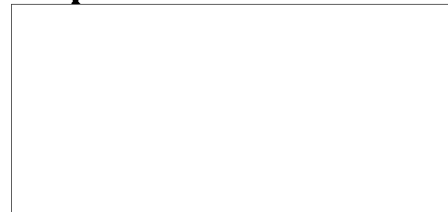




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The Soviet Soldier in Afghanistan: Morale and Discipline Problems



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A Research Paper

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NESA 85-10178CX

September 1985

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The Soviet Soldier in Afghanistan: Morale and Discipline Problems



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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] of the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a contribution by [redacted] the Office Soviet Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, South Asia Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, [redacted]

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**The Soviet Soldier in Afghanistan:
Morale and Discipline Problems**



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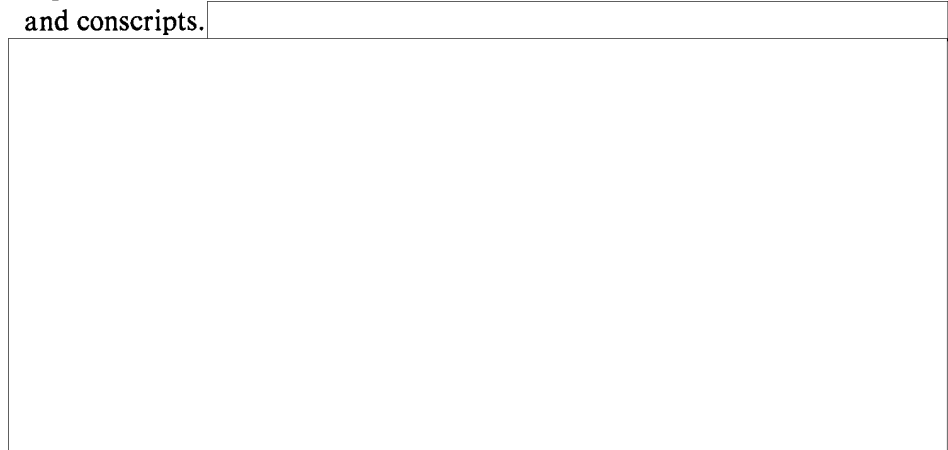
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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 August 1985
was used in this report.*

Soviet military forces in Afghanistan over the past five years have experienced serious morale and discipline problems among both officers and conscripts.

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Although morale and discipline problems are widespread, they have not significantly hampered Soviet operations. Afghan insurgents have often asserted that Soviet soldiers have been unaggressive in combat, but the insurgents never have accused them of collapsing under fire or surrendering. [redacted] nearly all Soviet troops—including Central Asians—obey orders, even though they dislike the war, because they fear punishment. [redacted]

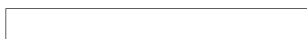
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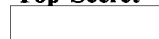
There is little prospect that Soviet morale and discipline in Afghanistan will appreciably improve. Soviet authorities will instead rely on a combination of strict discipline and vigorous political indoctrination to keep the situation from fundamentally affecting their approach to the war in Afghanistan. [redacted]

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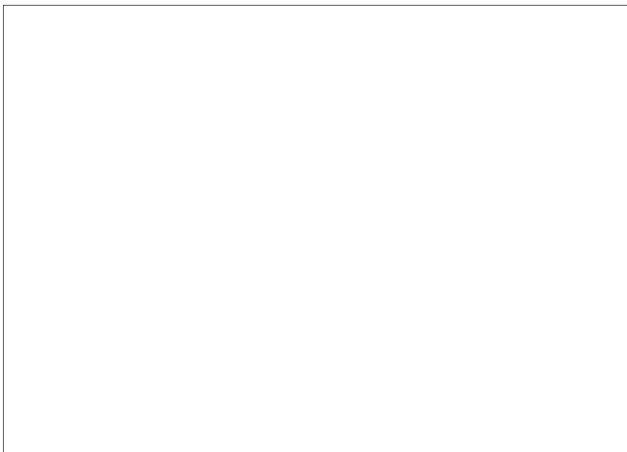


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**The Soviet Soldier in Afghanistan:
Morale and Discipline Problems**



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The Causes of Poor Morale

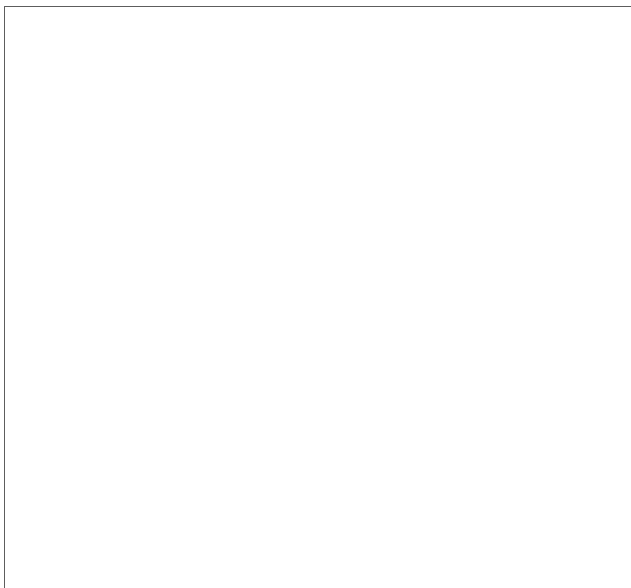
The Soviet soldier in Afghanistan is confronted by such morale-sapping factors as antagonism between senior and junior conscripts and between officers and conscripts, debilitating diseases, poor material conditions, disillusionment, isolation, boredom, and inadequate training and unit cohesion.

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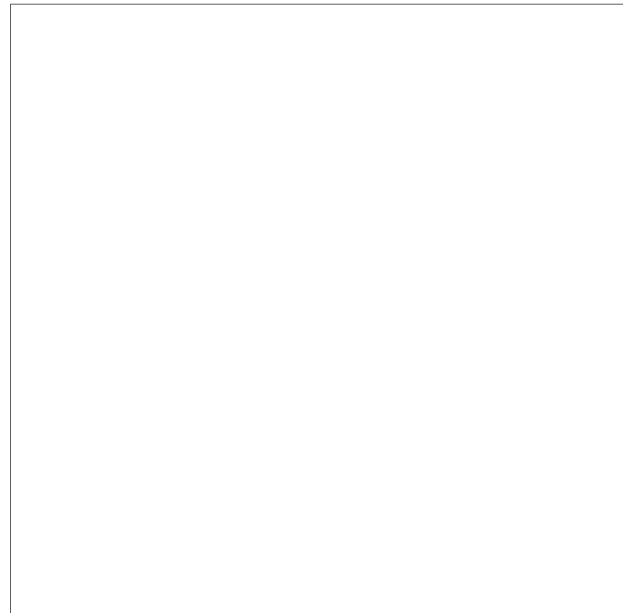


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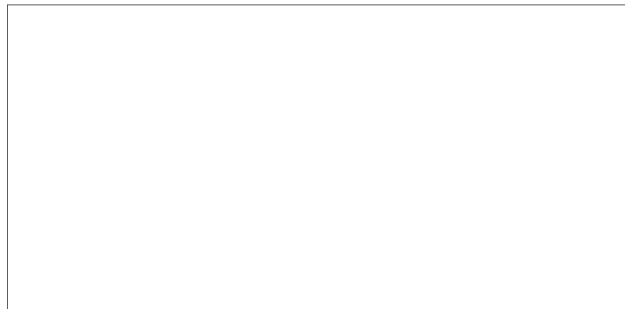
Internal Frictions



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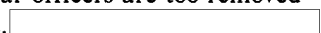
We believe that friction between the older and younger conscripts,

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results in part because the army's regular officers are too removed from the conscripts' lives.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Conscripts rarely retaliate against officers. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted] conscripts rarely complain about mistreatment because they are afraid of reprisals. [Redacted]

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Disease

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Hepatitis is the most widespread ailment, although typhoid, malaria, and assorted skin diseases are also common. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Material Conditions

Soviet soldiers find living conditions in Afghanistan usually worse than they have experienced elsewhere.

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[Redacted]

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We believe the pervasiveness of these diseases reflects poor hygiene, a general shortage of vaccines and medical equipment, logistic deficiencies, as well as Afghanistan's difficult climate. Hepatitis and typhoid are caused by nonpotable water, contaminated food, and shared eating utensils. Inadequate shelter forces troops to sleep on the ground, unprotected from the cold and from insect-borne diseases. Malaria reflects inadequate mosquito control. [Redacted]

Disillusionment

In our view, the low state of Soviet morale stems in part from the frustrating nature of the Afghan insurgency. [Redacted]

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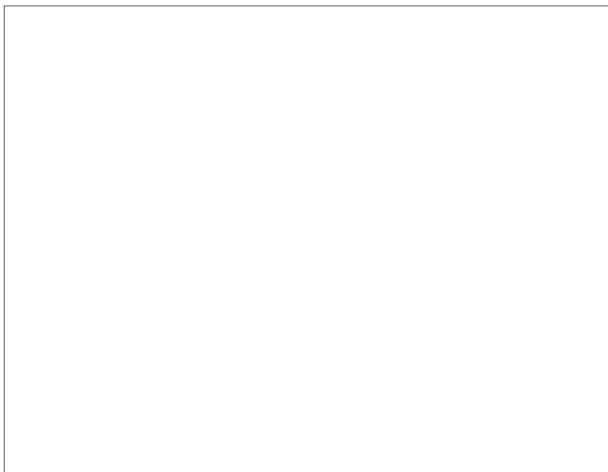
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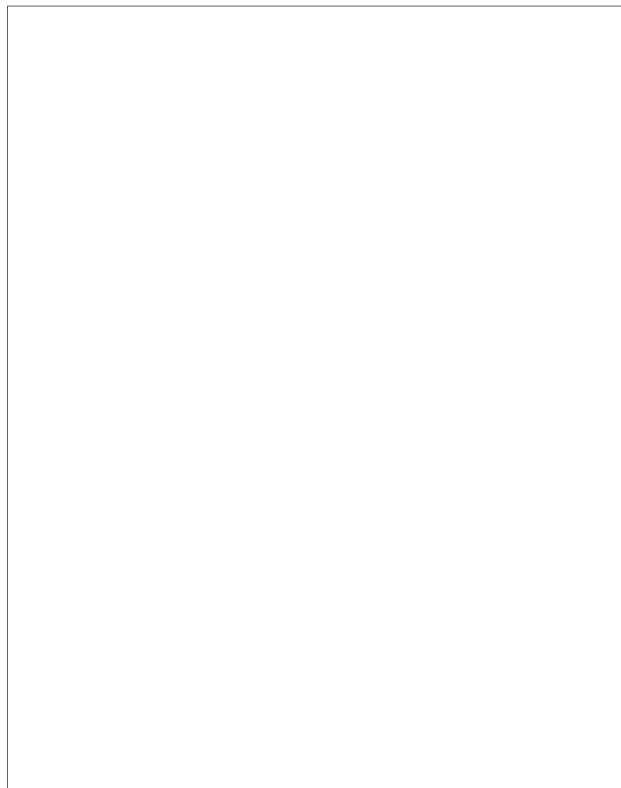
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Soviet soldiers see little reason to risk their lives in a war that threatens to drag on indefinitely and does not, in their opinion, involve vital Soviet interests.

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Moreover, Soviet authorities tell conscripts going to Afghanistan that they will be fighting, at least indirectly, Americans and Chinese. But even the most uneducated lout quickly discovers that he is fighting Afghans who hate Russians and who are defending their villages against foreign invaders,

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most of their free time sleeping, washing clothes, and singing songs about their loved ones and their fear of death.

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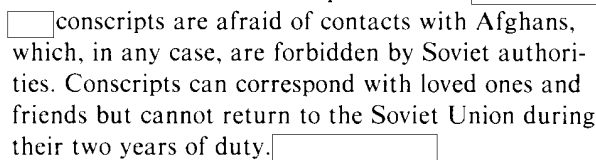


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Isolation and Boredom

Isolation also contributes to poor morale. Conscripts are afraid of contacts with Afghans, which, in any case, are forbidden by Soviet authorities. Conscripts can correspond with loved ones and friends but cannot return to the Soviet Union during their two years of duty.

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Poor Training and Unit Cohesion

Soviet troops are poorly prepared for the rigors of fighting the Afghan insurgency. They are not provided training appropriate to guerrilla war and are informed of their destination only just before they leave or after they arrive in Afghanistan.

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Conscripts find their tours of duty extremely boring when not faced with combat because authorities have made little effort to provide entertainment.

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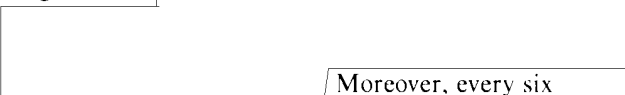


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Transistor radios are forbidden because of foreign newscasts, although some officers allow their troops to listen to them. troops spend

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Moreover, every six months, about 25 percent of most unit members leave military service (after two years of service) and are replaced by new conscripts. We believe this high

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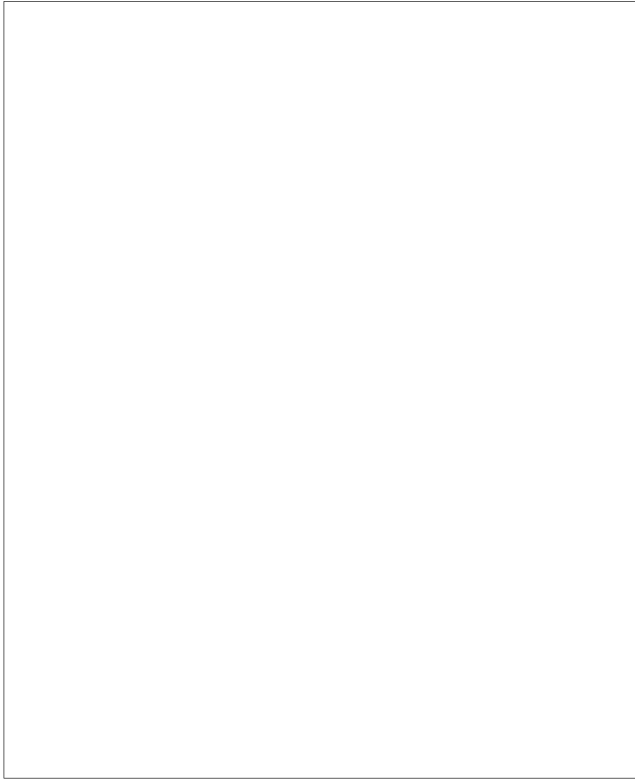
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turnover, which occurs throughout the Soviet military, hinders the growth of cohesion through shared experiences and hardship. 

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The Effects of Poor Morale

Drug Abuse

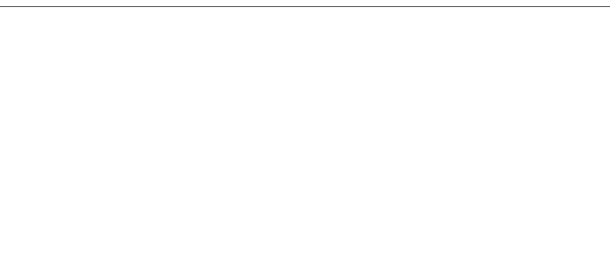
We believe drug abuse is a worrisome problem for the Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan. 

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 about half the conscripts smoke hashish, which is cheap and widely available in Afghanistan; significantly fewer conscripts consume opium and cocaine. Soldiers barter clothing and gasoline; some are so addicted that they trade weapons. Narcotics will often buy an Afghan's way through a Soviet roadblock. 

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Alcohol Abuse

Soviet troops in Afghanistan also turn to alcohol, a solace both within the Soviet armed forces and Soviet society as a whole.  conscripts make vodka from stills or buy imported vodka from officers.

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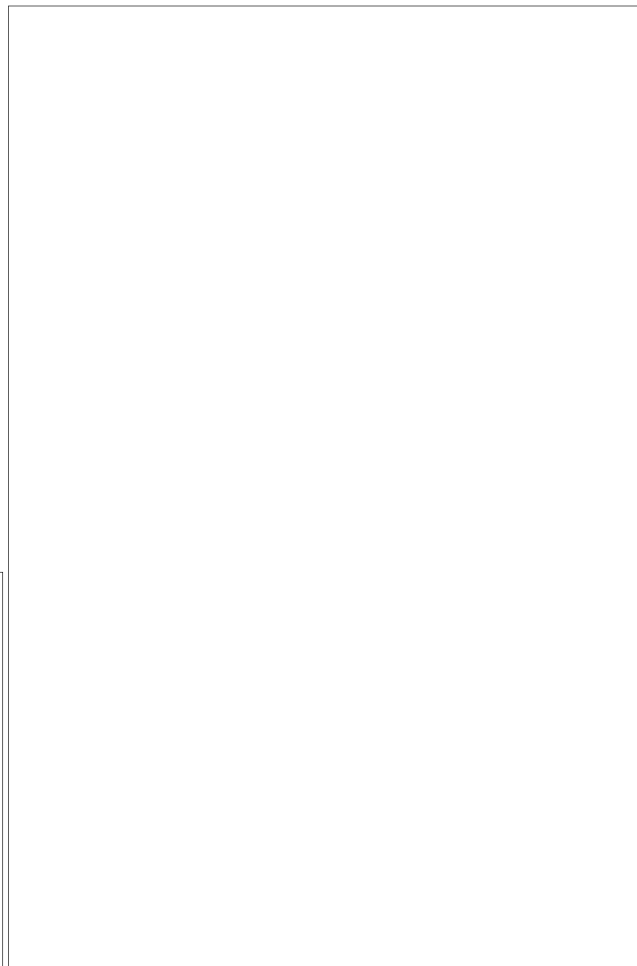
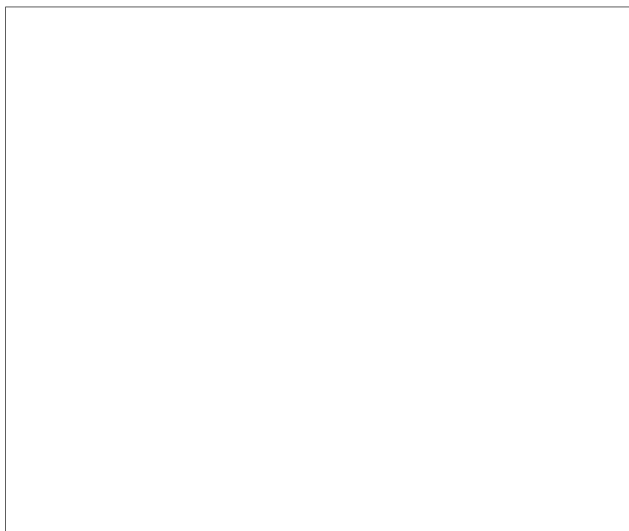
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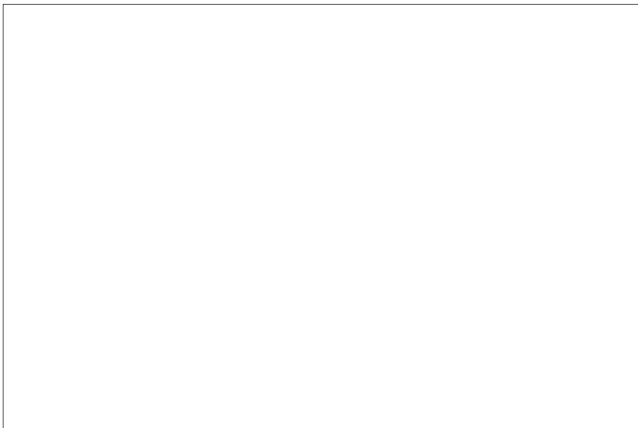
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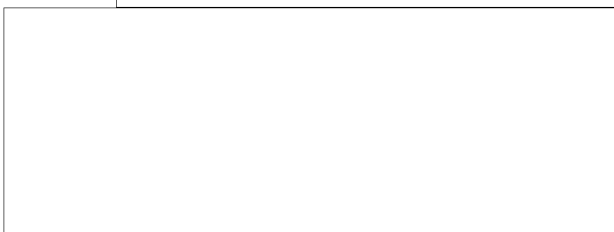
Corruption

Poor morale and the desire to make money—sometimes to pay for drugs or alcohol—have led to extensive black marketeering. [redacted]

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[redacted] the most frequent transactions in Afghanistan involve trading Soviet small-arms ammunition, fuel, vehicle batteries, and tires for hashish, cigarettes, Western clothing, radios, and food. [redacted]

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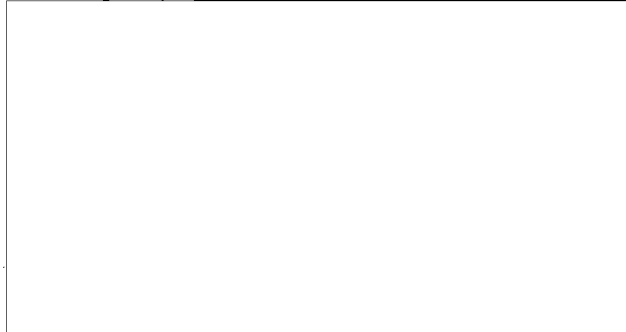


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Soviet soldiers steal from Afghans as well as trade with them. [redacted] Soviet soldiers often extort petty cash and hashish from Afghan truck-drivers and car passengers at checkpoints along the main highways. [redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Soviet authorities appear to have made progress only in curbing the sale of arms. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] no longer see Soviet soldiers selling small arms in the bazaars, and Panjsher Valley leader Ahmad Masood said in 1982 that his men could no longer buy weapons from Soviets in nearby garrisons. We believe strict penalties and better accounting procedures explain the decline. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

Impact on Combat Operations

Although the Soviets have serious morale and discipline problems, we believe these problems have had only a small impact on combat operations. We have not found evidence that morale and discipline problems have forced cancellation of any operations or directly caused significant insurgent gains. Although Afghan insurgents have often described Soviet soldiers as being unaggressive in combat, the Afghans have never accused them of collapsing under fire or surrendering. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] separate accounting procedures for Soviet and Afghan weapons in the Kabul garrisons also have reduced illicit arms sales. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Soviet troops indulge less in drugs and alcohol when faced with combat, and only a small number have defected to the insurgents. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] fear of punishment is the key to the Soviet troops' compliance with orders and the failure of poor morale and discipline to adversely affect combat operations. Poor military performance leads to extra work, reduced rations, and problems with future employers in the USSR; outright insubordination leads to lengthy prison sentences. The presence of informers inhibits troops from expressing opposition, although not apathy, toward the war. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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The Role of Soviet Central Asians in Afghanistan

Soviet Authorities' Responses

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[redacted] only a handful of the more than 100,000 Soviet Central Asians who have served in Afghanistan have defected, and [redacted]

Soviet authorities have tried to improve morale and discipline through punishments, criticism of officers, and moderate rewards for good performance. The authorities have resorted to strict, but not brutal, punishments. [redacted] selling weapons, desertion, and engaging in assaults that cause death or serious injury are punishable by death but that penalties for lesser infractions are similar to those elsewhere in the Soviet armed forces:

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[redacted] the Soviet Central Asians have conducted themselves in a relatively disciplined fashion. Most Soviet Central Asians serve in the noncombat support roles that they have traditionally filled throughout the Soviet military. [redacted]

- Loss of weapon: up to three years' imprisonment.
- Theft of weapon: up to seven years' imprisonment.
- Large-scale theft: up to 10 years' imprisonment.
- Theft with armed assault: up to 15 years' imprisonment.

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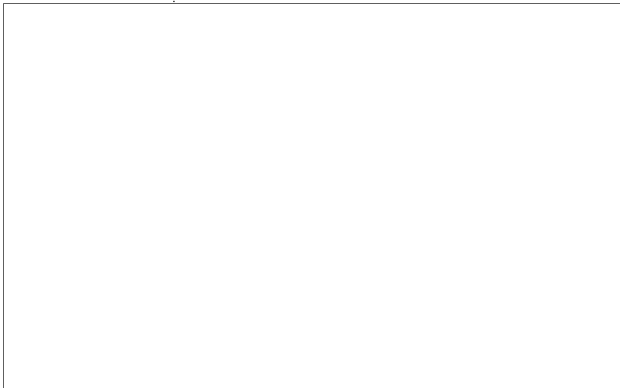
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We believe Soviet Central Asians are not moved to support or join the insurgents because of language barriers, strict control of conscript time and activities, and physical isolation. These overcome any sense of shared religious belief and ethnic solidarity they might have with the Afghans. Most Soviet Central Asians speak Turkic languages and cannot communicate with the Afghans any better than the Soviet soldiers of Slavic origin. Soviet Tajiks, who speak a Persian dialect intelligible to a majority of Afghans, represent less than 10 percent of all Soviet Muslims. [redacted]



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The only unrest among Soviet Central Asians that we have observed occurred in the USSR at the beginning of the war. There were spontaneous demonstrations at military recruitment centers in two Kazakh cities, a reported riot at a Tashkent induction center, and a report of civil unrest among Uzbeks and Tajiks when the coffins of their dead began to arrive. [redacted]



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We also believe that the apolitical outlook of most conscripts leads to their relatively docile behavior.

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[redacted] nearly all conscripts are preoccupied with surviving the war and are uninterested in world politics. [redacted]

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A moderate number of rewards have been used to improve morale. Soviet officers are credited with three years of service toward retirement for every two

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[Redacted]

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years of service in Afghanistan; conscripts usually receive better food in Afghanistan than do Soviet forces elsewhere; and veterans do not have to pass normal university entrance exams, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Soviet personnel are praised in the press, although they are not usually lavished with praise in public ceremonies. Conscripts, however, are paid no better than conscripts who serve in the USSR, and disabled soldiers do not receive pensions, [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Outlook

We believe that Soviet morale and discipline problems will remain a prominent feature of military life in Afghanistan and that the existence of these problems, which are prevalent throughout the Soviet armed forces, in a combat zone illustrates their deeply rooted nature. On the other hand, morale and discipline problems will not have a serious enough impact on combat performance to inhibit Soviet authorities from pursuing their present course in Afghanistan, and we doubt these problems will play a decisive role in future decisions on strategy and tactics. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Appendix

**Morale and Discipline
Problems in the Soviet
Military: The Big Picture**

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Although 98 percent of the Soviet armed forces do not serve in Afghanistan, these forces experience the same kinds of problems as those fighting the war. Most problems result from "normal" life in the Soviet army and in Soviet society at large. [redacted]

the general harshness of living conditions are evident in Soviet military units from East Germany to the Soviet Far East. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet youth today are reluctant soldiers whether they serve in Afghanistan or Germany. The "decline of patriotism" has evoked much concern and public commentary by Soviet leaders. To the extent that morale and discipline within the military reflect underlying problems within Soviet society, they are not amenable to solutions that apply only to the military. The Soviets, however, seem to expect morale and discipline problems with a conscript army, and their system is designed to endure in spite of them. [redacted]

Many articles in the Soviet military press are devoted to exposing specific acts of misuse of authority, dereliction of duty, or other infractions of military discipline. The articles also discuss in more general terms what commanders should do to create better morale and discipline in their units, and are invariably peppered with examples of units that do not measure up. Increased Soviet sensitivity to these kinds of problems dates at least to the mid-1970s when several major incidents—including a mutiny aboard a Baltic Fleet destroyer and the defection of a Soviet pilot with a MIG-25—prompted high-level concern in Moscow. [redacted]

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The "stariki" system, whereby senior soldiers hold sway over new recruits, is probably the single most significant factor in contributing to poor morale, [redacted] Alcoholism and drug abuse, corruption and black marketeering, brutality toward subordinates, ethnic tensions, and

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