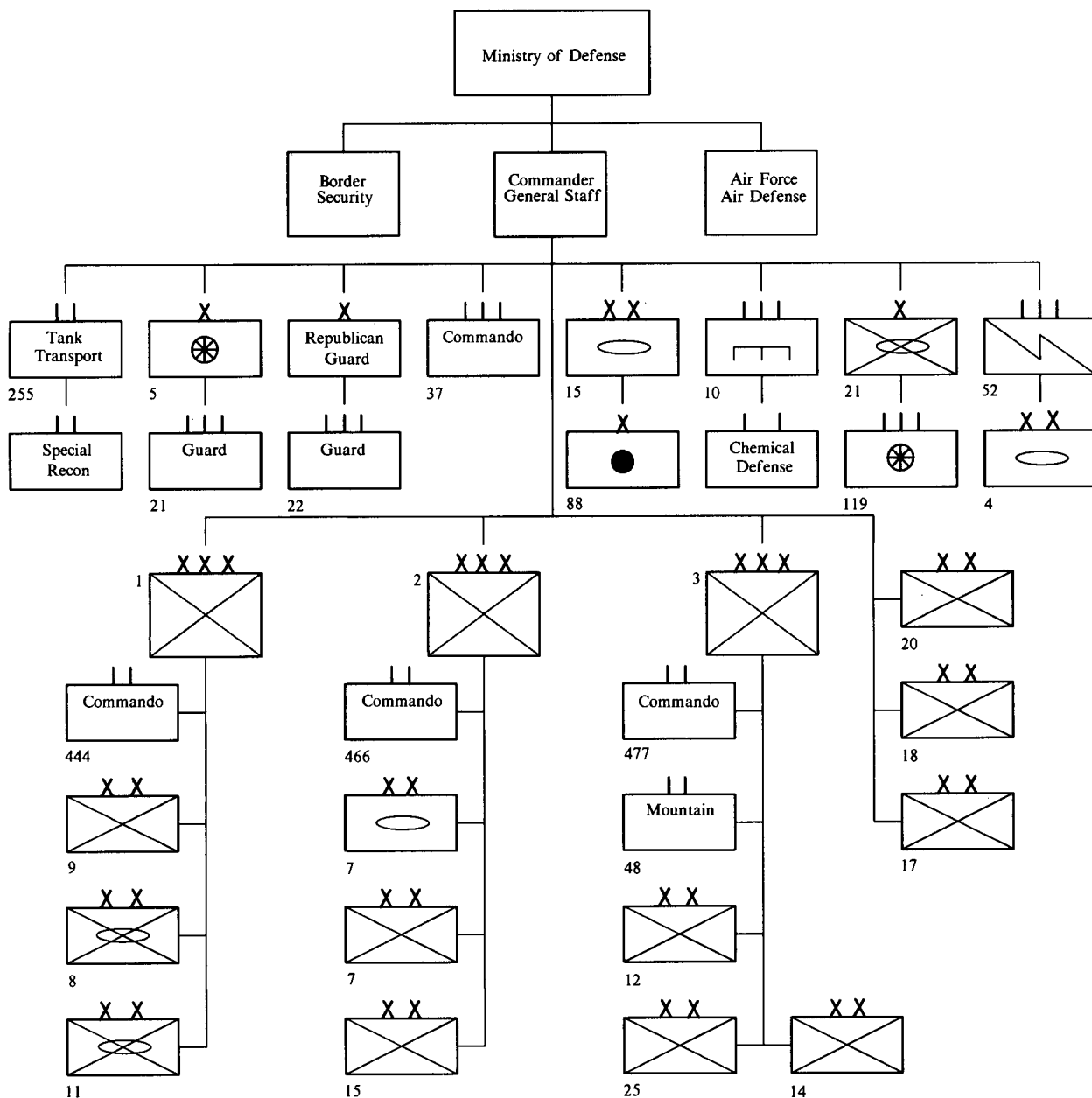
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Figure 13  
Estimated Organization of the Afghan Army

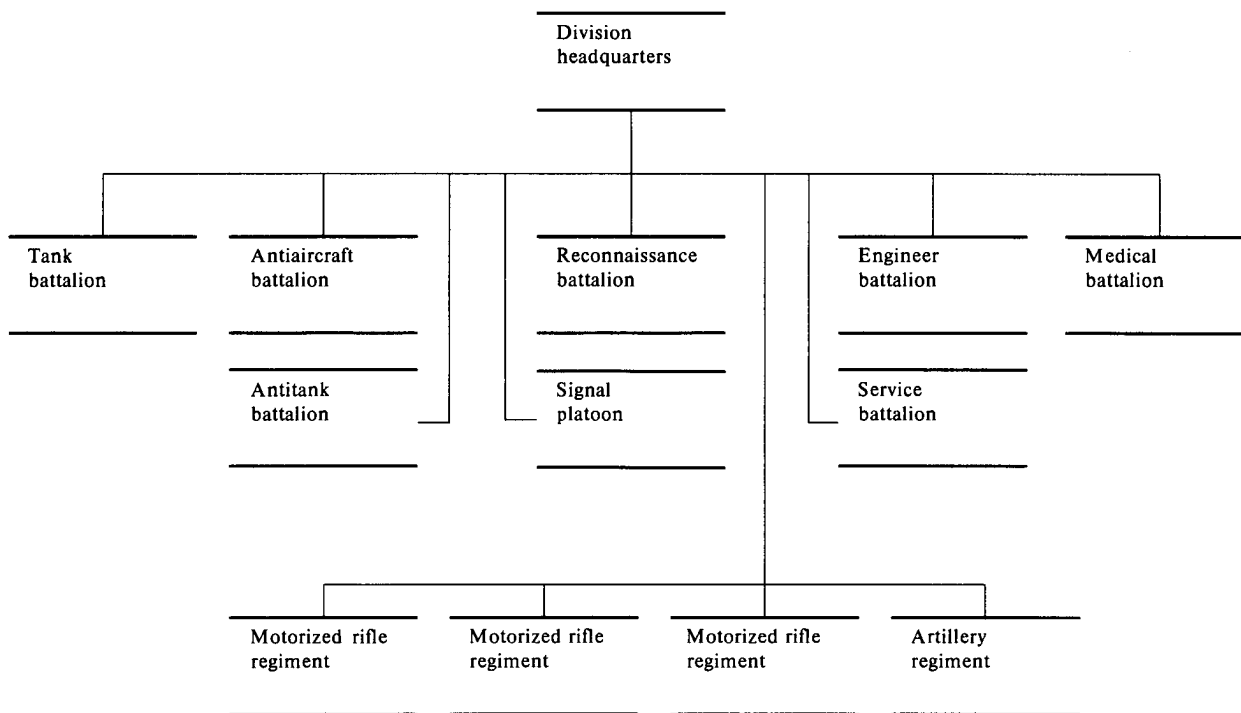


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**Figure 14**  
**Organization of the Afghan Motorized Rifle Division (Infantry)**



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The regime gives them priority on manpower assignment, training, and equipment. Most commando battalions are authorized about 600 men and usually include three infantry companies, an 82-mm mortar company, and antitank (RPG), air defense (12.7-mm DshK), supply, and signal platoons. [redacted]

[redacted] commandos undergo rigorous physical conditioning and receive some jump instruction. Some special training for commando forces is also conducted in the Soviet Union. The regime, however, has only one airborne battalion, the 242nd of the 37th Commando Regiment. [redacted]

Commando units probably are more reliable and effective than other army forces, but their performance in counterinsurgency operations with only a few exceptions—usually when units are deployed with Soviet forces—has been unsatisfactory. The demise of the 38th Commando Brigade in 1983 and the problems currently besetting the 444th Brigade in the Panjsher Valley typify the regime's lack of success with its commando forces. [redacted]

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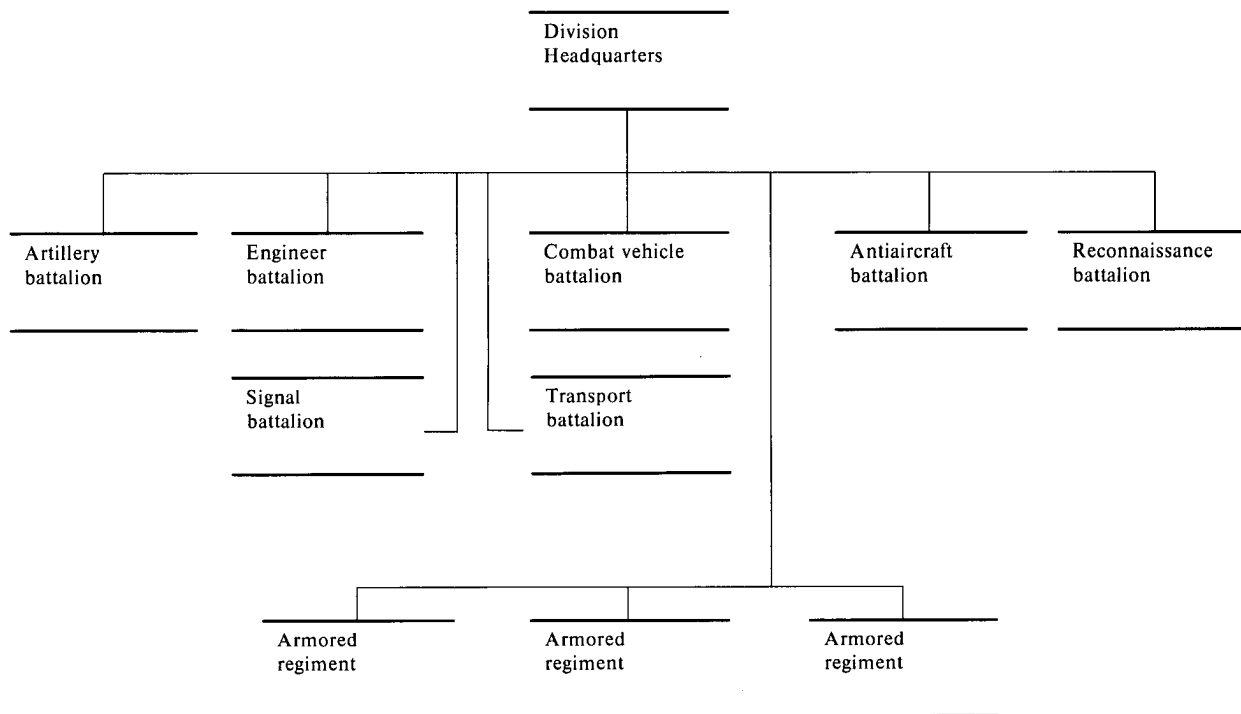
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**Figure 15**  
**Organization of the Afghan Armored Division**



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**Equipment**

The Afghan army depends on the Soviet Union, which began supplying it almost exclusively with equipment and arms in the early 1960s, for replacements and spare parts. Afghan units currently use poorly maintained T-34, T-54/55, and T-62 tanks and BTR-40, BTR-60PB, BTR-152, BMP, and BRDM-2 armored vehicles. Most of the army's artillery is towed. Little of the equipment in the Afghans' inventory is specifically suited to counterinsurgency warfare.

**Paramilitary Forces**

In addition to rebuilding the army, the Soviets have attempted to strengthen Afghanistan's paramilitary forces, in our view with little success. Most Afghans, although willing to cooperate temporarily to achieve financial or other benefits, withdraw support for the government once perceived gains have stopped, and many at least tacitly support the insurgents.

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**Table 8**  
**Equipment in an Armored Division**

97 tanks (T-34, T-54, T-62)
20-30 BRDMs
31 armored personnel carriers
31 BMPs
12 ZSU-23/4s
12 76-mm guns

[Redacted]

**Tribal Recruits.** The regime occasionally tries to recruit members of nomadic tribes, mainly for intelligence purposes. Recruits are issued AK-47 rifles and are deployed independently without army support.

[Redacted] such units have suffered high casualties in all operations. They often desert or defect to the resistance in critical situations.

[Redacted]

The government, not dissuaded by the nomads' poor performance, has tried to bribe some tribal chiefs with promises of money, food, clothing, and weapons for all individuals joining the local militia force. We believe these efforts are largely unsuccessful, since tribes will cooperate only as long as it is in their interest to do so.

[Redacted]

**Civil Defense.** In 1982 the Soviets organized a civil defense element to supplement police forces. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the civil defense personnel—called Sarandoi—are under the authority of the Ministry of Interior and are organized into small battalions. These units—including some 8,000 men—serve as police strike forces in Kabul, Qandahar, Herat, and Jalalabad. [Redacted]

**Defense of the Revolution.** The Defense of the Revolution organization—assigned over 4,000 men—is staffed by party members and carries out propaganda and civic action to consolidate and extend regime control in rural areas, [Redacted]

We believe it is severely under strength. [Redacted]



**Figure 16.** Afghan forces sometimes use Soviet-supplied BTR-60PB armored personnel carriers. *Aviation Week and Space Technology* ©

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Occasionally the regime mobilizes party volunteers, called defenders of the revolution, for special duty.

[Redacted] service is temporary and usually involves assignment to a police battalion for combat against insurgents or propaganda and agitation. [Redacted] such "volunteers" have been reluctant to accept party mobilization orders and, if assigned to combat duty, often become more of a burden than an asset. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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**Table 9**  
**Provinces With Militia Regiments**

Konarha
Nangarhar
Paktia
Zabol
Qandahar
Helmand
Paktika



*Figure 17. Militia forces receive training in Nangarhar Province.*

Sovfoto ©

Because many insurgent groups maintain strict security to guard against government informers, we suspect the battalions will have only limited success.

**Border Militias.**

in late 1982 the regime, at Soviet instigation, decided to reorganize its border militias based near Pakistan and Iran. The Ministry of National Defense established seven new militia regiments—each authorized 1,000 men—in late May 1983. The units' primary mission, which they fulfill poorly, is to stop insurgent movement through border areas and to supplement existing border forces.

there is an extremely high defection rate from the militias. The major difference between border and militia forces is mobility; border units are positioned and operate over a wide area; militias are tribal forces that serve part-time only in their home localities. Border forces also have heavier weapons than militias and are supported by police and regular army units.

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