



INTERPRETING THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOVIET MILITARY OPERATIONS WITH PHASE I RUSSIAN OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE –

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The following paper provides a comparative analysis of Soviet military operations in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan and Phase I Russian operations in Ukraine. The principal object of analysis is the employment of military force within the Soviet and later Russian military operational art outside of large-scale doctrinal conventional warfare. The principal thesis of the paper revolves around providing adequate evidence for two core postulations – the Soviet and later Russian militaries have historically relied in the case of escalation and use of conventional military force on the “military operation” as a method to utilise said military force in a low-intensity, non-kinetic approach where large-scale conventional land forces, in combination with airborne and special forces, would rapidly overwhelm an adversary’s military and civilian capabilities to offer resistance; first-phase Russian operations in Ukraine in 2022 followed the provided historical model, encompassing all elements and methods previously employed, but were unable to repeat Soviet successes, failing due to a variety of factors, which had previously worked in favour of the Soviet military, but were not sufficiently present or counteracted. The paper conducts a comparative analysis by synthesising the key elements, which make up the matrix of a given “military operation” – political goals, military objectives, preparation and execution, and applies them in each of the three case studies – Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and Ukraine. By analysing each of these elements, the paper provides proof of the identical approaches used by the Soviet/Russian militaries and also its subsequent conclusions on the inability of the Russian military to achieve success in Ukraine.

Keywords: Russia; Soviet Union; doctrine; military operation; Czechoslovakia; Afghanistan; Ukraine;



INTRODUCTION

The direct implementation of military force stands as a principal instrument of power projection in the toolset of the modern nation-state to fulfil the primary task of ensuring the state’s security, as a core tenet to its continued existence. The methods through which this power is implemented vary significantly from one state actor to the other and depend on an array of factors that define and characterise any given nation-state – geography, history, economy, population, ruling elites and, most importantly and combining all others, the historically developed perception of the state, leadership and population on the concept of “security” and its provision through the application of military power.

The **principal object of analysis** of the following paper is the implementation of military force within Soviet and later Russian military operational art. In the employment of military force to achieve the political objectives of the Soviet and later Russian states, three methodological approaches and concepts can be differentiated in the contemporary era. The first encompasses the large-scale activation of all military forces available to the state in the event of a total war against an adversary of equal or greater power. This can be termed the “doctrinal” warfare approach within Russian military thinking and involves the utilisation of all available means, both conventional and non-conventional, such as the use of tactical and strategic nuclear means. It also involves the large-scale mobilisation of the population and economy in conducting warfare across multiple fronts and theatres. The second is the concept of the limited “military operation”, which involves the usage of limited available military resources and standing operational military groupings, supplanted by special operations forces and security services, against singular adversaries near Russia’s territory (Russia’s perceived sphere of influence). Such “military operations” attempt to utilise available resources in a high-risk/high-reward-type scenario, where military forces are deployed against sole adversaries to provide a quick political outcome

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through conventional military means, without engaging in large-scale and prolonged kinetic warfare. The focus is placed on quick military manoeuvres into the territory of the adversary, the blockading of civilian, military and political structures into a non-effective and non-resistant state, and the imposition of a favourable political resolution before resistance and support can be garnered for the cause of the adversary from both within and without. The third is the utilisation of military resources in military assistance missions beyond the immediate close orbit of Russia. Such missions include the provision of military equipment, military advisers, or limited combat units.

The **subject of analysis** of the paper derives from the above deconstruction of the object of analysis and the three main vectors of the implementation of military force in Russian military art and focuses on one specific category of the “military operation”.

The **principal thesis** of the paper is subdivided into two core postulations:

In the history of the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation (Russia), the military operational art has been refined and centred on the “military operation” as the principal and most effective method and choice of employment of the armed and special forces against perceived threats for the achievement of set political goals.

The Phase I Russian operations in Ukraine mirrored historical Soviet approaches; however, where Soviet operations achieved success, Russian operations in Ukraine in February-March 2022 fell short of the assigned goals and objectives.

The following paper seeks to provide proof for the above thesis by conducting a comparative analysis, where two historical case studies of the “military operation” will initially be examined – Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979). The case studies encompass military operations carried out by the Soviet Union, which exemplify a specific and unique approach in attempting to achieve political objectives through the employment of military means without engaging in direct “doctrinal” warfare. To define and better understand the character and role of the “military operation”, in each case study, the following will be established as a baseline for analysis and further comparison: *political goals, military objectives, preparation, and execution*. These four elements form the matrix of the “military operation”, the principal main goal of the state to achieve its security needs (figure 1).

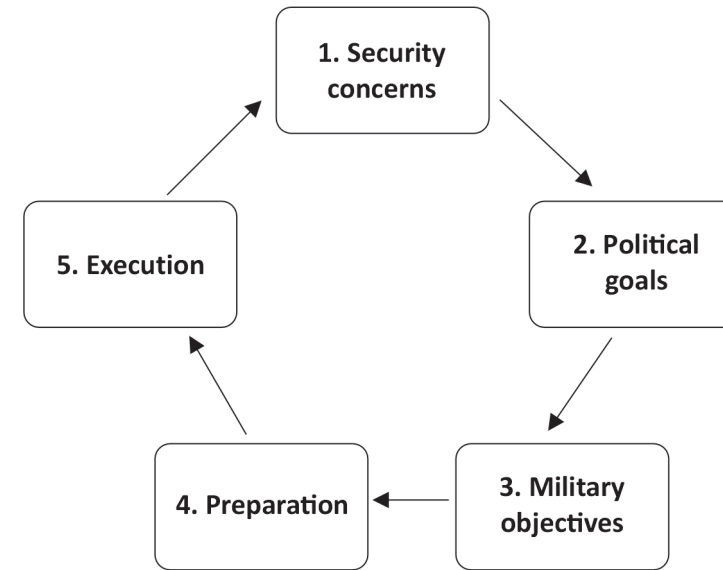


Figure 1: Matrix of the “military operation”

1. The security concerns of the state drive political leadership elites to make decisions on how to alleviate them in favourable political outcomes. **2.** In turn, manifested **political goals** have the choice of instrumentarium where hard power in the form of the implementation of military force is made preferable. **3.** The application of military force is defined by set **military objectives** by the wanted political outcomes. **4.** To achieve both the set military objectives and the political goals behind them, adequate **preparations** are made to afford the necessary concentration of resources, military or otherwise, to conduct shaping activities to degrade the ability of the adversary to respond and in a manner where their accumulation would not give rise to a pre-emptive response. **5.** Accumulated power, by the military objectives is then unleashed in the **execution** phase. The execution strives towards achieving set objectives and goals, delivering a favourable political outcome and remedying security concerns.

Based on the four specific layers of the given military operations, the paper will subsequently apply their structure to understanding the objectives, conduct and outcomes of the First Phase (Phase I) of hostilities in Ukraine in 2022, spanning the period from 24 February to late March. Ultimately the paper in its conclusion would provide a combined comparative table of analysis, which will on the one hand



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The paper aims to both expand the understanding of military operational art in historical terms and to provide, based on the historical interpretations, an adequate and valuable information tool for understanding and further analysing the contemporary security environment, specifically on the European continent, the conflict in Ukraine and the Russian approaches towards the utilisation of military force.

present the similarities in characteristics of the three military operations, and on the other hand, how, despite following a near identical model to the historical examples, the Russian operation in Ukraine suffered significantly from qualitative and quantitative factors in its beginning stage.

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In the examination of the case studies, a diverse set of resources are utilised to achieve maximum objectivity in the analysis. For the historical examples of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, ample academic research, declassified material and expert analyses have emerged over the years, which can be directly applied to defining the four stages of each military operation. The resources used aim to encompass the widest possible range by including multilingual materials from the states in question, and outside analysis both from Western and Eastern sources. For the example of Ukraine and Phase I of the Russian operation, and in due consideration of the still ongoing conflict as of early 2023, the fog of war, the differing political perspectives on events and the role of propaganda in an ongoing conflict, the resource set includes the utilisation of more recent and mature research material, official statements, expert analysis, as well as personally collected open-source data and observations during the opening months of the conflict. The evolution of the concept of military operations of this character can be further expanded and reinforced to include other military engagements of the Soviet Union and later Russia, including the suppression of the uprisings in East Germany in 1953, Chechnya in 1994/1995, Georgia in 2008 and the Crimea in 2014, but these fall outside of the scope and limitations of the following paper.

MILITARY OPERATIONS OF THE SOVIET UNION

In the period between 1945 and 1991, the Soviet Union engaged in a multitude of military operations spanning from small- to large-scale military assistance missions in proxy conflicts with the United States in the far abroad and large-scale military interventions utilising conventional forces in the near abroad and the perceived immediate sphere of Soviet influence. The second class of military activities includes operations to stabilise allied socialist governments and suppress popular dissent in the European theatre, as well as to expand Soviet influence in regions of particular geographic significance. Examples of such operations include the suppression of the East German Uprisings in 1953, the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the Soviet entry and subsequent war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, amongst others. In the following section, the paper will examine the latter two operations, centred on defining and analysing the four predefined key components, which make up the matrix of any given military operation – *political goals, military objectives, preparation and execution*. The choice of case studies is based on several factors, which most closely correlate with the objectives of the paper and the goal of interpreting historical and contemporary Russian approaches towards the implementation of military force in the doctrinally defined “*military operation*” and the context of early-stage operations in Ukraine in 2022. The factors include the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the two operations, which differ from other possible examples, as they represent the large-scale and complex commitment of conventional and special forces; the similarities in end goal political and military objectives; and the degree to which both operations serve to showcase a refinement of military operational art, after other engagements where Soviet forces had participated. The two case studies, in their outcome, also most clearly contrast the results of Russian operations in Ukraine in February-March 2022.

Czechoslovakia. 1968. Operation “Danube”

The Warsaw Pact Intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 was consequent to other operations carried out by the Soviet armed forces in the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe. In the post-World War II delineation of the European continent, East Germany, Hungary



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and Poland had suffered episodes of significant unrest against nascent socialist governments, which in the formative years of the establishment of the Cold War system of power balance, were deemed by Soviet leadership to require the introduction of Soviet military forces to ensure the position of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the United States and the Western allies. The utilisation of military forces in the suppression of popular unrest within ostensibly independent allied socialist states presented radically different challenges and approaches for the Soviet military compared to both the doctrinal stance of Soviet forces in Europe arrayed against NATO and historical World War II operations and operations in the interwar period. The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 exemplified the difficulties of conducting such types of military operations based on limited contingents of available forces engaging in low-intensity asymmetric suppression and stabilisation activities. Such military operations, even though unpopular both among Eastern Bloc states and the wider international community, in all cases accomplished the objectives of preserving the Soviet sphere and curbing popular demands and anti-Soviet sentiments to manageable non-threatening levels. Moreover, they provided the Soviet armed forces with the ability to refine their methodology within a distinctly unique set of operational military tasks, based on similar, if not nearly identical political goals. In 1968, the political landscape and developing situation in Czechoslovakia would again be deemed by Soviet leadership to require the introduction of military forces into the country, building upon experience earned in preceding interventions.

The **political goals of the Soviet leadership in Czechoslovakia** coalesced around similar concerns and end goals to the ones during the East German Uprisings of 1953 and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 but also bore the lessons learned during their eventual suppression. In principal terms by 1967, the Soviet Union was witnessing a significant loss of credibility of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, political infighting, and widespread public demands for liberalisation. The removal of First Secretary Antonín Novotný, and replacement with Alexander Dubček in late 1967, failed to curb the aforementioned processes, having the opposite effect of increasing public pressure on the new Czechoslovak leadership around Dubček to continue liberal

reforms, resulting in the “*Prague Spring*” of 1968. Such a turn of events, beyond the reforms agreed upon with the replacement of Novotný, was viewed by the Soviets with contempt and as a dangerous signal and a serious threat to the stability of other Eastern Bloc governments and the wider security architecture of the Warsaw Pact. As a result, the Soviet leadership around Brezhnev set down the goal to reverse the processes of liberalisation in Czechoslovakia beyond the means of bilateral negotiations, which were taking place by the summer of 1968, and to bring to power more conservative communist party elites within the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, headed by Gustáv Husák. However, in consideration of the negative political fallout of the intervention in Hungary, the intervention in Czechoslovakia would encompass the wider Warsaw Pact. Similarly, the intervention would have to overcome the problems faced in Hungary from the resistance of the population and national military units. Political and popular resistance would have to be negated to the maximum possible extent to avoid protracted military engagement against a “*friendly*” socialist country and a broader international outcry. The operation would thus have to be sudden and quick in achieving its goals to prevent the mobilisation of political and military support both from within Czechoslovakia and from other outside powers, especially NATO. A successful operation was viewed as serving a consolidating function for both the Eastern Bloc political regimes and the Warsaw Pact militaries. By April 1968, instead of the situation in Czechoslovakia, the “*Prague Spring*”, the Soviet leadership finalised its decision that a military intervention would have to take place.

The **military objectives of the Warsaw Pact** armed forces, and principally those of the Soviet Union, followed closely the assigned political goals, with military planning, encompassing the conduct of both regular and special security forces, correspondingly revolved around providing a quick political victory through military means. In the lead-up to the military operation, the principal objective was the assembly of a large military grouping of conventional forces within and near Czechoslovakia, whilst masking its intended purpose. The primary objective of forces in the operation would be the rapid seizure of the capital of Prague and the city of Brno by rapidly advancing ground



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and airborne forces. Prague represented the main target, where the centres of gravity for potential resistance to the military operation were concentrated, the political leadership under Dubček, the military command apparatus and the strongest concentration of anti-Soviet sentiment among the population. Military forces would have the additional task of seizing key locations around the country, with a focus placed on airports around Prague and Brno, allowing for the direct landing of forces in the opening of the operation. Soviet forces would also blockade major urban centres and immobilise the country, seizing city entrances, major road intersections, bridges, and train stations and moving in to capture locations of importance such as radio and television centres, places of gathering, as well as military command posts and blockade military units, relying on the fast movement of forces and the shock value of the tank and mechanised formations. In terms of the conduct towards the Czechoslovak People's Army (ČSLA), in the cases where hostility was assumed, the objectives were to "localise" the Czechoslovak forces, and if not possible, to "disarm" them (Вартанов, 2004, pp. 58-62). Popular resistance in urban terrain was seen as the most probable hindrance to the quick completion of the operation and special focus was placed on suppressing civil unrest. Additionally, measures were to be taken to minimise the possibility of NATO entrance, with the blocking of the West German border early in the invasion, and in the case where NATO forces were present, to refrain from any aggressive actions. The operation called for the entrance of 20 divisions in the first three days, with an additional 10 divisions following suit in the subsequent further two days. In the case where the military operation was unsuccessful in providing a quick outcome and led to a deteriorating situation on the European continent, an additional 85-100 Soviet divisions and 70-80 Polish, East German, Hungarian and Bulgarian divisions were envisioned to take part in immediate future hostilities. The Soviet strategic deterrent forces would also be placed on higher alert status, as an additional signal towards outside intervention (Ibid).

The **period of preparation was key to the outcome of the military operation in Czechoslovakia**. The preparation stage included large-scale political, military and intelligence efforts on the part of the Soviet Union to ensure a positive outcome of the operation. Initial planning

and organisation for a military operation commenced in the period February-April 1968, before the final decision of Soviet leadership (Burgess III & Merritt, 1990, pp. 183-185; Вартанов, 2004, pp. 58-62). The mobilisation of conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact was masked behind the organisation of military exercises both within Czechoslovakia and around it. Starting in May 1968, the large military exercise "Shumava" was conducted, with 16 thousand Soviet troops being placed within Czechoslovakia itself (Вартанов, 2004, pp. 58-62; Povolný, 2008, pp. 21-28, 31-35). Soviet and Warsaw Pact commands extensively worked on resolving the questions by the set military objectives, focusing on coordination between national militaries, urban warfare, blocking operations, and suppression of civil unrest (Баев, 2008, p. 200). When the exercise ended on 3 July, Soviet withdrawal was purposefully slow. In the period 23 July – 10 August, the rear-area exercise "Neman" was conducted. On 11 August, air-defence exercises "Sky Shield" were commenced (Вартанов, 2004, pp. 58-62). Thus, by the eventual date of the final decision for military operation on 16 August, Warsaw Pact forces had prepared extensively on all levels for supporting and conducting a large-scale military operation. Overall, accumulated Warsaw Pact forces included 250 thousand troops in the first echelon and 250 thousand more in the second echelon, against the roughly 200-250 thousand non-mobilised troops of the Czechoslovak People's Army (a 2:1 advantage). After the conclusion of the series of exercises, Warsaw Pact troops would move into positions for the intervention in late July 1968. In the preparation phase, air force and VDV officers were embedded in both Prague and Brno to gather intelligence in preparation for the air-landing operations on Czechoslovak airfields, whilst embedded Soviet officers within the Czechoslovak People's Army would assess and monitor the developing situation and hinder the logistics and organisational situation of the ČSLA. Simultaneously, separate military exercises of the ČSLA were organised in Western Bohemia, to divert forces away from the principal points of crossing of Warsaw Pact forces (Burgess III & Merritt, 1990, pp. 184-185). In the months leading up to the military operation, key elements in the newly appointed political and military leadership in Czechoslovakia, represented by President Ludvík Svoboda and Defence Minister Martin Dzúr, respectively, were dissuaded from interfering in the eventual deployment of Warsaw Pact forces to the country



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and would serve to constitute along with others a new government after the removal of Dubček.

After two attempts to introduce forces into Czechoslovakia in May and August 1968, through the large-scale military exercise "Shumava" (Povolný, 2008, pp. 28-55), the execution of the full-scale Warsaw Pact military intervention into Czechoslovakia, codenamed Operation "Danube", commenced at 22:15 on 20 August 1968 with the signal "Valtava-666". Warsaw Pact ground forces entered the country simultaneously from East Germany, Poland, the Soviet Union and Hungary in four main directions along twenty points of crossing (Вартанов, 2004). The main forces headed to the main cities of Prague, Plzen, Brno and Bratislava. Ground forces also rapidly moved along the West German and Austrian borders to secure them (Povolný, 2008, pp. 150-160). Even before the ground elements were activated, the Soviet VDV and special operations units were already undertaking tasks on the territory of Czechoslovakia by the set military objectives in seven air-landing operations. The most vital, at Ruzyne Airport in Prague, began at 20:30, with the landing of two unplanned Aeroflot-painted An-24 aircraft, which with the assistance of personnel from the Czechoslovak Interior Ministry, unloaded personnel that will form the bridgehead for the decapitation strike on Czechoslovak leadership. In the following hours between 23:00 and 04:00 on 21 August, Ruzyne Airport was fully secured and utilised for the mass landing of VDV and Spetsnaz forces by aircraft, with their subsequent employment in the rapid seizure of key government buildings and the arrest of the Czechoslovak political leadership in Prague (Burgess III & Merritt, 1990, pp. 185-187; Zaloga, 1985, pp. 12-13; Suvorov, 1988, p. 150). In the early morning of 21 August, about 5 hours after crossing the border, forward elements of the 20th Guards Army reached Prague and supported the forces of the Soviet 7th VDV Division and Bulgarian 22nd Motor Rifles in securing the city (Вартанов, 2004, p. 60). The military operation concluded 36 hours after its beginning, facing no resistance from the nearly 200,000 strong ČSLA. The largest resistance occurred in Prague, where civilians erected numerous barricades and protested *en masse* the arrival of Soviet forces in the city, leading to civilian casualties when the protests were suppressed with the use of tank forces to crush through the erected barriers (Баев, 2008, pp. 202-203). Warsaw Pact forces also suffered casualties



from instances of friendly fire, especially in the seizure of Prague when ground forces met up with the already present VDV forces, with some not having placed identification markings on their vehicles.



Figure 2: Operation "Danube".

Source: original author unknown, map (in Russian) available at: iohotnik.ru

Overall, the military operation achieved all of its objectives, successfully demonstrating an intrinsically well-planned approach towards the execution of a large-scale military operation, combining numerous moving parts. In advance, the preparation phase accomplished the tasks of masking the concentration and purpose of Warsaw Pact forces, and when the intent was known to Czechoslovak military leadership, adequate measures prevented the mobilisation and action of the ČSLA. Specialist assets in the country further expedited the effective completion of assigned objectives once the operation had started, effectively suppressing both the Czechoslovak military and civilian leadership. However, in political terms, the outcome of the operation was viewed as unfavourable by the leadership of the Warsaw Pact countries in political, economic and diplomatic terms. The military operation was viewed as a harsh repression of the political and civilian demands in Czechoslovakia for liberalisation and democratisation.



A large-scale immigration wave of the Czechoslovak population was triggered towards Western Europe despite the measures undertaken to block off the Western border. The operation was further widely condemned on the international scene and in UN assemblies. An unwanted additional wedge was also placed in the security structure of the Eastern Bloc and especially when concerning the reaction of Romania and Yugoslavia, where relations had already been strained after the military intervention in Hungary, a decade prior.

The successful intervention in Czechoslovakia served to further reinforce the belief of Soviet leadership in the methods and capabilities of the Armed Forces and Special Services.

Afghanistan. 1979. Operation "Baikal-79"

Outside of the European theatre, the vast borders of the Soviet Union presented other adjacent regions as areas of particular interest and security considerations for the Soviet leadership. The location and role of Afghanistan are critical for the security architecture of the Central Asian region and had been recognised as such dating back to the 19th century with the "Great Game" between the British and Russian Empires. In the 20th century, and specifically the Cold War-era context, Afghanistan again assumed a role of pivotal importance for the two global superpowers in extending influence in Asia and especially for the Soviet Union, where the historically unstable constituent Central Asian SSRs bordered the country. In 1973, a coup d'état overthrew the Afghan monarchy of the Barakzai dynasty, replacing it with a republican government, which formulated good relations with the Soviet Union under President Mohammed Daud. This government was itself overthrown in 1978 by communist-leaning forces, leading to even closer cooperation with the Soviet Union under Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin (Арунова, 1981, стр. 48-56), which saw the entrance of Soviet military advisors and substantial military-technical support into Afghanistan. Such an outcome was very positive for the Soviet Union, especially in consideration of adversaries in the region such as Iran, Pakistan and China. However, by the summer of 1979, the situation quickly became contentious to Soviet interests with political infighting, popular resistance to the government and finally with Amin and the Khalqist faction undertaking a purge against Taraki's Parchamite faction (Антонов, 2018), leading the Kremlin

to seek a solution, which would entrench Soviet power in Afghanistan and bring more direct control over a crucial new linchpin in the Soviet sphere. Thus, **the Kremlin set out the political goals of the removal of Hafizullah Amin** and his supporters, the replacement of Amin with the Parchamite, Babrak Karmal, who was exiled to the Eastern Bloc, and the stabilisation of the country's rising insurrection against the central government (Galeotti, 2021, pp. 21-22). The political decision for a military operation was made on 10 December 1979 (Никитенко, 2004, стр. 60-61), and would be codenamed "Baikal-79", an inconspicuous name, closer to the one given to the annual regional military exercises.

The **military objectives of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan** were centred on the physical removal of Hafizullah Amin and the introduction into Afghanistan of a large Soviet military contingent from the Turkestan Military District, which would secure the coming into power of Babrak Karmal. For this purpose, a sufficient build-up of forces had to be conducted. The operation would have to be supported by military and special forces contingents already on the territory of Afghanistan. The Afghan military's capabilities would have to be degraded to the extent, that they would not be able to resist the Soviet incursion and would have to switch loyalties to the new regime. Afterwards, Soviet forces would have to assume the duties of suppressing the diverse opposition groups forming across the country. As with the previous instance of Czechoslovakia, the role of the Soviet armed forces would be to blockade and suppress the Afghan military through non-kinetic means, quickly advancing and securing Kabul, as well as other major urban centres and key infrastructure sites, such as airports, to allow for the quick insertion of additional forces via air-landing operations. In the planning stage, the provision was made for the need to physically remove Amin and his close circle. When an initial poisoning attempt failed, the move of Amin to the heavily fortified Tajbeg Palace on the outskirts of Kabul in late December 1979 necessitated the rethinking of the assassination of Amin from a purely covert operation to an aggressive one, which would directly engage with the large number of Afghan forces surrounding the Palace.

The **preparation phase for the operation was short, but intricate**, relying on available resources on the territory of Afghanistan and newly



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By 25 December 1979, a compromise decision had put the final force composition at 75-80 thousand, which included about 100 total formations, consisting of 8 motor rifle divisions, 2 VDV divisions, 2 tank divisions, 2 aviation, 2 VDV division, 2 separate VDV brigades, and supporting logistics brigades, as well as 3 reserve motor rifle divisions, outside of the main force.

assembled ones on the other side of the border. In seeking support from the Soviet Union, Amin had allowed the entrance of Soviet advisors and military specialists, providing them unfettered access to much of the political and military structures of Afghanistan (Burgess III & Merritt, 1990, pp. 203-204). The limited military contingent in Afghanistan included VDV forces and limited detachments from the KGB and GRU, including the three-thousand-strong “Muslim Battalion” (Антонов, 2018). The forces initially introduced into Afghanistan during the military operation would rely on formations from the Turkestan Military District. On 16 December 1979, the 40th Combined Arms Army was formed in District, under the command of Lieutenant General Yu. Tukharinov (Волков, 2011). The force composition was debated, based on the priorities put forward by the two involved branches and their corresponding objectives – the military favoured a larger military contingent of over 100 thousand, based on the experience in Czechoslovakia and the need to take and control the large territory of Afghanistan; the intelligence services favoured a contingent of 30-40 thousand needed to secure the removal of Amin (Galeotti, 2021, pp. 21-23). By 25 December 1979, a compromise decision had put the final force composition at 75-80 thousand, which included about 100 total formations (Никитенко, 2004, p. 61), formed in 8 motor rifle divisions, 2 VDV divisions, 2 tank divisions, 2 aviation, 2 VDV division, 2 separate VDV brigades, and supporting logistics brigades, as well as 3 reserve motor rifle divisions, outside of the main force (Котев, 2001, стр. 114-119; Волков, 2011). The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) was nominally large with a paper strength of nearly 150 thousand, consisting of 11 infantry, 3 tank and 2 motor rifle divisions (Котев, 2001, pp. 114-119), but was practically insignificant, close to 45 thousand (Galeotti, 2021, pp. 26-27), with most forces heavily understrength and divided between political, ideological and tribal loyalties. Their capabilities would be further hampered in advance of the beginning of the military operation by the already present Soviet forces, who would conduct sabotage, misinformation and diversionary actions.

The **execution of “Baikal-79” was a two-part operation**, encompassing the larger military operation and entry of Soviet forces

into Afghanistan, and the operation to eliminate Amin and seize Kabul, special forces operation “Storm-333”. On 25 December 1979, at 15:00, units of the Soviet 40th Army crossed the state border of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, beginning Operation “Baikal-79”. Additionally, three thousand VDV and special operations forces of the KGB and GRU would land at Kabul airport (Антонов, 2018). This initial entry of Soviet forces would be seen by Amin as a positive answer by Soviet authorities to his repeated requests for military assistance in securing the deteriorating situation of his government. Soviet ground forces quickly moved along the key road arteries along two main axis – starting on 28 December 1979 from the Turkmenistan SSR south towards Herat and Farah, pivoting east towards Kandahar; starting on 25 December 1979 from the Uzbekistan SSR south towards Mazar-I Sharif, Kunduz, Kabul, and converging with the other pincer on Kandahar (Galeotti, 2021, p. 25; Burgess III & Merritt, 1990, p. 194). The special forces operation “Storm-333” began on 27 December 1979 at 19:30 (Антонов, 2018), with the assault on Tajbeg Palace. Simultaneously, key centres of power were assaulted in Kabul (Galeotti, 2021, p. 54), resulting in sporadic small-scale gunfights between Soviet forces and Amin supporters throughout the city. Ultimately the assault of the VDV and special forces successfully decapitated the Afghan military and its ability to coordinate. The special operations group of the “Muslim Battalion”, VDV detachments, GRU and KGB operatives engaged in a brutal assault on the heavily fortified palace and surrounding DRA positions. Storming the palace, the grouping successfully neutralised Amin (Козлов & et al, 2013, pp. 34-40). By 24:00 on 27 December 1979, the firefights in Kabul had subsided. By the morning of 28 December 1979, motor rifle forces from the ground element had linked up with VDV forces to the northeast of Kabul. Utilising the airfields in Kabul and Bagram, a total of 343 transport aircraft would land and unload additional personnel and equipment (Никитенко, 2004, p. 66). Operation “Baikal-79” was completed successfully, two days after the initial entry into Afghanistan, and three hours after commencing open actions. On 28 December at 02:00, Babrak Karmal, who had been flown into the country beforehand with the Soviet VDV contingent, appealed to the people of Afghanistan, assuming power and presenting the role of Soviet forces in the country (Антонов, 2018).



The special forces operation “Storm-333” began on 27 December 1979 at 19:30, with the assault on Tajbeg Palace. Simultaneously, key centres of power were assaulted in Kabul, resulting in sporadic small-scale gunfights between Soviet forces and Amin supporters throughout the city.



Operation "Baikal-79" followed along nearly identical lines of planning, preparation and implementation to the previously discussed "Operation Danube", and in turn delivered the required results—the intentions of Soviet leadership, the military build-up and the purpose of forces were successfully masked; Afghan leadership was removed in a hard, but successful decapitation strike through the employment of special forces, with the capabilities of the DRA army successfully suppressed in the preparation and opening execution phases.



Figure 3: Operation "Baikal-79".
Source: Rodina, 1999.

The success of the first phase of the Soviet entry into Afghanistan in 1979 from a military standpoint alone cannot be understated. Operation "Baikal-79" followed along nearly identical lines of planning, preparation and implementation to the previously discussed "Operation Danube", and in turn delivered the required results – the intentions of Soviet leadership, the military build-up and the purpose of forces were successfully masked; Afghan leadership was removed in a hard, but successful decapitation strike through the employment of special forces, with the capabilities of the DRA army successfully suppressed in the preparation and opening execution phases; Soviet forces quickly entered and occupied all assigned objectives in the allotted limited period, meeting only token resistance, for which the assembled forces were sufficient to overcome.

However, the end-term political goals, which gave rise to the decision to begin a "military operation", namely, to install a stable Soviet-aligned government in power was proving a tenuous final objective, as organised opposition quickly mounted in the countryside, with the dilapidated Afghan military doubtful to be able to maintain

control. Ultimately the entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan would be a disaster, facing a decade of costly counterinsurgency operations against the Mujahedeen, which would bring about mounting social and economic pressures within the Soviet Union, leading up to its collapse. The invasion would be condemned by other international actors, leading to the end of the period of détente with the West and increased Soviet isolation.

Two years after the exit of Soviet forces from the decade-long conflict in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union would collapse in 1991. Operation "Baikal-79" was the last major "military operation" of the specific type discussed in the paper to be conducted by the Soviet military. The conclusion can be made that operations "Baikal-79" and the preceding "Operation Danube", as well as the operations in Hungary "Volna" and "Vikhr" precipitated the evolution and reinforcement of a specific and unique approach in Soviet military thinking for the large scale employment of military forces outside of conventional kinetic warfare in a complex specialised "military operation" type, which would leverage the overwhelming shock value from the rapid deployment of standing operational-strategic military groupings, with the abilities of the airborne forces and special forces to deliver results in the immediate sphere of perceived Soviet influence, and against less capable opponents. Both Soviet operations discussed in this paper and based upon the outlined four principal components of analysis and comparison demonstrate that the military planning, preparation and executions phases yielded favourable results; however, the set political goals, whilst achieving their set parameters, discounted larger and longer terms effects outside of the scope and timeframe of the military operation itself.

MILITARY OPERATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The Russian Federation inherited much of the approaches and solutions developed during the Soviet era, albeit with severely limited quantitative and qualitative capacities to implement them. Regardless, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation resorted to the application of military force both within and beyond its borders on several occasions with contrasting results. The operations in Chechnya in 1994-1996 and 1999-2000, especially in the first case demonstrated limited ability to repeat Soviet successes in the defined "military operation" type.



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

The operations in Hungary "Volna" and "Vikhr" precipitated the evolution and reinforcement of a specific and unique approach in Soviet military thinking for the large scale employment of military forces outside of conventional kinetic warfare in a complex specialised "military operation" type.



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Russian operations into the 21st century, in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, showcased the build-up of Russian military capabilities and the further implementation of the “*military operation*” within the historical parameters already showcased, especially with the latter example, where Russian military and special forces succeeded in capturing the Crimean Peninsula in a rapid low-intensity and non-kinetic operation. At the beginning of 2022, the Russian Federation would again attempt to enforce political outcomes through the implementation of military force with the entry of its forces into Ukraine. The beginning phase of this conflict spanning the period from 24 February to mid-late March will be discussed in the following paragraph demonstrating an adherence to the already outlined approaches developed and executed during the Soviet era, whilst also establishing a chronology of events and an overall operational picture.

Ukraine. 2022

The interpretation of the political and military objectives of Russia in Ukraine is an ambitious and ambiguous goal, considering the recent nature of events. However, based on a combination of official statements, expert analysis, and most importantly, the following conduct of hostilities, general conclusions can be extrapolated. The **stated political goal of the Russian leadership** was the “de-militarisation” and “de-Nazification” of the Ukrainian state. Based on subsequent official positions put forward by Russia, the end-term political goals for the resolution of the conflict also include the distancing of Ukraine and the end of its ambitions to become part of the European Union or the security architecture of the NATO Alliance. Neither of these stated ambitions of Russia could be fulfilled without the **removal of the government of Ukraine, its centres of power and its ability to defend the country**. As would be later summarised, the main thrust of Russian forces was directed towards Kyiv, facilitating the most predominant argument, that the removal of the government and the central role of the capital, Kyiv, as a centre of political and military power was a key political and military objective of Russia. In addition, a key element in the planning was the supposed popular support the operation would garner within Ukraine itself, which would be further facilitated by the quick collapse of the Ukrainian government. In the end term, the operation, similarly to past instances, as already examined,

was envisioned as a quick military operation, which would force the collapse of the Ukrainian government and its replacement and would later move on to suppress any civil or limited military resistance that may arise.

In terms of **military objectives**, the first directive was to assemble the necessary grouping forces but to keep the size, composition, direction and purpose of their attack a secret. Once Russian forces entered Ukraine, they would have to act quickly to render the response of the international community irrelevant. Critical centres of political and economic power would have to be taken and secured, whilst also confusing the reaction of the Ukrainian military in responding accordingly along an enormous front. The capture of Kyiv was central, which would be facilitated by both a land offensive from multiple directions and air-landing operations to seize bridgeheads in the Kyiv suburbs and more specifically the Hostomel Airport to the northwest of Kyiv. To support the conduct of the ground forces, strikes would be carried out to degrade Ukraine’s ability to interdict Russian operational freedom by destroying its air, maritime and air-defence forces. The role of the Armed Forces of Ukraine would be nullified further by fixing them in the Donbas and blockading any military formations along the principal axis of attack (Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023).

The **preparation phase for the eventual incursion into Ukraine** was an extended one, lasting from early 2021 to mid-February 2022. The initial build-up of forces around Ukraine’s borders began with a concentration of military units around the Donbas region for the stated purposes of large-scale military exercises, with the number of forces increasing to 100 thousand by mid-April 2021 (Гончаренко, 2021). At their conclusion in April, the military exercises encompassed 300 thousand combined military personnel of the Western and Southern Military Districts of the Russian Armed Forces and were declared over (Интерфакс, 2021), with units returning to their principal basing locations. Deployments in the winter-spring period were; however, a prelude to a much larger force concentration, beginning in the summer of 2021 for the “*Zapad-2021*” military exercise. The “*Zapad-2021*” exercise, which lasted from 10-16 September 2021, and involved between 150 thousand and 200 thousand military personnel, on the territory of both Russia and Belarus, was the largest



The “Zapad-2021” exercise, which lasted from 10-16 September 2021, and involved between 150 thousand and 200 thousand military personnel, on the territory of both Russia and Belarus, was the largest military exercise in Europe since the Cold War era.



Russian missile strikes from airborne, naval, and land-based platforms attempted to strike Ukrainian aviation assets on military airfields, as well as to suppress Ukrainian air-defence capabilities, alongside attacks on other military installations. At the same time, Russian electronic warfare attempted to extensively degrade the capabilities of the Ukrainian air defence and command and control networks.

military exercise in Europe since the Cold War era (Congressional Research Service, 2021, p. 2; The Economist, 2021). Western intelligence agencies, and in particular those of the United States, interpreted the military build-up as a prelude to imminent military action on the part of Moscow against Ukraine (Deni, 2021). The preparation phase extended past the autumn exercises and continued with the “Union Resolve 2022” exercise between Belarus and Russia on 10 February 2022. The military manoeuvres brought additional forces from Russia’s Eastern Military District into Belarus, as well as the movement of Russian combat aviation to Belarussian airfields (Interfax, 2022). On 21 February 2022, the Russian legislature recognised the independence of the Lugansk and Donetsk Republics and promptly moved to approve the possible deployment of the Russian Armed Forces abroad (BBC, 2022). The entry of Russian forces into the Donbas region began on the same day (Child, 2022). Overall, the Russian forces deployed on the eve of the operation are considered to have been around 150 thousand, supplemented by 40 thousand Lugansk and Donetsk irregulars, as well as forces subordinated to the Russian Interior Ministry and National Guard (Jones, 2022, p. 2; Zabrodskiy, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023, pp. 7-13). Arrayed against them, the combined forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Збройні сили України/ ZSU), numbered 196 thousand, with an additional 102 thousand gendarmerie and paramilitary personnel (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2022, pp. 221-222).

The execution of the Russian military operation in Ukraine began early on 24 February 2022 and followed along similar lines to the already presented cases, but with the key difference that military force was directly applied to degrade the combat capabilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the opening phase of the conflict, yet not to the extent where Russian “doctrinal” warfare would apply. Russian missile strikes from airborne, naval, and land-based platforms attempted to strike Ukrainian aviation assets on military airfields, as well as to suppress Ukrainian air-defence capabilities, alongside attacks on other military installations. At the same time, Russian electronic warfare attempted to extensively degrade the capabilities of the Ukrainian air defence and command and control networks (Zabrodskiy, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023, p. 24). At dawn on the morning of 24 February, Russian VDV forces conducted an air-landing operation on the Antonov Airport at Hostomel, in the north-western suburbs of Kyiv, seizing the airport.



This evidenced that a large part of the Kyiv air defence umbrella had been suppressed, even if not through kinetic means. On the morning of 26 February, Russian forces would also unsuccessfully attempt to seize (or raid) Vasylykiv Air Base, southwest of Kyiv, although the composition and character of Russian forces involved, deep behind Ukrainian lines have not been publicly established. The ground elements of the operation penetrated the Ukrainian border along several axes (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2023). The main northern axis (figure 4) advanced from Belarus, from the region of the cities of Mazyr and Gomel, along both sides of the Dnieper River, with the apparent aim of reaching Kyiv,

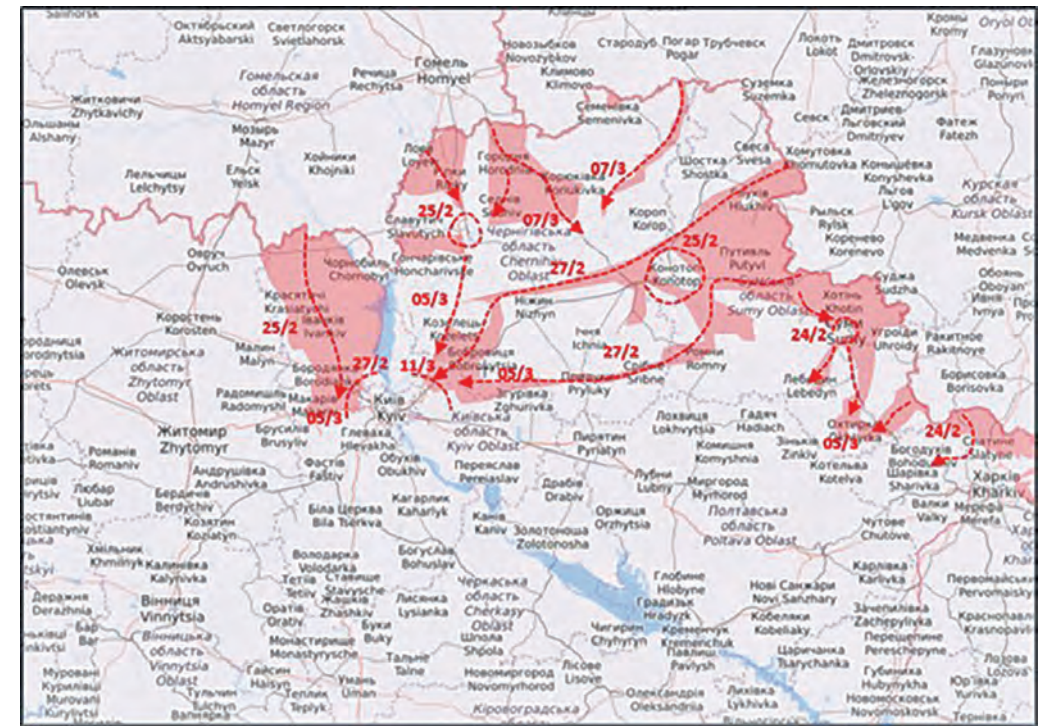


Figure 4: Russian operations in Northern and Eastern Ukraine by 11 March 2022.

Sources: baseline map by Liveuamap; overlay made by the author based on information from liveuamap, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and personally collected open-source information.

linking with the already established bridgeheads at Hostomel Airport and conducting a blockade on the Ukrainian capital both from the east and the west (Zabrodskiy, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023, pp. 26-27). In the city of Kyiv itself, information and footage had emerged of sporadic firefights at several locations, indicating the presence of either advanced reconnaissance detachments or previously infiltrated



Russian elements of the special forces and security services. The forces moving in from the northeast had the assumed task of blockading the city of Chernihiv/Chernigov, where the 1st Tank Brigade of the ZSU was stationed and continuing to support the blockading of Kyiv from the east. The northern axis was additionally supported by an advance into the Sumy region of Ukraine (figure 4), along the E101 and H07 transport arteries, with the city of Konotop being taken and the city of Sumy being bypassed and blockaded in the early hours of the operation. These armoured trusts advancing along the key routes, were by 12 March on the eastern approaches to Kyiv at Brovary (Zabrodskiy, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023, pp. 32-38; Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2023). The eastern axis (figure 5) moved to blockade the major city of Kharkiv/Kharkov and to seize territory north of the Seversky Donets River towards the urban centres of Izyum and Severodonetsk, to secure the flanks of both the Kharkiv blockade and the Donbas region. The southern axis (figure 5) advanced from the Crimea moving in two principal directions – to the north in the direction of Kherson and the north-east in the direction of the Zaporizhzhia region. By the end of 25 February, these thrusts had reached and crossed the Dnieper River



Figure 5: Russian operations in Southern and Eastern Ukraine by 11 March 2022. Sources: baseline map by Liveuamap; overlay made by the author based on information from liveuamap, Neue Zürcher Zeitung and personally collected open-source information.

at Kherson and had advanced to the important city of Melitopol. By the end of the month, Kherson, Melitopol and Berdyansk were fully secured with limited resistance, and Russian forces continued to advance further. By 1 March, this axis of advance had reached, partially blockaded and bypassed the city of Mykolaiv/Nikolaev, moving further north towards Nova Odesa by 9 March, and to the east had placed the city of Mariupol under siege, whilst establishing positions to the north in Zaporizhzhia, running from the Dnieper to the Russian lines in the Donbas (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2023). At this point in the period, 10 March – 20 March, Russian forces had reached the maximum extent of their advance (Clark & al, 2022).

Phase I Russian Operations in Ukraine.

Reasons for Failure and Comparisons with the Past

In the roughly three weeks of the military operation from 24 February to late March 2022, Russia had committed all assigned forces for the operation (Congressional Research Service, 2022, p. 10), but was unable to achieve its assigned military objectives, and was thus unable to impose the completion of the principal political goal of a quick resolution in Ukraine through the collapse of the Ukrainian state, the removal of its political and military leadership, and the rendering of the armed forces to a non-combat effective state. The northern advance met stiff resistance in the suburbs of Kyiv and was thus unable to encircle the city, nor to seize the vital centres of power within. The captured airfield at Hostomel could not serve the purpose of landing larger contingents of additional troops or supplies, due to its proximity to ongoing fighting. Ukrainian forces in Chernihiv were able to organise and maintain resistance to blockading Russian forces, preventing the establishment of additional lines of supply towards Kyiv. The advance of columns from the direction of Sumy and Konotop was constantly harassed by attacks along the routes of advance and rear areas, leading to the impossibility of consolidating gains for a concentrated final drive towards Kyiv. Thus, the operational situation in the North serving no useful purpose, beyond tying down Ukrainian forces from redeploying to the east and south, necessitated the conservation and withdrawal of Russian forces by the end of March, ending the threat posed on Kyiv and Ukraine’s northern border. In the Kharkov direction, Russian forces were unable to fully blockade the city, nor bypass it, due to effective Ukrainian resistance.



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More successful was the advance towards the Seversky Donets River, which managed to consolidate its positions along the northern bank of the river. The Southern axis achieved higher success in capturing Kherson and linking with Russian forces in the Donbas, meeting limited resistance. The further advance towards Mykolaiv and beyond was eventually hampered by increasingly organised Ukrainian resistance and was thus unable to expand the success beyond the Kherson bridgehead.

Overall, the Phase I Operations in Ukraine followed similar political and military objectives to Russian military operations in the past – the preparation phase was extensive and relied on concealing the purpose, time and direction of attack; military forces would enter the country from multiple directions, with a focus on the decision-making centres, whilst blockading major cities and seizing key locations; ground operations would be supported by air-landings, which would secure airfields for the introduction of additional men and materiel; the shock value of armoured and mechanised units would be the principal force of dissuasion against both the civilian population and the willingness of the opposing army to engage in hostilities. The operation, however, concluded with a failure due to a variety of factors, which in the past had worked in favour of the Soviet Union, but were not present in Ukraine, or were extended to the permissible limit for possible success. In keeping with the military objective of masking the intent of the assembled armed forces and preventing the escape of information, limited to no information was provided to lower rank officers and troops regarding the objectives of their mission and the expected resistance. Ultimately this was successful in surprising the Ukrainian side, which failed to mobilise beforehand and failed to anticipate the concentration of forces towards Kyiv (Zabrodskyi, Watling, Danylyuk, & Reynolds, 2023), but significantly hampered the conduct of the military operation when faced with even limited Ukrainian resistance when such did exist. The forces relegated to the operation ensured that Russia would not have a numerical superiority over the combined non-mobilised Ukrainian Army, National Guard and Special Operations Forces, which would only further increase in favour of the Ukrainian side as mobilisation of forces was conducted. Unlike in previous instances of successful military operations, there were no effective Ukrainian political or military elites that would support the Russian objectives and would act to hamper the ability of the Ukrainian army and population to resist. The territory

of Ukraine and the spread of assigned objectives were much larger compared to past operations, facilitating the dispersal of the limited Russian forces. Along the main axes of advance in the north, acute logistics problems materialised due to the lack of suitable road or rail connections (Jones, 2022, p. 2). Russian forces also did not undertake blockading operations of the Ukrainian border, facilitating the eventual influx of military support for Ukraine. Most significantly, Russian forces did not plan effectively for the carrying out of a military operation in the contingency where significant Ukrainian resistance did occur and were unprepared for the tactics and technology employed by the ZSU. Ultimately this final factor spelt the end for the envisioned quick military operation in Ukraine and shifted its focus and character in the subsequent months to large-scale, high-intensity warfare and the more traditional “firepower-centric” doctrine of the Russian Armed Forces, albeit constrained by limited manpower and mobilisation capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the provided case studies and their comparison, several conclusions can be extrapolated. In the military history of the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation, political crises precipitated by a perceived degradation of the security of the state escalate into military conflicts, based upon the decision to impose political objectives through military means. The constituent elements of such military actions display characteristics that differ significantly from other envisioned employments of Soviet/ Russian military power, namely in either full-scale “doctrinal” warfare, or military assistance missions in the far abroad. The qualitative indicators in the case studies define military operations as low-intensity conflicts relying on the use of conventional military power to reinforce the ideological system and security framework centred on Russia. The military actions, based on quantitative indicators encompass limited military resources of operational-strategic military groupings and last only a limited amount of time. The conduct of such military operations in all examples provided, revolves around the rapid introduction of conventional military forces into a state, supported by the active work of special forces and supportive indigenous political elites, to deliver a decapitation strike on the political and military apparatus of a target country. The aim is to incur a defeat and impose a favourable political outcome without engaging military forces in large-scale or even limited kinetic hostilities.



In the military history of the Soviet Union and later the Russian Federation, political crises precipitated by a perceived degradation of the security of the state escalate into military conflicts, based upon the decision to impose political objectives through military means. The constituent elements of such military actions display characteristics that differ significantly from other envisioned employments of Soviet/ Russian military power, namely in either full-scale “doctrinal” warfare, or military assistance missions in the far abroad.



As the below table (table 1) showcases, the analysed operations adhere to the same model and baseline characteristics established as the matrix of the “military operation” type in Russian and general military art.

Table. 1: Comparative table of the predefined matrix of the “military operation” type along the elements of political goals, military objectives, preparation and execution with the analysed three operations in Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and Ukraine.

	Czechoslovakia, 1968	Afghanistan, 1979	Ukraine, 2022
Political objectives	The removal of the liberal Dubček government; The curbing of liberal and democratic popular sentiments; The consolidation of Eastern Bloc member states and militaries.	The removal of Amin and his close political and military circle; The installation of a Karmal-led government; The curbing of a pro-Western course set by Amin; The securing of the Soviet southern flank;	The collapse of the Kyiv government; The curbing of Ukrainian pro-NATO and pro-EU stance; The securing of Russian-populated regions in the East of the country;
Military objectives	The rapid introduction of a 250,000-strong military contingent into Czechoslovakia; The blockading and seizure of key military, political, and transport centres around Prague and Brno; The prevention of organised military of civilian resistance to the operation.	The entry of an 80,000-strong force into Afghanistan; The securing of all key urban centres and the blockading of Afghan military formations; The physical elimination of Amin in an opening special force operation; The capture of Kabul airport	The entry of 150,000 strong into Ukraine; The blockading of the major cities of Kyiv and Kharkov; Seizure of Hostomel airport outside of Kyiv as part of an air landing operation; The collapse of the Ukrainian military through the shock of a multipronged

	Czechoslovakia, 1968	Afghanistan, 1979	Ukraine, 2022
Preparation	Military forces assembled under the guise of the “Shumava” and later exercises; Favourable political alternatives found and co-opted for the operation; Special forces and services assets infiltrated to degrade the military and command capabilities of the ČSLA.	Military forces assembled outside of Afghanistan under the guise of “Baikal” military exercises; Favourable political alternatives found and co-opted for the operation; Military and special forces contingents were introduced into the country under the guise of support, advisory and stabilisation missions.	Military forces assembled under the concealment of several military exercises spanning the whole of 2021; Russian forces enter Lugansk and Donetsk regions two days before the full-scale operation;
Execution	Warsaw Pact forces enter the country along five axes and reach the capital Prague in five hours, entering the city and establishing blocking operations elsewhere; Airlanded forces, with the help of infiltrated and co-opted assets support and seize key airports leading to the introduction	Soviet forces enter the country along two main axes and converge on Kabul and Kandahar in two days; Special forces seize Kabul airport and begin an air landing operation; Key centres of power in Kabul are assaulted and captured; Special forces assault and seize	Russian forces advanced along four major axes centred on Kyiv in the north, Kharkov in the east, and a two-pronged advance toward Nikolaev and Mariupol in the south; Airlanding operation seizes the airport of Hostomel outside of Kyiv in the opening hours;





The examples provided demonstrate a refinement of the conduct and outcomes during the Soviet era, delivering ultimately successful immediate results, whilst failing to anticipate longer-term political ramifications and international reactions.

	Czechoslovakia, 1968	Afghanistan, 1979	Ukraine, 2022
	of forces into key centres of power before the main advance of Warsaw Pact forces; Western borders of Czechoslovakia were blockaded in the beginning phase; ČSLA forces are blockaded and suppressed through non-kinetic means from interfering in the operation.	Tajbeg Palace, eliminating Amin in the process.	Major resistance is faced in all directions except the south; Four days into the operation, Russian Forces have not reached assigned objectives and no political and military collapse has occurred, with both Kyiv and Kharkov remaining unblockaded; Renewed Russian advance reaches maximum extent by March 8-11 along all axes; After failing to achieve objectives, Russian forces begin organised withdrawal around Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkov and Nikolaev.

In historical terms, such operations have been the preference of Soviet and later Russian leadership in achieving specific political objectives when concerning states on their periphery and in what they consider their sphere of influence. The examples provided demonstrate a refinement of the conduct and outcomes during the Soviet era, delivering ultimately successful immediate results, whilst failing to anticipate longer-term political ramifications and international reactions. In the case of Ukraine in 2022, military actions

again revolved around the established model in Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and elsewhere, but failed to achieve the set goals due to a variety of factors centred on a fatal underestimation of the Ukrainian military and political capabilities and cohesion, Russia’s military prowess in conducting such a type of military operation, and the overall applicability of the described type of military operation to the specific case of Ukraine, where major factors that contributed to Soviet successes in the past were either not present in sufficient quantity, or completely absent. Ultimately, the inability to achieve in full the specific and ambitious goals of such military operations, gives way to them devolving from the proverbial term “special military operation” into large-scale and prolonged conventionally termed “wars”, as has been the case in Ukraine since.

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