

PRIME MINISTER

SOVIET STUDIES IN BRITISH UNIVERSITIES

If you have time you might glance at the attached report about Soviet studies in British universities, a subject on which Bryan Cartledge is now taking a lead. Frankly it is a disaster area as will be apparent from your own recent seminars where we have had to rely either on Americans or on generalists to give much push to the discussion, with the honourable exception of Chris Donnelly (now at NATO).

This weakness stems in essence from the decision in 1979 to terminate Russian teaching and Soviet studies at some 20 British universities. We have now effectively deprived ourselves of any ability at the academic level to follow and interpret developments in the Soviet Union in the future. Some might argue blithely that the recent changes in the Soviet Union make it no longer necessary for us to be active in this area. We should just let the market operate and teach what there is a demand for. I think myself this is a mistake and we shall regret it when it comes to staffing British Embassies, the JIC and GCHQ in the future: and it will count against us in our relations with the United States. (The Germans are now much stronger than we are in the field of Soviet studies).

It is an area where relatively little money buys you an awful lot. With a million pounds of new money - and it would have to be new - we could set Soviet studies in this country on a footing which would pay substantial benefits in 5-10 years' time. Without it, we face continuing decline. The reason for putting this to you now is that your visit to the Soviet Union in June offers an opportunity to do something about it. If you were to announce there that we are setting aside a million pounds to finance Soviet studies in this country, I believe it would have quite a strong effect, both in the Soviet Union and here. I just feel that this is one more area where the end of the Cold War must not lull us into a false sense of security that we do not any longer need to know about the Soviet Union and what it is up

to. Indeed by spending more in this area we may in the long term save ourselves substantial sums in the defence area.

Would you like me to pursue this?

Yes please.

OR

Prefer to let nature take its course?

Partly it will have to be done through the U.C.C. But we should select some Universities as centres of excellence and expect some Soviet studies to be taught at most. Richard Pollard will have some ideas

C. D. P

(C. D. POWELL)
18 March 1990
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Alternatively we put up some money and let the Universities & Polytechnics bid for it.

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 * THE AFGHAN COMPLEX *
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AM. 16/3

From: Chris Donnelly
 Sovietologist-in-Residence

16 March 1990

Comment:

It is just over a year since the Soviet Army withdrew from Afghanistan. This short study by Michael Orr of SSRC underlines the social problems that still remain in the USSR as a result of the Afghan Experience.

Ten years ago Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, provoking a war of insurgency which ended for the Soviet Union on 15 February 1989 when its last troops re-crossed the border. Over half-a-million Soviet soldiers served in 'The Limited Contingent of Soviet Troops in Afghanistan', the majority of them being conscripts. They are 'combat veterans whose fathers had never known war'; for most of them the war in Afghanistan was the most dramatic event in their lives. The phenomenon of the 'Afgantsy', who find themselves separated from the rest of society by their experience in Afghanistan, has been noted by the Soviet media for some years now and it is obvious that the impact of this experience has not been reduced by the withdrawal.

In an interview with Sovetskaya Rossiya (15.11.89) Colonel General Boris Gromov, the last commander of the 40th Army in Afghanistan and the 'last man out' of the country, spoke of the so-called 'Afghan complex'. A survey by Moscow University School of Psychology found that 60% of Afghan veterans feel the psychological impact of the war, a third of them in an acute form. The Afgantsy have a reputation for abnormal aggression and for outbursts of fierce anger against those who question them too persistently about their experiences. At the same time Afgantsy are often portrayed in the press as a force for social renewal, model citizens in their patriotism and concern for others. Clearly, as General Gromov noted, the impact of the war depends on the personality of the veteran. The 'Afghan complex' has positive and negative sides and it seems that Soviet society - and indeed the Soviet Army itself - find both aspects hard to cope with.

The Army has tried to 'accentuate the positive' by focussing attention on a group of officers who not only proved their professional competence in battle in Afghanistan but have been successful in applying their experience in their peacetime service. The pre-eminent example of this group is Lt.Col. Ruslan Sultanovich Aushev. Volunteering for service in Afghanistan, Aushev served as a battalion chief of staff from 1980 and was one of the first Heroes of the Soviet

Union gazetted during the war. After graduating from the Frunze Military Academy he returned to Afghanistan and was severely wounded during this second tour of duty. He is now serving as a regimental commander in the Far Eastern Military District and was elected to the Congress of Deputies. He is frequently quoted as an ideal commander who has applied the lessons of his Afghan service in raising his regiment to a leading position within the district.

However, by being selected as the ideal Aushev has in many ways become an exception to the rule. Other officers who served successfully but did not attract the attention of the media are finding peacetime service more frustrating. One regimental commander recently found that his in-tray contained news of the award of the Order of the Red Star to one of his company commanders for service in Afghanistan and that same officer's letter of resignation. Like many of his contemporaries life in a peacetime garrison had brought him down to earth with a jolt. In Afghanistan, he claimed, officers led their men on the principle of 'do as I do'; back home it was 'do as I say'. The routine of preparing for endless inspections or 'show exercises' controlled by senior officers whose tactical skills have not been developed in the harsh school of real battle is driving many young officers to ask for their release from the Army. This impatience with the old ways might revitalize the Soviet Army if only the old guard were prepared to give it more scope.

Official approval has been given to the 'Councils of Soldier-Internationalists' which have sprung up within the Army, for example, in the Northern Group of Forces and the Lenin Military-Political Academy. These provide a forum for Afghan veterans to meet and channel their energies into socially useful voluntary work such as 'Military Patriotic Education' in schools, helping crippled veterans or supporting the families of soldiers killed in the war. Similar clubs have been established by veterans who have now left the Army. The psychological wounds of Afghanistan may best be treated within such groups which provide both a sense of purpose and the chance to share experiences.

The problem though is to keep such organizations within an official framework. The veterans groups frequently find themselves at odds with the bureaucracy, whether over the provision of premises for their meetings or of the benefits which have been decreed for Afghan invalids and the dependants of those who died. The creation of a new 'Society of Veterans of the Armed Forces' has been opposed by the hierarchy of the older 'All-Union Council of Veterans of War and Labour'. The new society seems to be more orientated to the problems of Afghan veterans.

Control is also a problem when the state tries to channel the patriotic feelings and military training of Afghan veterans into supporting the cause of social order. Afghan veterans are being recruited for the new MVD 'special duties detachments', with preference being given to former paratroopers. However, it was a paratroop unit with many Afghan veterans which was responsible for attacking Tbilisi demonstrators with

entrenching tools in April 1989. The head of the investigating commission has even suggested that some of the paratroopers may have used gas cylinders which they had 'acquired' while in Afghanistan.

Afghan veterans have been encouraged to join the POSM (Workers Detachments for Co-operation with the Militia) and have helped arrest drunks, speculators, illicit distillers and so on. But there is a large element among the Afgantsy whose enthusiasm for stamping out corrupt and decadent groups in society is hard to distinguish from plain hooliganism. 'Punks' and other youngsters favouring Western pop music and fashions have been beaten up by Afgantsy and it was outraged Afgantsy who destroyed the grave of a well-known Moscow 'Mafioso' who was buried next to a soldier killed in Afghanistan.

Sometimes there is not even the excuse of righteous indignation. In August 1988 Airborne Forces Day was marked by drunken disturbances in Moscow and several other cities. In October this year it was said that 3,000 Afghan veterans were serving prison sentences. Difficulties in adjusting to civilian life are said to have contributed to this. It is also admitted that some veterans acquired the drug habit in Afghanistan.

There is nothing very surprising about these problems. Similar difficulties in adjusting to normal life were common among American soldiers after Vietnam and in the French Army following withdrawal from Algeria. There are, however, some special features of the Afghan complex. The media black-out on news from Afghanistan in the early years of the war must have added to the veterans' sense of isolation. The general perception that the war was a mistake, to be blamed on Brezhnev and his cronies, does not help those who served in Afghanistan. Officially they may be heroes but there is a strong body of public opinion which sees them as little storm-troopers. The intense indignation aroused by Andrei Sakharov's accusation that Soviet soldiers had been killed by their own side to prevent their capture by Afghan guerrillas was a clear indication of how sensitive a question is the self-image of the Afgantsy. While the failure to provide for those physically crippled during the war is approaching a national scandal it would be vain to expect a coherent programme to treat the psychological casualties. But if the Afghan veterans are not accepted in society then it is not just individual Afgantsy but Soviet society itself which will suffer.