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## H-Diplo Roundtable Review

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Introduction by Sergey Radchenko

**Artemy M. Kalinovsky. *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan.***

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. 320 pp. ISBN: 9780674058668 (hardcover, \$27.95, £20.95, €25.20).

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Introduction by Sergey Radchenko, University of Nottingham Ningbo China

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This roundtable brings together five distinguished experts of Soviet history and foreign policy to debate the merits of Artemy Kalinovsky's new book, *The Long Goodbye*, a history of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, 1979-89. The book, published in 2011 by Harvard University Press, is a highly anticipated product of Kalinovsky's painstaking research effort. I witnessed some of this work from the sidelines, as a colleague, never failing to be amazed by Kalinovsky's resourcefulness as he extracted scraps of evidence from unlikely sources in the face of adversities that stand in the way of even the most ingenious historians of Soviet foreign policy when they encounter the bureaucratic morass of the Russian archives. Kalinovsky, whose cultural background defies categorization, showed himself to be equally at ease with retired diplomats and Mujahedeen, with former soldiers and intelligence officers, with politicians and academics, and, last but not least, with the Russian archivists who would not even entertain the thought of giving documents to you and me but who succumbed to Kalinovsky's charm and determination. Seeing that he also writes exceedingly well and that his argumentation boasts clarity and conviction, it is not surprising that Kalinovsky won appreciation and praise from many a reviewer, including the all-star cast of this roundtable.

"It is unlikely that his elegant narrative will soon be bettered," writes Rodric Braithwaite of Kalinovsky's book, an assessment echoed in Les Grau's conclusion that this "rock-solid piece... should stand the test of time." Terms like "invaluable" and "brilliant" punctuate Alex Marshall's review. Mark Galeotti and James Graham Wilson agree that the book is "well-written," "lucid," "compelling," and "impressive." Beyond these general observations the reviewers are naturally not always in agreement as to the most important points of Kalinovsky's book. However, one can identify some common themes and concerns.

Galeotti, Braithwaite and Marshall highlight what I also thought was an important, though perhaps not surprising, finding of the book: that the Soviet policy-making elites were divided on the issue of Afghanistan, with the military and the KGB backing rival factions in Kabul, and offering contradictory advice to Mikhail Gorbachev. Kalinovsky's in-depth analysis of these contradictions takes our knowledge of the dynamics of Soviet policy making to a new level of sophistication and spoils the oft-repeated and hopelessly naïve arguments as to the particular shape of the liberal/conservative fault line in the Soviet leadership. Contrary to what one would be inclined to think, the Soviet military emerges from Kalinovsky's account as the pragmatic proponent of withdrawal rather than the evil force of aggression (even the "hardliner" Defense Minister Dmitrii Ustinov briefly poses as a harbinger of peace). Soviet General Secretaries, to the extent permitted by their declining mental and physical faculties, understood the mistake of the invasion and sought an early exit. The otherwise allegedly "liberal" Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze joined forces with an unlikely ally – the hardliner head of the KGB Vladimir Kryuchkov – to delay the withdrawal. There is none of the neatness here that underpins earlier accounts of the Soviet Union's last decade, and the reason for such messiness is all too easy to understand: close encounter with archival evidence impedes over-simplification.

Another common theme is the reviewers' attention to Kalinovsky's controversial claim that the war in Afghanistan, problematic as it was for the Soviet Union, was not fatal. To a far greater extent than, for instance, the Vietnam War, it was limited in scope. It was expensive but sustainable for a superpower, and one of the reasons for the Soviet Union's delayed withdrawal from Afghanistan was that the top leadership was not under great pressure to get out. For this reason, the war probably did not play that much of a role in precipitating the Soviet collapse. Among the present reviewers, Wilson goes to the greatest length to question Kalinovsky's assertion, seeing tension between his claim that the war was sustainable and the evidence that the Soviets wanted an early exit. In his response, Kalinovsky argues that while the war was sustainable, it was not necessarily desirable for the Soviet leadership. Wilson and Kalinovsky further disagree about the role of U.S. pressure on the Soviet Union, Wilson appearing more in favor of the idea that U.S. post-invasion sanctions and support for the Mujahedeen prompted the Soviet search for a way out of Afghanistan. Kalinovsky partially agrees with this assessment, although he underscores that the Soviet leaders were prepared to weather the fallout in relations with the U.S. even as they considered military intervention.

A further important issue that Marshall explores at some length in his review concerns the assessment of Gorbachev's legacy as seen through the lens of the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan. Marshall argues that Gorbachev comes across as "an indecisive and sometimes dilatory manager of events, whose post-1987 actions in most fields led in practice to disaster." By the same token, the U.S. appears to have been "a far from honest partner" in the peace negotiations in the lead-up to the Soviet withdrawal. Marshall notes that while Kalinovsky does not "explicitly advocate such a view," his book can be seen as "a subtle condemnation of the central incoherence of 'New Thinking' in Soviet foreign policy." Like Marshall, I noticed that towards the middle of the book Kalinovsky shows with remarkable clarity how Gorbachev disastrously mishandled the negotiations with the Americans, giving away one position after another for no better reason than to impress Washington. As a consequence, he ended up being pulled by the nose – in Afghanistan and, one might add, in other matters, not least German reunification and troop reductions in Europe and in Asia. Thus, Marshall concludes, Gorbachev did not necessarily have a good grasp of the Soviet Union's "true national interests."

Kalinovsky, however, does not return to the subject in the conclusion, and for understandable reasons. If we say that Gorbachev was a poor negotiator, it logically follows that he should have been tougher with the U.S. and should perhaps have abstained from a rash withdrawal from Afghanistan – a controversial point to argue. Indeed, as Braithwaite points out, Kalinovsky rather tends towards the opposite view: that Gorbachev "could and should have got out earlier." I think one way to balance these two arguments is to say that while Gorbachev committed innumerable mistakes in negotiating the withdrawal, these mistakes were inevitable if he wanted to complete this withdrawal sooner rather than later. On the other hand, one cannot help but be struck by the lack of imagination of the Reagan Administration, singularly determined as it was to bring about Gorbachev's defeat in Afghanistan without taking into account the long-term interests of Soviet-U.S. relations, or of Afghanistan itself. This is, however, my own take, not Kalinovsky's.

Kalinovsky wisely refrains from offering precise advice as to what Gorbachev should have done in Afghanistan (he says more about what he should not have done). In the concluding section he discusses the parallels between the Soviet failures in Afghanistan (in particular, the ill-fated modernization program) and the current U.S. effort. Most of the reviewers appreciate the connections Kalinovsky makes between Gorbachev and Barack Obama (with the exception of Grau who urges caution in drawing parallels). Still, Kalinovsky takes care to point out mistakes without necessarily offering any solutions. The moral of the story is that perhaps there is no solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Not all readers will walk away with as fatalistic an impression. But there is no doubt that the book will make an impression on a generation of readers, and leave a vivid mark in the historiography of the Cold War.

### Participants:

**Artemy M. Kalinovsky** is Assistant Professor of East European Studies at the University of Amsterdam and a Research Associate at the Centre for Diplomacy and Strategy at the London School of Economics. He is the co-editor, with Sergey Radchenko, of *The End of the Cold War and the Third World* (Routledge, 2011). He earned his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. His current research focuses on the development of Soviet Tajikistan.

**Sergey Radchenko** is Lecturer at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. He is the author of the forthcoming *Half a Leap across an Abyss: How Russia Lost Asia and the Cold War* (Oxford UP, 2013) and of *Two Suns in the Heavens: the Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press & Stanford UP, 2009). He co-authored (with Campbell Craig) *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale UP, 2008). Radchenko and Artemy Kalinovsky also co-edited *The End of the Cold War in the Third World: New Perspectives on Regional Conflict* (Taylor and Francis, 2011).

**Rodric Braithwaite** studied Russian and French at Cambridge and graduated in 1955. He was a visiting fellow at All Souls College Oxford in 1972-3, and at the Woodrow Wilson Center Washington in Spring 2005. From 1955-1992 he served as a British diplomat in Jakarta, Warsaw, Moscow, Rome, Brussels (European Union) and Washington. He was ambassador in Moscow from 1988 to 1992. In 1992-3 he was foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister and chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. Since then he has worked in a number of business and not-for-profit capacities, and writes regularly on current affairs and Russia in the press and academic journals. He is the author of *Across the Moscow River: The World Turned Upside Down* (London and New Haven 2002); *Moscow 1941: A City and its People at War* (London 2006), which was translated into 18 languages; and *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* (London and New York 2011). He is currently working on a project about Poland in 1960.

**Mark Galeotti** is Academic Chair of New York University's Center for Global Affairs, and Clinical Professor of Global Affairs. He read history at Robinson College, Cambridge University and then took his doctorate in the government department at the London School of Economics, exploring the impact of the Afghan war on the USSR. That became the basis of the first of his twelve authored and edited books, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Union's last*

war (Routledge: 1995). He works on security issues ranging from transnational crime to warfare in both an historical and contemporary context and is currently writing a book on the history of organized crime.

**Les Grau** is a Senior Analyst for the Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He is a retired US Army infantry lieutenant colonel and Foreign Area Officer (Russian). He served a combat tour in Vietnam, four European tours, a Korean tour and a posting in Moscow. His doctorate is in Military History. He has published over 125 articles and studies. His books on Afghanistan include *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*; *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War*; *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*; *Passing It On: Fighting the Pushtun on Afghanistan's Frontier*; *Mountain Warfare And Other Lofty Problems: Foreign Ideas On High-Altitude Combat* and *Operation Anaconda: America's First Major Battle In Afghanistan*.

**Alex Marshall** is a lecturer at the Scottish Centre for War Studies at Glasgow University, and was formerly a lecturer at the Defence Studies Department of King's College London. His publications include the monograph *The Russian General Staff and Asia, 1800-1917* and a variety of articles on subjects ranging from Russian military intelligence in the First World War to the Soviet withdrawal strategy from Afghanistan in 1987-89. His latest publications are *The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule* (RoutledgeCurzon: 2010) and a co-authored monograph with Dr Tim Bird for Yale University Press, *Afghanistan. How the West Lost Its Way* (Yale: 2011). He is currently working on a history of Soviet relations with the Third World and on a political economy of illicit drugs.

**James Graham Wilson** (Ph.D., University of Virginia 2011) is a historian at the U.S. Department of State. He has published articles in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, *The Journal of American Studies*, and *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, and is currently writing a book about U.S.-Soviet relations during the final decade of the Cold War.

Review by Rodric Braithwaite, former British Ambassador to Moscow

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The Soviet war in Afghanistan from 1979-1989 has been well covered in the West in popular and historical writing. The Russian side of the story was addressed surprisingly quickly by some Western historians, for example Mark Galeotti<sup>1</sup> and Mark Urban,<sup>2</sup> and by Lester Grau with his admirably balanced accounts of the fighting<sup>3</sup>. But until comparatively recently most Western accounts have seen the war through the prism of Cold War prejudice. The belief that the Russians had gone down to humiliating and thoroughly deserved defeat was reinforced in the public and even the official mind by popular works such as the inaccurate but lucrative film of *Charlie Wilson's War*.<sup>4</sup>

These attitudes have begun to change, not least as we realise that the U.S. and its allies are bogged down in a quagmire not so different from the one the Russians found themselves in three decades ago. The story is imperfectly documented. But significant documents, giving at least a partial picture of the way the Soviet leadership got themselves into the war, began emerging in the early 1990s, partly a consequence of the chaos which then reigned in the Soviet archives. The scrupulous as well as the unscrupulous were then able to buy, borrow or steal documents almost at will. Many of the generals who fought in Afghanistan wrote their memoirs to justify their own actions, and they appended the documents to prove their point. Most of these documents have been systematically published over the last twenty years thanks to the efforts of the scholars at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington<sup>5</sup> and elsewhere.

Documents continue to seep out by one means or another, though the KGB files for the period - essential for a full understanding of the Soviet decision-making process - remain as firmly closed as the files of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service. There is still a great deal of further research to be done - on the fate of the veterans after they returned to the Soviet Union, on the collapse of the Soviet military medical services in Afghanistan, and on the role and effectiveness of the numerous advisers that the Russians sent there.

The Russians themselves have produced a very substantial body of work, and it is still growing: straight history, monographs, memoirs, eyewitness accounts, interviews, many to be found on veteran websites. This material is of varying quality, needless to say: some of it is merely sensational. And the war is still too difficult for Russians to write about easily: too close, too painful, and too associated with the chaotic collapse of their country. Even the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War* (London, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> M. Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (London, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Lester Grau, *The Bear Went over the Mountain* (London, 1996) and numerous articles.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War* (New York, 2003). The film is from 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See for example documents at [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/e-dossier\\_4.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/e-dossier_4.pdf).

best, such as the massive military history by Aleksandr Lyakhovskii<sup>6</sup> and the fascinating account<sup>7</sup> of the run up to the war by a respected journalist and a former KGB officer who served in Kabul, suffer from a lack of proper sourcing and scholarly apparatus.

Artemy Kalinovsky is among the Western scholars who have stepped into the gap. *A Long Goodbye* is his first book, and he has brought to it a perfect knowledge of Russian and English and the skill to charm his way into the archives and persuade eyewitnesses into unexpected confidences. He is scrupulous with his sources. And he writes a flexible, and accurate English, which is a pleasure to read. Nothing is ever definitive in historical writing. Kalinovsky's account will doubtless be challenged as new documents and new interpretations appear. But it is unlikely that his elegant narrative will soon be bettered.

Kalinovsky concentrates in absorbing detail on the diplomacy, the politics and the decision-making in Moscow surrounding the Soviet withdrawal. But he also provides a necessary and lucid account of the preliminaries. From the nineteenth century onwards, Afghanistan was a neighbour of considerable strategic importance to the Soviet Union. By 1979, the Russians had enjoyed sixty years of - on the whole - mutually productive relations with the Afghans, to whom they had given considerable economic aid and advice. They had built roads, factories, irrigation projects, schools. They placed advisers everywhere in the military and the civilian administration. They had trained Afghan military officers, engineers, specialists of all kinds. Their methods had given the Soviet Asian republics clean water, health care, education for girls, a developing agriculture and industry, and the Soviet version of law and order. There seemed no reason why they should not do the same in Afghanistan. Some of the most useful and interesting passages in Kalinovsky's book concern this attempt at nationbuilding, an important subject hitherto ignored or derided in the West which he is now investigating more fully. The attempt failed, defeated by ignorance of local custom, a determination to apply in Afghanistan Soviet methods of administration which were already failing back home, and a general unwillingness of many Afghans to accept foreign nostrums which they felt were alien to their own way of life.

The Russians did not care much about the political complexion of the government in Kabul, provided it remained friendly. They worked well enough with King Zahir and then, when Zahir was ousted, with his cousin President Mohammed Daoud. The Americans were also active in Afghanistan. But in the 1970s they were a waning force. On the whole the Russians held the field.

Then in April 1978 the tiny, inexperienced, and brutally divided Afghan Communist party took power in a bloody coup. The Russians claim, perhaps with reason, not to have encouraged them. But they could hardly avoid recognising them, and that is where their troubles began. The countryside rose up against the godless Communists. Mutinies spread throughout the army. In March 1979 the Western city of Herat and much of the

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<sup>6</sup> A. Lyakhovskii, *Tragedia i doblest Afgana* (Moscow, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> V. Snegirev & V. Samunin, *A. Virus, Kak my zaboleti vtorzheniem v Afganistan* (Moscow 2011).

surrounding countryside fell into the hands of the rebels. The Communists appealed to the Russians to send troops. They refused. But as the months passed the country fell into growing chaos. Prime Minister Amin murdered the President, Nur Taraki. The Russians believed that the Americans might move in. Soviet generals advised against war. The politicians ignored them. In late December they sent in the specially constituted 40th Army of some 100,000 ground troops - fewer than the West has in Afghanistan today. Soviet special forces stormed the Presidential palace in Kabul, killed Amin, and replaced him with a Soviet puppet.

That was supposed to be the end of the story: the Soviet leaders believed there would be little further fighting and that the troops could soon be withdrawn. Instead the Russians found themselves caught in the crossfire, as the Afghan civil war became a three-way fight of ambushes, roadside bombs, villages obliterated by bombardment, atrocities on all sides. It was a war, as its Russian critics said, of tactics without strategy. It took them nine years to extricate themselves.

Among his other scholarly merits, Kalinovsky has an unusually good sense of the practicalities of policy making and execution. This shines through his interpretations, and gives the book much of its strength. I nevertheless part company when he seems to imply that Gorbachev could and should have got out earlier. This underestimates the dilemma that faces even the most determined leader when he tries to end an unsatisfactory war. Past errors and commitments, present circumstance, and contradictory pressures from both friends and enemies, all combine against him. Gorbachev summed it up in the Politburo: *"We could leave quickly, without worrying about the consequences, and blame everything on our predecessors. But that we cannot do. We have not given an account of ourselves to the people. A million of our soldiers have passed through Afghanistan. And it looks as if they did so in vain. So why did those people die?"*<sup>8</sup> His words are entirely applicable to the situation of the West in Afghanistan today. But they might have been used by Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam War or even Lloyd George as he tried to end the bloody stalemate on the Western Front at the height of the First World War.

Gorbachev was supported by his colleagues and by his generals, who had long concluded that the war was unwinnable in any real sense. It took him three years to negotiate an agreement after coming to power: not particularly long by historical standards. The result was surprisingly favourable. The Geneva Accords of April 1988 enabled the Soviet soldiers to depart in good order. The Soviet government's own man, the politically astute Mohammed Najibullah, was left behind with an army capable of combating the mujahideen. None of this was what the Russians' enemies in Pakistan and the United States had intended. There was almost a last minute hitch: Kalinovsky describes how Eduard Shevardnadze, the liberal foreign minister, joined Vladimir Kryuchkov, the conservative head of the KGB, in an improbable alliance to persuade the Politburo to leave a Soviet military force behind to support Najibullah. The idea was vetoed by Gorbachev.

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<sup>8</sup> A. Chernyaev, V. Medvedev, and G. Shakhnazov, *V Politburo TsK KPSS* (Moscow, 2006), page 149: entry for 23 February 1987.



Then it all went wrong. Najibullah's government disintegrated and the country degenerated into growing chaos. The Russians, themselves bankrupt, cut off his essential supplies. Najibullah fell in 1992. The civil war intensified, and was ended only by the victory of the Taliban.

There are obvious parallels between the Soviet war and our war today, and Kalinovsky draws some of them at the end of his book. NATO will not be defeated on the battlefield, any more than the 40th Army was. On the other hand, we are no more likely than the Russians to achieve anything which can sensibly be described as victory. We too have had to abandon the hope of re-engineering Afghan politics and society to match our own ideals. We too will doubtless leave behind a "friendly" government capable - up to a point - of defending itself. Unlike the Russians we are also - rightly or wrongly - contemplating leaving behind a considerable number of troops to bolster it. Unlike them, too, we are rich enough to continue giving the Afghans the economic and financial support they will undoubtedly need - if we can sustain the political will. We still have to work out what to do about Pakistan, a problem the Russians were able to ignore.

History does not offer reliable lessons, and governments rarely take any notice of those it does offer. But many officers now fighting in Afghanistan can no longer see the point of a war which - like the Soviet war before it - has lost its purpose. Things may yet turn out as the optimists hope. But the historical record, as set out by Kalinovsky and others, does not inspire all that much confidence.

In spring 1990, as the Soviet Union was grinding closer to its demise, I was in the rundown working-class suburbs of Moscow, meeting some *afgantsy*, veterans of that country's intervention into its troubled and troublesome neighbor state. It was by now a depressingly familiar experience as I worked on my doctorate, one which never failed to produce further evidence of the decay of the Soviet state. There would be the accounts of shortages of medical supplies both in the war and afterwards, of honors denied and of truths withheld. But then there would also be evidence of the essential humanity, camaraderie and even continued patriotism of these men who fought in this futile campaign, as they banded together to help the most needy of their number and provided the support network that the state was initially unwilling but by then unable to provide.

However, that particular encounter was especially memorable because of the observation of one of the veterans. A tattooed body-builder in his paratrooper's blue striped tee-shirt, the sort that I must confess under other circumstances I'd probably cross the street to avoid, looked at me at one point and asked a simple question to which I had no simple answer: "Gorbachev, Rodionov [the commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan when he served], they all knew we shouldn't be there. Why did it take so long to get us out?"

That is a crucial question, and it is not just contemporary developments which attest to the sad fact that it is a great deal easier to start most wars than to end them. There has been a recent crop of books about the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, including Rodric Braithwaite's elegant *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-1989*, Gregory Feifer's workmanlike *The Great Gamble* and now Artemy Kalinovsky's *A Long Goodbye*.<sup>1</sup> The particular strength of this well-written study is that it unpicks the decision-making process, above all about the withdrawal. Kalinovsky may be being a little ungenerous to describe the historiography of the ten-year war as "paltry." (2) Nonetheless no one has yet collated the documents, memoirs and papers now available, as well as the first-hand accounts by participants, to such good effect in assessing how the Kremlin practically, diplomatically, and intellectually prepared itself for withdrawal.

A powerful image emerges of a bureaucratic machine (or rather a series of interlocking bureaucratic machines, from the military and K.G.B. to the ministry of foreign affairs and Gorbachev's inner circle) grappling with the basic intractability of the world. Just as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (P.D.P.A.) had proved to be willful and demanding, even as it professed admiration for the Soviet model, so too the Afghan people failed often to respond as they were expected to, especially when showered with an extensive 'hearts and minds' aid and construction program. To a generation of Party officials who had become accustomed to only hearing what they wanted to hear, the world just ought not be like that. Besides, this was a deeply conservative structure, unwilling to

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<sup>1</sup> Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-1989*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

take bold steps. In this respect, some figures emerge from Kalinovsky's narrative if not exactly as unlikely heroes, but certainly as more complex than they are usually portrayed. For example, while General Boris Gromov got the kudos for actually leading the Soviet 40<sup>th</sup> Army out of Afghanistan, it was General Valentin Varennikov, the defense minister's personal representative in Kabul and fixer-in-chief, who drove the process most effectively. He probably would have arranged the withdrawal more quickly and with fewer Soviet and Afghan casualties had he not been fighting the K.G.B. every step of the way. Foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, by contrast, emerges slightly tarnished, not least because of his determined advocacy of the Afghan communists. It is an interesting irony that arch-conservative Varennikov - who was one of the conspirators behind the 1991 "August coup" - was a champion of rapid withdrawal from this imperial war while liberal darling Shevardnadze fought to keep troops in Afghanistan to keep propping up the P.D.P.A.

The basic story Kalinovsky tells is a familiar one, from the extent to which the Soviets invaded Afghanistan reluctantly, feeling they had no alternative and anticipating a brief stay, through to Gorbachev's desire to end the war in order to further his wider goals of a new détente and, though that, the revitalization of his moribund state. However, this book's great virtue is in the level of granular detail it provides, from the internal rows to the might-have-beens (what if the Kremlin had decided to back a coup by the forceful and effective defense minister Shahnawaz Tanai in 1988?). As is inevitable in any such work, there are some details and accounts I would challenge, from Kalinovsky's willingness to accept foreign policy adviser Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov's claims to have been a committed opponent of invasion (in his own memoirs, after all, he asserts that he heard about it after the fact - which would seem to preclude his trying to forestall it) to some of his characterizations about the K.G.B., which emerges as rather more monolithic than it was and more so than pretty much every other institution in this otherwise admirably nuanced study. Of course, these are petty nitpicks (maybe I am inclined to be persnickety given that my own book on the war appears attributed to former Russian prime minister Yegor Gaidar in the bibliography) and in no way invalidate the broad sweep of this work.

And maybe it gives an answer to that veteran mentioned above as to why Gorbachev couldn't bring the boys home sooner. Rodionov was bound only by his orders, but Gorbachev was tied up in his initial ideological assumptions about the blow a hasty retreat would deliver to world progressive forces, by the practical constraints of managing the process, by the often inaccurate assessments he was fed by experts and officials in Moscow and on the ground, and by political calculations, given that he was trying to bring change to a deeply skeptical elite. Kalinovsky's research rightly highlights not only how relatively insignificant the war was in terms of its impact on the Soviet Union, but also how - although he handled some aspects of his policies well and many badly - a national leader like Gorbachev can often find himself far less in control of events than he might expect and like to think.

**D**r. Artemy M. Kalinovsky is a young analyst who has already established a name for himself in the Soviet studies community. This is his second book.

Scholarship on the Soviet-Afghan War begins with the work of two Soviet participants in that conflict. General Aleksandr Lyakhovskiy (who died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2009) wrote the pivotal work on the conflict (*Tragediya i doblest Afgan*) based on his service with the Ministry of Defense operational group inside Afghanistan during the conflict.<sup>1</sup> General Makhmut Gareev wrote the pivotal work on the Soviet withdrawal and aftermath based on his assignment as the senior Soviet adviser after the departure of the Soviet 40<sup>th</sup> Army (*Moya poslednaya vojna*).<sup>2</sup> Kalinovsky has built on their work and interviewed General Lyakhovskiy as part of his research. He has further interviewed many of the key Soviet players in the war and done commendable primary research in the Russian-language documents of the war.

*A Long Goodbye* is a solid piece of diplomatic and political history of the Soviet-Afghan War. It is a study of Soviet decision making within the Politburo and makes a welcome addition to Kamal Matinuddin's *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush* and Barnett Rubin's *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*.<sup>3</sup> In spite of its title, it is a political history of the entire conflict and its aftermath which relies on previous scholarship as well as interviews, archives and material that were not available a few years ago. Kalinovsky has assembled these in a plausible account of the underlying Soviet politics and decisions that shaped this war and its termination. His work includes the input of the Soviet military and the KGB to the government and the impact of this input on the process. It is not a military history, but it does tie key military events in with the decisions of the governments in Moscow and Kabul. Its strength is that it employs a variety of Soviet and Russian sources that are not widely read in the West. It also throws a bit more light on the still-murky politics of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.

Despite its lead cover blurb, this is not a book on why the United States is doomed to fail in Afghanistan. Rather, it is a book with a tight focus on the Kremlin politics and foreign policy involved with the Soviet-Afghan War. It is principally a book about Mikhail Gorbachev and his attempts to rule his Politburo on this issue. In this, the author does an excellent job and delights the old Soviet analysts among us who miss the days deciphering the turgid speeches of Leonid Brezhnev and pondering the Soviet bureaucratic maze. For

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<sup>1</sup>Lyakhovskiy, Aleksandr, *Tragediya i doblest afgana* [The tragedy and honor of the Afghan veteran], Moscow: GPI "Iskona," 1995.

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Gareev, *Moya poslednaya vojna* [My final war], Moscow: INSAN, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Kamal Matinuddin, *Power Struggle in the Hindu Kush: Afghanistan (1978-1991)* Lahore: Wajidalis (PVT) Ltd., 1991 and Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation & Collapse in the International System*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

we specialists, this is an enjoyable and easy read. For the non-specialist, it is probably a tougher read.

Kalinovsky has gathered a lot of material from personal interviews with a variety of participants—both the great and the almost forgotten. Oral histories are great tools for the historian of recent events, but they have the problems of bias, accuracy of memory, perception changes over time and producing an accurate picture from numerous, conflicting accounts. The interviewer goes through a long, often-painful personal learning process before becoming thoroughly comfortable with interviewing equipment, scheduling, planning, time management and cross-walking. Even using someone else's interview can be challenging. Interviews, as well as much written material, need to be understood, considering nuance, context and underlying societal background. Dr. Kalinovsky is at ease when dealing with Russian individuals and society. He knows the Russian language, Russian culture and proprieties, and appears to have a good bit of "Soviet street-smarts." His interviews were clearly effective.

Kalinovsky seems to get a bit off track when comparing the United States' War in Vietnam with the Soviet-Afghan War. Although this is a popular exercise among journalists, there are problems from a historian's perspective. Although there were clear political and ideological ties and consequences between the two wars and both involved modern armies from nations with strategic nuclear weapons, they were two different wars. One was fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia against communist conventional forces of a neighboring state and some centrally-controlled local guerrillas while the other was a mountain war fought in Central Asia by communist forces against local and some foreign guerrillas who lacked any form of central control but were united by religion. Historians seldom compare the Russian Army and Russian guerrillas of 1812 with the Spanish guerrillas and Wellington's Army of the Peninsular Campaign even though they have much more in common. History may not repeat itself, but it does provide some great models. All models, of course, require modification to fit the nation, history, geography, customs, economy and ideology of the model to the current event.

Kalinovsky then takes his comparison one more step. He attempts to tie Presidents Gorbachev and Barack Obama together as like-minded campaigners for change who see Afghanistan as a stumbling block to political gain, but fail to control the main actors of their own Afghanistan policy and see themselves as hostage to the consequences of failure should the incumbent Afghan government fail to survive. The reviewer is skeptical of this approach, but leaves the final decision to the reader. History is history, analysis is analysis, but is there enough symmetry of variables and time? There probably is not.

Gorbachev was not in power when the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed in April of 1992. Following the Putsch in August 1991, Gorbachev lost all leverage over Soviet policy in Afghanistan. It was Boris Yeltsin, the President of the Russian Federation, who pushed the end of military and other assistance to Kabul in September 1991. Why was Yeltsin so opposed to Gorbachev's Afghanistan policy and what did he think that he would gain by selling out Mohammed Najibullah? Frank Snepp, CIA station chief, wrote that United States policy in Vietnam became seeking "a decent interval" before the collapse of

Saigon.<sup>4</sup> Judged by that criterion, Gorbachev's policy delivered such an interval in Kabul for the Soviet Union, one that the new government of Russia did not consider of any merit.

Bottom line: this is a rock-solid piece of political and diplomatic history of the Soviet side of the war. It should stand the test of time.

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End Told by the CIA's Chief Strategy Analyst in Vietnam*, New York: Random House, 1977.

In December 1979 the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan with a 'limited contingent' of military forces that ultimately grew to a peak of 108,800 personnel by 1986; between 1987 and 1989 however they then pulled out, leaving behind a government in Kabul which survived a further three years, before eventually collapsing in April 1992. As a major episode in the culminating stage of the Cold War, these events have aroused debate and periodic review ever since. The immediate effect of the opening of the Soviet archives after 1991 was a better understanding of why the Soviet Union first intervened in December 1979. With the steady stream of memoirs and archival sources that have emerged since, we now also have a better understanding of the course of and motivations behind the eventual Soviet withdrawal. In this fine and well researched work, Artemy Kalinovsky consolidates this broad array of sources to present a skilful overview of this second phase, namely the Soviet decision making process during the war's final years. The result is a study which, if it contains few genuine revelations for those already broadly familiar with the bulk of new material that has come out since 1991, still carries both lessons for current Western intervention in the same country, and a variety of useful corrections to many of the still quite persistent layman's view of the conflict (for example, the film *Charlie Wilson's War*). In this, Kalinovsky's book also forms an invaluable companion piece to Rodric Braithwaite's recent and masterful study, *Afgantsy*.<sup>1</sup>

Kalinovsky's work sits firmly within the 'new historiography' of the Soviet-Afghan war. It was a war, it is now clear, fought without any annexationist goals—a desire for 'warm water ports' played no role in the Soviet decision making process in 1979. Nor was the war itself necessarily excessively costly for Moscow, or for that matter a key milestone in the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. Soviet military casualties, at some 15,000 dead and 50,000 severely wounded, were significant, particularly compared to current coalition casualties in the same theatre (a reflection of improvements in body armour and medical treatment since the 1980s), but they were also a fraction of American casualties in Vietnam (over 58,000 dead). Economic burdens were similarly significant, but far from unendurable for an undeniable superpower at the time like the Soviet Union. Similarly, it is now clear that the gifting by the Reagan administration of the Stinger missile, an effective man-portable anti-aircraft system, to the *mujahidin* in 1986 also played next to no role in accelerating the Soviet decision to withdraw. Soviet exploratory talks regarding withdrawal had already begun in 1982; recognition was already dawning in Moscow even then that the war could not be won by military means. Broader political discontent within the Soviet system over the actual results of attempting to 'export socialism' to the Third World also had their roots in the experiences already acquired in the mid-to-late 1970s, as the memoirs of both Karen Brutents and Markus Wolf have made clear.<sup>2</sup> What in fact prolonged the conflict, despite

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<sup>1</sup> Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy. The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-89* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Karent Brutents, *Tridstat' let na Staroi Ploshchadi*. (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnoye Otnosheniia, 1998), Markus Wolff & Anne McElvoy (trans.), *Man without a Face. The Memoirs of a Spymaster*. (New York: Times Books, 1997)

that early recognition, as Kalinovsky brilliantly underlines in his analysis, was precisely the diplomatic complications of disengagement, conjoined with the ongoing relative *low cost*; if, in Mikhail Gorbachev's metaphor, the war by 1985 was a 'bleeding wound', then, as Kalinovsky brilliantly rephrases it, the blood flowed "from a small vein of a large animal." (92)

As a study in diplomatic policy making within the context of human conflict, rather than a study of conflict as such, Kalinovsky's book makes a brilliant contribution to the 'new historiography' in other areas as well. One overall trend from the greater availability of new sources in general has been the slight tarnishing of Gorbachev's previously saint-like image, together with a reassessment of the supposedly entrenched conservatism of the Brezhnev-era Politburo. In this account, both Andrei Gromyko, the long-serving Soviet Foreign Minister prior to Eduard Shevardnadze, and Vladimir Kriuchkov, the last chairman of the KGB, come across rather better than would have been allowed for even five years ago. Both men arguably had a far firmer grasp of the Soviet Union's true national interests than Gorbachev himself, and this book makes an interesting comparison with Jonathan Haslam's recent study of Russia's Cold War, which is far more condemnatory of the Brezhnev-era regime.<sup>3</sup> Kalinovsky also underlines the point that the Brezhnev doctrine was being gradually abandoned by the Brezhnev-era Politburo itself by 1980. If the conservatives now look rather better in retrospect that one might once have imagined possible, Gorbachev by contrast comes across here much as he has done in most of the better-informed post-91 accounts; as an indecisive and sometimes dilatory manager of events, whose post-1987 actions in most fields led in practice to disaster.

Though Kalinovsky himself does not explicitly advocate such a view, the book can certainly also be interpreted as a subtle condemnation of the central incoherence of 'New Thinking' in Soviet foreign policy. Gorbachev's persistent belief in resolving international tensions by collaboration, openness, honest partnership, and working through the U.N. looks deeply naïve in retrospect. The difficulty of decoupling an ideological commitment to the Third World from making diplomatic progress with the West was meanwhile a dilemma which was also never successfully resolved until ideology itself came to be increasingly abandoned altogether during 1990-91. The Reagan administration, though certainly more open -- and, at least at first, even rather desperate -- for engagement with the Soviet Union in its second term, was also a far from honest partner in the Geneva Accords process, and the U.N. itself proved itself an utterly inadequate 'honest broker' when it came to policing ongoing Pakistani support for the *mujahidin*, even as Soviet forces withdrew in 1987-89. Lack of mutual trust, and the machinations of the Kabul government itself -- anxious to avoid being completely abandoned, but also quite resistant to pressure from Moscow to open ranks and engage in more open talks with its enemies -- together led to a long, drawn-out and difficult withdrawal process, brilliantly and carefully documented here.

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).



As the West more generally seeks to extract itself from Afghanistan today, the ongoing crisis of government in Kabul forms the one ongoing point of most obvious comparison with the Soviet experience. Yet in the end, it is the *difference* between current events and the Soviet experience that Kalinovsky identifies in his conclusion which, in the end, is perhaps the most chilling point of all: that “the Afghanistan problem is even more of a challenge for the United States today than it was for Moscow in the 1980s’ due to the subsequent proliferation of multiple diverse policy stakeholders (from NATO partners to NGOs), coupled with the need to essentially build a state from scratch, rather than merely assist a weak and failing state.” (225). Such lessons from Afghanistan, when considered in conjunction with the ongoing deep, and extremely serious, financial crisis on both sides of the Atlantic since 2007, make it clear that the West today could seriously use some strategic ‘New Thinking’ of its own, particularly in the pursuit of international structures that might actually work.

*The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of State or the U.S. Government*

**A**rtemy Kalinovsky's *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* is a richly-textured account of Moscow's decision-making during the last decade of the USSR. The author argues that Soviet leaders concluded early on that the invasion had been a mistake and tried to extricate themselves from Afghanistan. "Why did it take the Soviet Union so long to bring its troops home?" he asks. "[T]he single most important reason that Soviet leaders delayed the decision to withdraw for as long as they did is that they continued to believe the USSR could help stabilize Afghanistan, build up the Afghan armed forces, and make the Kabul government more acceptable to its people." (2)

Kalinovsky has navigated a labyrinth of Russian archives, mobilized a wide selection of fresh evidence, and crafted a lucid and compelling narrative. The first four chapters tell the story from the spring of 1979 to the summer of 1987. Particularly striking are chapters five and six. The Mikhail Gorbachev who emerges in the crucial period from the fall of 1987 to the spring of 1989 is an idealistic and impatient leader attempting to reconcile his aversion to violence with a commitment to preserving Mohammed Najibullah's regime after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The outcome was messy; the policy pleased few. Kalinovsky conveys in vivid prose the obstacles Gorbachev overcame and the mixed legacies that ensued. *A Long Goodbye* is an impressive work sure to inspire scholars writing about the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the turbulence of modern Afghanistan.

The book's strengths notwithstanding, I would offer three critical responses. The first is that I see a tension between "a long goodbye" -- the notion that Soviet leaders wanted to withdraw much earlier than outside observers generally assumed -- and a central theme of the book: that the war was militarily limited and politically manageable. "The USSR avoided becoming overcommitted by limiting its presence in Afghanistan to roughly 120,000 troops," Kalinovsky writes, "and it never expanded the war into neighboring Pakistan, thus avoiding some of the pitfalls of US strategy in Vietnam. It faced domestic pressures and international criticism, but not at a level that made an immediate change of course obligatory." Furthermore, "[a]lthough the war was costly in terms of lives and materiel, it was well within the limits of what the Soviet Union could manage." (42-44) Leaders made choices. Even during "the tumultuous period of 1989-91," he asserts, "one must understand that both the social effects of the war and opposition to the war among the Soviet population (to the extent that it existed) were scarcely felt by the USSR's leaders, and thus played little if any role in their decision making on the war." (45)

If Soviet leaders indeed believed the war was sustainable, then I question Kalinovsky's depiction of their diplomatic strategy. Stabilizing the Babrak Karmal regime and normalizing the situation in Afghanistan, as Kalinovsky puts it at the end of Chapter One, probably constituted two tracks of Soviet policy. Yet did participation in the United

Nations' effort to find a negotiated settlement, as he argues in Chapter Two, really constitute a third? "The Soviet Union's turn toward diplomacy was not just a result of the power transition after Brezhnev's death," Kalinovsky contends, "rather, it came from an emerging consensus that the war could not be won. . . . By 1982, Soviet leaders had come to accept the need for UN diplomacy to help resolve the Afghan conflict, and prodded their Afghan clients to do the same." (55) Even before that, the author writes, the Soviets accepted the Cordovez mission in pursuit of a U.N.-backed settlement. "Moscow saw the main purpose of the accords as a way for the Kabul government to gain legitimacy and strengthen its ability to fight the opposition. Nevertheless, the Soviet interest in negotiating was genuine." (66)

What precisely did the Soviets hope to negotiate from 1982 onward? Kalinovsky cites a Politburo meeting on 27 November 1982, where Andrei Gromyko apparently asked for plans for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. "For Moscow, the goal of any settlement was the preservation of the Karmal regime." (67) The goal of a negotiated settlement, it would seem from the evidence, was barely indistinguishable from victory. It was not, in other words, Moscow's search for its own "decent interval" to salvage prestige through diplomatic sleight-of-hand even as it accepted the inevitability of defeat. Yuri Andropov may have told Diego Cordovez in March 1983 that life would be easier if the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, but these words do not necessarily reflect the Soviet leader's actual intentions, will, and capability to translate musings into policies.

Did the Soviet leadership truly seek a diplomatic solution to the war in Afghanistan? Or, did it seek diplomatic cover to continue to shore up a friendly regime and crush the Mujahadeen? Kalinovsky intimates that Moscow pursued both goals. It is entirely possible that Soviet leaders sought different outcomes at different moments, and that their attitudes toward negotiation were a mixture of both. I am not convinced, based on the evidence Kalinovsky cites, that the Soviets genuinely wanted a negotiated settlement in the early 1980s.

Kalinovsky nonetheless makes a compelling case that Moscow's failure to stabilize Afghanistan and shore up a friendly regime -- not a decisive military defeat -- convinced Gorbachev to bring the troops home. He dismisses the popular view that the introduction of Stinger missiles provided by the United States in 1986 'changed the course of the war.' "Soviet military and pilots adjusted," he argues "fitting aircraft with various devices to disorient the missiles, flying at night, or staying so low to the ground as to make the missiles useless. Although this adjustment allowed the Soviets to limit damage caused by the Stingers, it meant sacrificing accuracy and precision, and relying on even more damaging higher-altitude bombing." (43) This is a difficult assertion to prove, and it may not be enough to dissuade those who believe otherwise. It may also push the limits of what historians can reasonably conclude about the operational realities, given the evidentiary disposition of Soviet military records from the time. Independent of that debate, I would broaden the discussion. I wonder if the author might speak a bit more to the larger U.S.-Soviet relationship and Gorbachev's decision to withdraw.

How does Kalinovsky regard the impact of U.S. financial and military support for anti-Soviet resistance prior to the Stingers? Did the sanctions and boycott of the Olympics have any impact on the how Soviet leaders assessed the wider costs of the invasion? More broadly, if Washington had not taken steps to delegitimize the Soviet invasion in the months and years after December 1979, would it have altered the outcome? Moreover, an outstanding question from this period -- to my mind -- is how Ronald Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz could gain the trust of Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze as their administration was aiding and abetting the killing of Soviet soldiers. I wonder: how does Kalinovsky account for this exception to the concept of 'trust but verify'? Did the Soviets agree to quarantine Afghanistan from other bilateral issues? Or, perhaps, does the fact that Afghanistan did not block the path toward improved superpower relations from 1985-87 suggest that it was not so consequential after all? As Kalinovsky stresses repeatedly (and which is one of his most provocative arguments), the costs the Kremlin faced for continued occupation were not prohibitive. "A 'bleeding wound' it may have been," he writes at the close of chapter three, "but the flow came from a small vein of a large animal." (92)

I also question whether Kalinovsky succeeds in developing each of the themes he lays out. After reading pages 8-11 in the introduction, I expected modernization to be major theme throughout the rest of the book. He returns to modernization in the conclusion, linking together the U.S. experience in Vietnam, the Soviet attempt at nation-building in Afghanistan, and the more recent U.S. endeavor to do the same. These passages in the introduction and conclusion, notwithstanding, I am not entirely clear how modernization relates either to the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan or its decision to withdraw, let alone how the state-building enterprise actually worked inside Afghanistan.

One theme Kalinovsky does sustain is that there was relative continuity in the process of Soviet decision-making toward Afghanistan with important implications for understanding the broader formulation of Soviet foreign policy in the 1980s. He describes at the close of chapter six how Gorbachev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Vladimir Kriuchkov huddled before formal meetings of the Politburo to decide policy. "Thus," Kalinovsky writes, "after a brief period in which Moscow tried a more 'democratic' approach to policy making on Afghanistan -- a period marked by long, heated debates involving the full Politburo -- a familiar pattern emerged. It resembled the approach taken in the early 1980s, when Andropov, Ustinov, and Gromyko essentially set Afghan policy among themselves." (177) Kalinovsky returns to this theme in the conclusion. "The so-called Sinatra Doctrine, which allowed socialist regimes in Eastern Europe to collapse in 1989, rightly belongs to the Gorbachev era; but its roots lay in the early 1980s, when Soviet leaders began to feel the full effect of the hangover that resulted from their overindulgence during the previous decade," he states. (213) "If one approaches the issue dispassionately . . . it becomes clear that Gorbachev's overall approach to the Afghan problem flowed logically from the prerogatives that were largely set by the situation he inherited in 1985" (223). At the end of this otherwise highly impressive book, I am not entirely convinced by these assertions. Does self-awareness of a hangover during the Brezhnev era truly equate to a set of prerogatives during the Gorbachev era? It is also possible that I am misreading what Kalinovsky intends to say here (or misrepresenting what he does say).

I hope these comments elicit discussion. Kalinovsky has written an impressive work that transcends the challenges of conducting research in regions where this period in history remains politically volatile. *A Long Goodbye* forwards our understanding of Soviet decision-making, Afghanistan, and the end of the Cold War. It speaks to the broader, and timely, question of how we define victory and defeat in counterinsurgency or guerrilla wars. Victory on the battlefield may have been impossible; but it was not, as Kalinovsky points out, the Soviet objective: to secure a stable regime by recalibrating the combination of military might, diplomacy, nation-building, and political negotiation.

I would like to thank Thomas Maddux and the roundtable participants for their very generous reviews. It is a great honor to be reviewed by this all-star cast, whose work was very important for my own understanding of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and the last decade of the Cold War in general. The reviewers also bring up some important points which I will try to address below.

James Wilson is skeptical of the link between the “sustainability” of the war effort and the Soviet leadership’s desire to withdraw. I would say that while the war may have been sustainable, that does not mean that it was desirable. More importantly, though, I think the realization that a withdrawal was necessary came from the realization that the war was unwinnable, which I discuss at some length in the first two chapters. Why sustain a war that you can’t win? I would add here that when it comes to the introduction of Stinger missiles in 1986, I would note that while Wilson is right that our access to Soviet military documentation is very limited, there is useful memoir literature as well as analysis that supports the idea that the Soviets found ways to adjust to the Stinger. More importantly for my own argument, Soviet officers and leaders were making their decisions about the war independently of the Stinger’s introduction, or indeed any individual change on the battlefield. Both Marshal Sergei Sokolov’s statement that “the war could not be won by military means” and Mikhail Gorbachev’s decision to find a way out preceded the introduction of the Stinger, while Eduard Shevarnadze and Vladimir Kriuchkov’s pleas to keep a number of troops in Afghanistan after February 1989 came long after.

Wilson is also skeptical that Soviet leaders were genuine about their desire for a negotiated withdrawal in 1982. It is not inconceivable to suggest, as Wilson does, that the Soviets just wanted to have the U.S. and Pakistan out of the way so they could isolate the *mujahedeen*. But here it is important to pay attention to the internal Soviet discussion: by 1982, the Soviet military command had already made it very clear that “crushing” the mujahedeen was not going to be possible. What the Soviets wanted was to leave the Karmal regime with a solid chance of holding out against the opposition. At the same time, the Soviets were also exploring ways of bringing opposition leaders over to the government side. They believed that U.S. and Pakistani involvement had to end for the opposition leaders to take them more seriously and for the Afghan government to survive without Soviet troops, but that is not the same thing as holding out for an outright military victory.

What about the issue of U.S. support for the mujahedeen and its sanctions and boycotts more generally? I discuss this in the first chapter, but let me underline some points here. Obviously the U.S. campaign contributed to a Soviet sense of isolation after the intervention, and the supply of arms (via Pakistan) gave the *mujahedeen* much greater capability to harass the militaries of the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. But looking at discussions before and after the intervention, it seems that the Soviets expected the sanctions and isolation and were prepared to weather the storm. The sense that *détente* had collapsed made the costs seem much smaller, while the importance

of shoring up Afghanistan meant that a temporary period of heightened tension with the U.S. was not necessarily an unfair price to pay.

Wilson correctly notes that my discussion of “modernization” is (mostly) limited to the introduction and conclusion. This was primarily a stylistic choice, and I ended up removing my longer, more extensive discussion about Soviet non-military advising and aid efforts, and developing it further as a separate piece.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to have a very long discussion about what “modernization” means – it is a loaded term. But it is sufficient here to point to the obsession of Afghan communists with their own country’s perceived “backwardness” and the “modernity” they encountered elsewhere, especially in the USSR, which they wanted to recreate within their own country. Their goals included industrialization, secularization, the emancipation of women, the spread of literacy, and the creation of a government with the reach and depth to carry out those changes. These were the goals of previous Afghan governments, too, but none wanted to go as far and as quickly, with as little regard to reality, as the communists who came to power in 1978.

How does all of this connect to the question of withdrawal? The Soviet leadership believed, logically, that for its allies in Afghanistan to survive, those allies would need to achieve legitimacy, and to get legitimacy they would need to show some material achievements. Hence the major aid and advising effort undertaken within Afghanistan, and the smaller attempts to demonstrate the benefits of Soviet rule, such as bringing Afghan clergy to the USSR, for example, and showing them not just functioning mosques but also factories in Soviet Central Asia. The reason this had an effect on the length of the Soviet presence, I believe, is that as the aid effort went on – and the specialists’ and advisers’ glowing reports about their own progress reached Moscow – it became yet another reason not to rush a withdrawal. The aid effort had to be given time to work.

This brings us to the possibilities of comparison with Vietnam and the current International Security Force Assistance effort in Afghanistan, an issue raised by Professor Grau. I agree that these are very different wars, and we mustn’t get carried away when making comparisons. The more striking similarities that I see are the ones that emerge not from a study of the military aspects of the conflict (which I am in any case ill equipped to analyze) but rather the way leaders slowly come to terms with failure in a situation where they have superior power and resources but nevertheless find themselves contemplating defeat. I mean only to suggest some interesting parallels – like Professor Grau, I prefer to leave it up to the reader to decide how deep that comparison can go.

Mark Galleotti rightly takes issue with my characterization of the literature on Afghanistan as “paltry.” I should have been clearer that this was a point about quantity rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Artemy Kalinovsky, *The Blind Leading the Blind: Soviet Advising and State-Building in Afghanistan*, (Cold War International History Project Working Paper #60, Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC, 2010) and in a forthcoming volume with Antonio Giustozzi, *Missionaries of Modernity* (manuscript in progress.)

quality.<sup>2</sup> (This is another interesting Vietnam comparison – the many hundreds of articles and books on various aspects of that war, as compared to those on the Soviet war in Afghanistan). The excellent work of the scholars who took part in this roundtable was crucial to my own research.<sup>3</sup> It is an honor to join their ranks.

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<sup>2</sup> However, I feel I have to be nitpicky here as well: I definitely do not say that Aleksandr-Agentov was a “committed opponent” of intervention; on the contrary, I point out that while he played a role in swinging the balance against intervention in March of 1979, but by the fall of 1979 he was leaning towards a Soviet military involvement.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, besides the truly excellent work of the participants of this roundtable, on which I drew extensively, there is the work of Antonio Giustozzi (whose work on the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan in power is still the best study of Afghanistan under the communists), and the recently published account by Peter Tomsen. Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (London: Hurst, 2000), and Peter Tomsen, *The wars of Afghanistan: messianic terrorism, tribal conflicts, and the failures of great powers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011)