Stairway to Safe-Havens: Insurgent Mountain Sanctuaries and Civil War Duration, a case-study of Afghanistan 1978-1992.

Birgül, Teo

Student: Teo Birgül – s3107094

Supervisor: Dr. Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl

Bachelor Project, Civil Wars in Theory and Practice

Bachelor Thesis

Stairway to Safe-Havens:

Insurgent Mountain Sanctuaries and Civil War Duration, a case-study of Afghanistan 1978-1992.

Leiden University

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

– International Relations and Organizations (BSc) –

May 24th 2024

Embargo statement: (a) public

Word count: 8262 Words

APA 7th Edition reference style

Introduction

Throughout its history, warfare has always been understood as a phenomenon heavily impacted by the geographical features of the terrain in which it was conducted. Back to the 6th century BC, Sun Tzu (1994) focused a third of his most influential *The Art of War* discussing terrain (Jacob et al., 2017, p. 11). He captured the importance of the environment in which forces evolve: "We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country--its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps." (Sun, 1994, p. 12). While military theorists and scholars have for long studied the impact of such environments on inter-state conflict dynamics until the beginning of the millennia, little attention was devoted to the same topics for civil conflicts. Yet, with the resurgence of counterinsurgency as a scholarly field and its asserted role as a key task of modern militaries, geography in intra-state conflicts has found itself under increasing scrutiny (Kilcullen, 2006, pp. 123-125; Moran, 2016, p. 260). Specifically, the incidence of conflict events in particular terrains and the latter's effect on duration. In studying civil war onset, the center-periphery divide has been considered most relevant in explaining the emergence of insurgencies (Schutte, 2017, p. 382; Fearon, 2004). Early guerilla theorists developed doctrines based on the advantages offered to insurgents by inaccessible natural environments (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, pp. 6-7).

This notion of inaccessibility, physical, overlaps with socio-cultural inaccessibility, which are both considered to be favored by forest cover and mountains spanning across an area (Rustad et al., 2008, p. 771; Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 7). However, investigation on the impact of foliage on civil war onset and duration has yielded no significant results (Rustad et al., 2008). Contrarily, mountains have shown to be more prone to witness civil conflict outbreak (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 85; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Theoretically, mountainous terrain is assumed to retain significance for insurgents by providing them a place to retreat and evade

targeting by the incumbent (Bruscino, 2006; Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015; Dudik, 2009). Thus, mountainous terrain is considered to not only increase the possibility of civil war onset, but also duration (Buhaug & Lujala, 2005, p. 412). Consequently, mountains have been extensively used as a control variable for a wide array of statistical analysis on civil conflicts. Furthering the inquiry, various empirical tests have been conducted as to whether or not mountains are determinant in shaping onset and duration, with contradictory results (Dulaney, 2015, p. 6). Nevertheless, despite evidence of mountainous terrain lengthening civil war duration, no study detailed into the specific mechanisms underpinning this relationship. Thus, the present analysis will attempt to do so through answering the following question:

How do mountains increase civil war duration?

In doing so, the paper will engage theory-testing process-tracing method, in a collection of specific events from the war of Afghanistan from 1978 to 1992, illustrating the chain of causal mechanisms leading from mountainous areas to a lengthen civil war. First, the core concepts relating to the matter are discussed. Then a theory of the impact of mountains on rebel strength in relation with the prospects of negotiated settlements is presented, followed by the methodology employed and the case selection. Finally an analysis based on various sources narrating the dynamics of the war in Afghanistan is provided.

Relevant Literature

Geography, physical and human, has received increased levels of attention in the field of intrastate conflicts since the 2000s. However, this focus remains relatively limited when comparing to the importance it is considered to hold in warfare (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 6). Moreover, inaccessible areas display higher risks of conflict (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015).

Apart from a handful of studies, how specific types of terrain affect the behaviour of actors in civil conflicts remains largely unexplored.

These studies take a quantitative approach, testing the impact of rough terrain on civil war duration and outbreak or indiscriminate violence, through large-N analyses. While the effect of geography is often used as a control variable for country-wide level, they instead use sub-national disaggregated data, measuring terrain roughness as a proportion of geocoded grid cells.

Two arguments can be distinguished, often intertwined in the researches. The first concerns how military capabilities are affected by difficult terrains. Schutte (2017) proposes a model assessing which geographical factors impact the choice of using indiscriminate or selective violence. Drawing on Kalyvas's (2006) zone control model, he adapts Boulding's (2018) loss-of-strength gradient (LSG) to measure the use of indiscriminate violence in relation with the distance from the armed actors' bases. He discusses technological, tactical and cognitive factors that shape the type of violence employed. His findings confirm the usefulness of his loss-of-accuracy gradient and demonstrate that indiscriminate violence is most pronounced close to the strongholds of the incumbent and the insurgents, the capital city and the periphery. Moreover, they suggest that the localization of indiscriminate violence can also depend on external factors unrelated to shifts of control. A "distance-decay model" in its most simple form like Schutte (2017) proposes, considers distance as absolute. Yet, Buhaug, Gates and Lujala (2009) argue that while absolute distance is useful, distance should be also measured relative to the roughness of terrain, and thus include it in their version of the LSG. This model describes, adapted to civil conflicts, the state's capabilities of power projection and its costs (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 8). The extent to which the state can project its military force thus determines the areas that are accessible to it and those which are inaccessible, forming physical (in)accessibility. The second argument deals with human geography, the population's

distribution in relation to the geographical features of the territory. The socio-cultural implications of such distribution are the ethnic diversity of the country, and the political setting in which they find themselves (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 10). Scott (2009) argued that mountains have been used as a refuge for population who have sought to evade the state's reach in Southeast Asia. This created specific cultures, political norms and values in the periphery of ever expanding states. Those he calls "Zomians" chose to position themselves at the margin of the powerful states of the lowlands (2009, pp. 43, 360). Caputo, Bianchi and Baglioni (2023, p. 125) hold a similar view, considering remoteness as a "form of resistance to central spaces' cultures and practices". Mountain settlers thus acted as a challenger to state authority. Coupled with high ethnic diversity and socio-cultural alienation from the majority, this can prompt the state to relegate mountainous areas to peripherical status and neglect its development and administration (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 10). The overlap of ethnic, economic and political cleavages further reinforces the difficulty for the state to govern these areas. This composes in the words of Buhaug and Tollefsen "sociocultural inaccessibility" (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, pp. 6-8, 10-11). Due to the overlap of physical and socio-cultural inaccessibility, they conclude that those two dimensions can be substituted to one another (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 22). Earlier research by Buhaug, Gates and Lujala (2009) concluded that terrain roughness allowed rebels to escape the reach of the state thanks to peripheral mountainous terrain, and therefore lengthen the conflict.

Concepts

Military theorists and practitioners have long acknowledged the challenges faced in mountain warfare. Yet, no consensus exists on what constitutes mountain environment in the military field (Tannheimer & Lechner, 2022, p. 50). Several definitions compete over the proportional elevation, inclination, ruggedness and roughness of an area for it to be deemed mountainous (Körner, Urbach & Paulsen, 2021). Defining and identifying what mountainous

terrain is has significant implication for the conceptualization of the ensuing ideas of remoteness, inaccessibility and the conduct of warfare in such contexts. In a similar fashion, much disagreement endures as to which criteria have to be taken into account to assess the length of a civil war (Fearon, 2004, pp. 278-279).

Mountainous Terrain

Körner, Urbach and Paulsen (2021) provide a detailed literature review of the various datasets and delineation of mountainous terrains in the field of geography. They identify the main issue in defining mountain areas as how to decide of its boundaries. They highlight the fact that climate is irrelevant, as mountain ranges span across almost every climate around the globe (Körner, Urbach & Paulsen, 2021, p. 214). Moreover, focusing solely on altitude can be misleading, as certain elevated highlands can be deprived of mountains (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004, p. 570)

The United Nations (United Nations Statistics Division [UNSD], 2023) use a model classifying any land above 300 m of elevation, which presents an elevation range of more than 300m and whose slope is from 2 to 5 degrees. This last parameter is considered irrelevant from 2500m of elevation onwards. Any area of 25 km² or smaller surrounded by mountains is also considered as part of it (UNSD, 2023). However, this definition seems to present a major shortcoming, which is to disregard ruggedness, a parameter essential in the establishment of LOCs and the assessment of mountain's impact on the LSG.

Körner, Urbach & Paulsen, 2021). The United States military employs a much simplified definition, differentiating between low and high mountains, respectively between 300m and 900m of elevation and exceeding the 900m threshold (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2000, p. 11). From a broader standpoint, a most useful working definition is the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA), which rests upon atmospheric pressure

and ruggedness. It presents the advantages of accounting for climate, as in periodical cold and weather dynamics. Moreover, it excludes certain areas that the United Nation's take into account, altitude plateaus, in which several major cities are located. Their exclusion is relevant due to the stark difference between urban warfare and combat in open terrain. In addition, the second version of the GMBA provides an easy-to-use geocoded map of the world, with several refinement levels, that allows the user to precisely assess whether a certain location is mountainous (Snethlage, 2022a; Snethlage, 2022b). The subsequent analysis will make use of the second version of the GMBA.

Duration

The study of civil war duration, and of the factors influencing it, is debated. A myriad of competing explanations exists as to which ones are holds the best explanatory power. Various approaches can be differentiated, among which economic, military and societal ones are predominant.

Collier & Hoeffler's (2004) findings suggest that duration is significantly affected by the military and financial viability of the insurgency along the conflict. Moreover, they expect longer civil wars where there is a significant part of the territory covered by forests and when the population is divided among a handful of ethnic groups. Contrarily to Buhaug Lujala (2005), who find that mountainous terrain accounts for longer civil wars, they point to the fact that the higher the proportion of mountain in the country, the shorter the war. However, this result is not statistically significant. The strength of their argument lies in the insurgencies viability in terms of military and financial activities, and state that in face of changing circumstances in these domains, the chances of rebel victory are to be strongly impacted (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). This is congruent with Schulhofer-Wohl's (2020) model of reliance on foreign sponsors for rebels to keep on fighting despite unfavourable circumstances on the battlefield and supplying needs.

Another influential argument, the infamous “sons-of-the-soil” developed by Fearon (2004), considers that longer civil conflicts are the result of competition between ethno-linguistic groups over material resources. Such wars, according to him, drag on when a peripheral minority group rebels to oppose the exploitation of resources located on its land, by a government dominated by a majoritarian group. In turn, the presence of resources allows for contraband, which also increase the capabilities of the insurgents to sustain the fight. Resistance to migration from the non-peripheral areas by the “sons-of-the-soil” is also considered as to allow prolonged conflicts. Yet, “sons-of-the-soil” are not exclusive to civil wars and can take place with lower level of violence than what most consider the threshold to qualify as war (Coté & Mitchell, 2017, p. 339). Moreover, this argument assumes fixed identities across the war, but it has been shown that the salience of identities varied along the course of a conflict (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter, 2006; Kalyvas, 2006, p. 3).

A third approach is the focus on military capabilities of the actors of the conflict, usually using dyadic theories and models. Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan (2009) have emphasized the importance of the relative strength of belligerents, specifically rebels, in shaping the prospect for negotiated settlements. According to them longer conflicts happen when insurgents are sufficiently secure to sustain the fight against the state, while at the same time lack the “power to target” that would be necessary to force the government to the negotiation table (Cunnigham, Skrede Gleditsch & Saleyhan, 2009, p. 574). Supporting the approach stressing the significance of rebel strength, DeRouen and Sobek (2004) they conclude that state strength is unrelated to prospects of a negotiated settlement (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch & Saleyhan, 2009; DeRouen & Sobek, 2004). Moreover, within their model, the intervention of the United Nations in the course of the conflict seems to increase the chances of an earlier negotiated settlement. They also take the same data as Collier and Hoeffler (2004) to account for mountainous terrain and differ in their conclusion, while mountains advantage

rebels and increase the likelihood of a truce, forests advantage no one nor favour any negotiated settlement.

Finally, a portion of the field stands apart, which focuses on factors exogenous to the conflict, geography. Buhaug and Tollefsen (2015), as detailed before, assessed the impact of both physical and human geography on the duration of civil war, stressing out the relevance of certain pre-war conditions, such as infrastructures, and the determinant role played by (in)accessibility. Readapting Boulding's (2018) LSG to the context of civil war, they discuss the costs of power projection relative to terrain and previous state penetration of the territory. Their focus on peripheral areas, uncovers the higher number of violent events in such locations during civil wars. Their model, using disaggregated country level data, although robust, is only tested for Africa, and is yet to be confronted to other cases. In an earlier publication, Buhaug, Gates and Lujala (2009, p. 566) developed a first dataset "to capture local and locational characteristics of the conflict zones". They emphasize the significance of mountainous and forested terrains in the initial phases of the conflict, and their secondary in shaping rebel strength later on, supportive of Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan's (2009) results. Overall, however, mountains do increase civil wars' duration all factors held constant, as demonstrated by Buhaug and Lujala (2005, p. 412) in a preceding publication.

Theory

Rugged, mountainous terrain is considered to rise drastically the costs and difficulty of power projection from the centre of power. The cost of developing transport infrastructures is much higher in mountainous areas, pack animals remain to this day the main mean of transportation in many of these locations. Moreover, communication infrastructures are still largely undeveloped as well (Kohler, Hurni, Wiesmann & Kläy, 2004, pp. 4-5). Such

infrastructures serve as a channel to project military and political authority over distance. Therefore, their absence, or limited presence, signifies increasing difficulties in the establishment of lines of communication (LOCs) to project military power across a territory (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 9). Boulding (2018, p. 231), emphasizes the importance of LOCs in its LSG, demonstrating a positive correlation between the length of LOCs and the cost of power projection. The extent to which the state's capabilities are affected by the LSG thus determines the physical inaccessibility by altering the relative distance to the state's home base (Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, pp. 8-10). Therefore, mountains, as a by-product of their inaccessibility, are favourable locations for the establishment of insurgent safe-havens within the country's territory, falling outside – or partly outside – of the state's surveillance and kinetic capabilities. Mountain ranges' role as natural international border also allows rebels to completely escape the incumbent's power by seeking refuge in a neighbouring sovereign state, avoiding pursuit from counterinsurgents (Tannheimer & Lechner, 2022, p. 50).

The creation of insurgent sanctuaries, both internal and external, is conceptualized by Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan (2009, pp. 574, 584) as "power to resist". As an insurgency is initiated in a context of stark imbalance of capabilities between the incumbent and the rebels, the state has significantly higher chances of defeating the insurgency during its first stages. When facing relatively strong rebels, governments are expected to be more willing to engage in negotiated settlements. Yet, in the initial period of the conflict, certainty seldom exists as to whether the rebels will grow strong. However, in the event that insurgents can go through this "initial period of vulnerability" undefeated, the prospects for a government victory decrease significantly (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan, 2009, p. 574). A way to evade state repression at the beginning of the war is to "simply go into hiding" (DeRouen & Sobek, 2004, p. 307). Thus, sanctuaries are determinant in the building of capabilities when insurgents are vulnerable, and mountains offer most favourable locations for their establishment.

They offer to rebels places to train, organize, supply and rest, allowing them to sustain the fight for lengthened periods of time (Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009, pp. 551, 563-564) Nevertheless, this power to resist cannot be equated with the capacity to challenge the state sufficiently to extract a negotiated settlement (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch & Saleyhan, 2009, p. 575). Therefore, if rebels remain weak, but manage to remain outside of the state's reach in inaccessible areas, the probability of an incumbent victory decreases while prospects of victorious insurgents do not increase. Such situation is the equilibrium which is the most unlikely to end up in a negotiated settlement between the parties (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan, 2009). This leads Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan (2009, p. 575) to conclude that longest conflicts are to be expected when insurgents "are *too weak* to extract concessions or obtain negotiated settlements, yet *too secure* to easily be eradicated by governments". This paper will argue that mountains allow rebels to stay too secure but too weak, and thus sustain the fighting for prolonged periods of time.

Research Design, Methods & Data

The recent use of disaggregated subnational-level data in statistical empirical analysis has shed light on the significance of geographical factors impacting civil war duration and tested the relationship between the occurrence of conflict events in mountainous areas and longer lasting wars (Buhaug & Lujala, 2005; Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015; Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). The use of such geocoded data allows for the assessment of their relative positioning in relation to the actors' locations, critical in the establishment of correct causal mechanisms (Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009, p. 566). However, while the broad causal link underlying the positive correlation between mountains and civil war duration has been demonstrated, little has been done in detailing the smaller mechanisms linking the two. This contribution will attempt to do so through a theory-testing process-tracing methodology. Each step detailed in the theory

section will be assessed and its presence verified as a part of a broader "series of "micro-correlations"" which, summed up, makes up for the bigger correlation discussed before (Chandra, 2006, p. 7). Such method is most inclined towards within-country analysis. As with sub-country statistical analysis, this approach is crucial in understanding belligerents' behaviour in relation to their environment. As Chandra (2006) argued, this entails the impossibility of outcome generalizability. Yet, it does not reject the possibility of identifying the same mechanisms in other cases, to test the theory across several countries, and identify different or similar variables that may be causing those mechanisms. Due to restraints on resources and for reasons of feasibility for this project, the analysis will be limited to a single-case study.

In order to detail and assess the presence or absence of the mechanisms previously identified as linking mountainous terrain with increased civil war duration, the case of Afghanistan will be put under scrutiny.

Case Selection

The Afghan conflict(s)

A first conflict erupted in 1978 with the political violence ensuing from the coup, challenging the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) rule, shortly escalating into a full-fledged insurgency with the Soviet intervention the following year (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). It lasted three years after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989, until the Mujahadin rebels took control of Kabul in 1992. The rise of the Taliban and their victory against the Mujahadin in 1996 is considered to be the second Afghan civil war. Yet some Mujahadin warlords kept on fighting after the proclamation of the Emirate in 1997, under the name of the United Front (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). This third conflict lasted until 2001 and the United States' invasion of the country and the subsequent war opposing the Afghan government assisted by the international coalition's forces to Taliban insurgents, lasting until the victory of

the latter in 2021 (Giustozzi, 2021). Resistance to Taliban rule still continues to this day in the Panjshir valley under the name of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (Asharq Al Awsat, 2024). The recurrence of armed conflicts in the country made DeRouen and Berkovitch (2008) categorize the events as a case of "enduring internal rivalry".

The contest between the PDPA and the Mujahadin from 1978 to 1992 is a stark example of a prolonged counterinsurgency campaign in mountainous environment. Envisaged to be surgical and decisive, the Soviet invasion soon became a quagmire in its own right, and lasted just short of ten years (Grau, 1996; Schulhofer-Wohl, 2020). Although the Soviet intervention spans across much of the war's duration, one year before and three years after are left with no direct foreign military intervention. An analysis across the three periods, from the Saur Revolution to the Soviet invasion, to the Soviet withdrawal and then to the defeat of the PDPA in 1992, allows controlling for the impact of foreign military intervention in the course of the conflict. In addition, the conflict's duration, fourteen years, make it fall under the category of long wars, according to DeRouen and Berkovitch's (2008) classification.

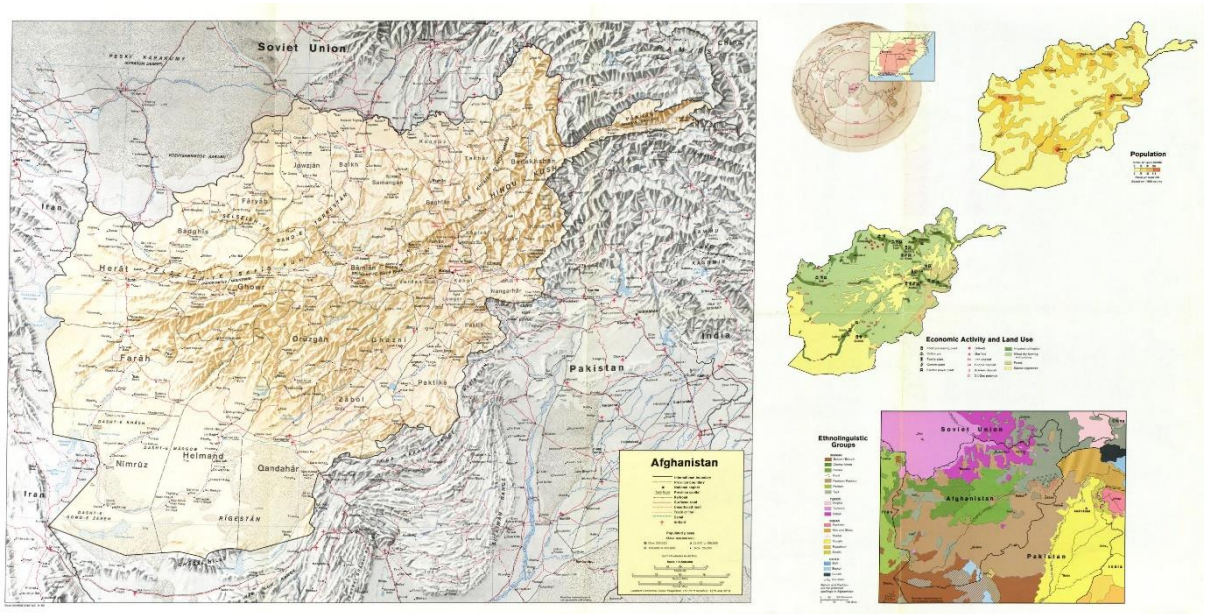
Afghan Geography

Within the country, five different major mountain systems are present, all contiguous. The Hindu Kush occupies most of the territory, spanning from the Tajik border to Herat and Kandahar. The Himalayas form the northern part of the border with Pakistan, while the Baluchistan Ranges compose its southern portion. The Wakhan corridor, where ends the Hindu Kush, is shared further east between the Pamir mountains in the north and a small portion of the Karakoram to the south. Last, the southernmost part of the Tian Shan is located in the north of Takhar province (Snethlage et al., 2022a; Snethlage et al., 2022b).

However, not all of the territory is covered by mountainous terrain, the southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Nimruz, bordering the Pakistani Baluchistan, are mostly

flat. Steppes cover the border with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Yet, the larger cities are located in the first flatlands after the end of the closest mountains. Kabul stands apart, entirely surrounded by the Hindu Kush to the north and west and by the Baluchistan Ranges to the east, the two systems meeting to its south (Snethlage et al., 2022a; Snethlage et al., 2022b).

As outlined previously, the occurrence of the events recounted in the following analysis are assessed based on the second version of the GMBA (Snethlage et al., 2022a; Snethlage et al., 2022b). This dataset is presented on its website through a navigable world map on which polygons of every mountain ranges are laid. Its user-friendly interface makes it a favourable tool which permits to avoid complex geographic information system software. The name of the localities mentioned in the analysis may have changed, as well as the administrative divisions of Afghanistan. When discussing such locations, it has been attempted to provide directional precisions in relation to a well-known population centre or landmark, in the event that a search on an online mapping website would prove unconclusive.



Map 1. Relief map of Afghanistan, political, economic, demographic and cultural (United States Central Intelligence Agency, 1982).

A wide array of academic sources are employed to conduct the following analysis. They detail the course of events during the conflict, provide figures – usually approximations due to the lack of precise or accurate estimates at the time – and discuss tactical and strategic interactions between the belligerents (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 1). For the latter considerations, the work of Grau (1996) and Jalali and Grau (1999) have been greatly beneficial, as they present a collection of interviews with Soviet and Mujahadin commanders.

Analysis

As Lamb (2008) defines it, insurgent sanctuaries are spaces of limited state governance in which rebels can operate without or with few constrains. Additionally, such locations fall outside of the state's surveillance capabilities. There, the state is unable to perform its usual duties, nor exercise power (Lamb, 2008, pp. 14-20). The state's reach, in terms of capacity, is what Buhaug and Tollefsen (2015, p. 8) coin "state penetration". This depends on the cost of power projection, which they operationalize, based on Boulding's (2018) LSG, for a domestic setting. This cost of power projection determines the extent of the state's penetration, and the LSG is particularly affected by the length of LOCs (Boulding, 2018). The longer the LOC, the less extensive the state's reach and power (Boulding, 2018, p. 231). Mountains constrain the establishment of LOCs, by raising their costs, as well as by forcing them to go through narrow passes. The various Afghan mountain systems do not allow for mechanized transportation (Dudik, 2009, p. 3). This led Afghanistan to have a ring of highways that carefully avoids the mountains, except from the portion from Mazar-e-Shariff to Kabul (Jalali & Grau, 1999; Grau, 1996). At the time of the war, there were no railroads to complement the road network (Shroder, 1981, pp. 47, 54; Grau, 1996). This made LOCs a central stake of the conflict, even more so considering that the capture of a single mountain pass meant the complete closure of the LOC crossing it. Illustratively, the Satukandav Pass (known as the Khost-Gardez Pass), once taken

by the Mujahadin, allowed them to besiege Khost until the infamous operation Magistral in 1987 (Grau, 1996, pp. 60-65). The conflict became a contest for LOCs, with Soviets attacking Mujahadin caravans, and Mujahadin seizing passes on the main roads (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 147-148; Bruscino, 2006, p. 58).

As Soviet forces concentrated along the main axes of communication and centres of power, large parts of the territory fell out of the state's penetration range. Although the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (AFDRA) and *sarandoy* (Afghan Gendarmerie) were originally supposed to be in charge of the countryside, their constant shortage of personnel made the task unrealisable (Giustozzi, 2000, pp. 67-68). The Soviets and the AFDRA had to devote about 85% of their personnel to securing LOCs and the major population centres, leaving between "18,000 and 23,000 soldiers" to conduct offensive actions against the insurgents (Dudik, 2008, pp. 12-13). Therefore, the rural hinterlands were largely deprived of governmental control, offering the Mujahadin plenty of room to (re)organize, shelter and retreat (Farr, 2019, p. 45). Moreover, the porous Durand Line, the border with Pakistan, from which the Soviets preferred to stay away at first, gave the Mujahadin yet another safe-haven with open-air arms markets (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 100).

Dudik (2009, p. 1) draws a distinction between internal and external sanctuary, both being physical spaces where rebels can "rest, rearm, refit, train, receive medical attention, or recruit and organize reinforcements". Similarly to Lamb (2008), he considers that internal sanctuaries are areas falling outside of the counterinsurgents' effective reach, while external ones are where the state cannot exercise sovereignty from an international standpoint (Dudik, 2009, p. 2).

Too secure …

Internal Mujahadin Sanctuaries

The first actions of resistance against the PDPA regime broke out in June 1978, in the valley of Pech, a mountainous area in the current Kunar province. As the first clashes involved Nuristanis with members of the Safi tribe inhabiting the area, the revolt spread to the neighbouring Nuristan province. Government officials retaliated to the attacks by destroying the village from which they originated, forcing rebels and civilians to flee the valley to seek sanctuary in the Nuristani mountains (Farr, 2019, p. 32). A few months later, the insurgents had gained sufficient strength to capture two district centres in Nuristan, followed by a winter campaign at the end of which the Pech valley and Nuristan were almost emptied of governmental forces (Farr, 2019, p. 33). Throughout the war, Nuristan acted as a major LOC for the Mujahadin, due to its location between Pakistan and Laghman province, as well as the relative absence of Soviet incursions in its northern valleys (Klimburg, 2001, pp. 384-385). Similar to the fleeing Safi tribesmen, the inhabitants of Khas Kunar, south of Pech valley, went to the mountains of the Mohmand border tribe to evade governmental attacks in the spring of 1979. These mountains served in the following weeks as the base from which raids on Khas Kunar were conducted (Farr, 2019, pp. 35, 38).

Every province that rebelled against the PDPA in the immediate aftermath of the Saur Revolution, twelve in total, were covered by mountains, apart from Balkh and Farah, which still have half of their territory covered by mountainous areas (Amin, 1984, p. 380; Snethlage et al., 2022a; Snethlage et al., 2022b). In December 1979, just before the Soviet invasion, the government seems to have retained control over only five provinces (Amin, 1984, p. 380). Farah is a mostly desertic region, bordering Iran (Adamec, 1973, pp. 71-76). Yet, the Mujahadin established a major sanctuary on Lor Koh, a mountain massif sitting at the western end of the Hindu Kush (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 185-195; Snethlage et al.,2022a; Snethlage et al.,2022b).

It is strategically located between two roads, the then Farah-Daulatabad highway 517 and the Herat-Kandahar highway 1, two main Soviet LOCs. The Mujahadin conducted regular assaults on convoys passing on these lanes, and then retreated to Lor-Koh. Neither the Soviet nor the AFDRA ignored that the insurgents held a large base there. Still, they were unable to dislodge them until 1985, despite several operations aimed at retaking the high-ground (Jalai & Grau, 1999, pp. 185-195). In a similar fashion, one of the most famous mountain sanctuaries of the Mujahadin was Zhawar, located on the flanks of Shodiyaki Ghar, few kilometres north of Pakistan, in what is now Khost province. However, rather than a base for launching raids and ambushes, it served as a Mujahadin training and supplying camp. Its road connection to Miranshah, a major supply base within Pakistan, made it a key location for this LOC. Five hundred Mujahadin were uninterruptedly living on site and dug tunnels to accommodate fighters and ammunition coming through. The AFDRA attempted to seize this "symbol of Mujahadin invincibility" twice, in 1985 and 1986 (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 317-326). For the first assault failed, the second resulted in a counterinsurgent victory. Yet, the AFDRA only held the place for five hours and then withdrew, leaving the tunnels almost untouched, and the Mujahadin free to come back (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 323-326). This was a recurring shortcoming of Soviet and AFDRA offensives, once a pass or safe-haven was seized and the insurgents in retreat, the installations would be destroyed, and counterinsurgents would withdrew. It allowed Mujahadin to be defeated, regroup in the surrounding canyons or ridges, and once the enemy was gone, retake the sanctuary and improve defences (Grau, 1996; Jalali & Grau, 1999). The Zhawar example also demonstrates the joint function of internal and external sanctuaries, specifically those located on both sides of the Durand Line, forming a network of supply bases which controlled a number of roads and passes crossing the Baluchistan and Eastern Himalayan ranges. Such large supply bases had to be permanent, considering the ever growing amount of material received by the Mujahadin. Thus, they offered

relatively easy targets for the Soviets and the AFDRA. Consequently, the rebels had to locate them in the most secure and easily defendable locations and fortify them. Mountains offered the most appropriate setting, being distant from the main power centres of the government and drastically increasing the LSG (Jalali & Grau, 1999, p. 402; Buhaug & Tollefsen, 2015, p. 9). Moreover, the proximity of these border camps meant that Mujahadin stationed in Pakistan could be mobilized and sent there in case reinforcements were needed. The Soviet assault on the bases of Krer, in Sirkanay district, provides compelling evidence. The operation was a success in the sense that the two Mujahadin bases on the ridge were destroyed. However, the rapid arrival of rebels from Bajaur inflicted heavy casualties to the counterinsurgents and allowed the Mujahadin to regain control of the area (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 327-330). Mountainous terrain also restricts available withdrawal routes. In 1987, a year after the first operation on Krer, AFDRA and Soviet forces attempted to sweep the area again. While they succeeded, the remaining Mujahadin took the ridge from which they retreated under heavy fire and imposed high casualties upon them (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 331-333).

Nevertheless, not every base could be defended or abandoned and then retaken following an assault. In 1980, the Soviets successfully destroyed a base on the ridges of Tor Ghar (current Qarghayi district), near Jalalabad, killing all the insurgents by effectively sealing off the area (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 281-283). Another Soviet achievement was the destruction of the sanctuary on Sher Alikhan mountain, southeast of Bamizay. It overlooked the highway linking Kandahar to Ghazni, and Mujahadin regularly ambushed convoys from this point. After the Soviet attack and destruction of the camp, mines and traps were laid and the insurgents had to convert the safe-haven into a temporary base (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 335-339).

The Mujahadin relied on an extensive network of mountain sanctuaries within Afghanistan. Those located near governmental LOCs were used to conduct ambushes and raids, allowing the rebels to retreat after combat and evade counterinsurgent reprisals. If bordering

the Pakistani border, they served as supply depots and training camps, from which weapons, ammunition and fighters were dispatched throughout the country. When Soviet or AFDRA forces attempted to seize a safe-haven, they usually proved unable to do so for extended periods of time, insurgents resuming their activity once the attackers were gone. This helped maintaining the rebel LOCs open while sustaining the disruption of enemy LOCs.

External Mujahadin Sanctuaries

Since the LOCs of the Mujahadin were connecting internal sanctuaries, as discussed above, and external ones, the following part will deal with the role of safe-havens established outside of Afghanistan's sovereign territory. Although Iran served as a sanctuary for the insurgents, Pakistan played a much more prominent role for hosting, training and supplying the rebels (Dudik, 2009, p. 11). However, in the first stages of the conflict, the Mujahadin were logistically reliant on the civilian population for food, ammunition and weapons, that could be bought at local markets. Yet, the shift in the Soviet strategy, leading to the depopulation of the countryside forced the rebels to create longer LOCs linking their areas of operation to Pakistan (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 267, 402-403).

Iran has been constrained in its support to the Mujahadin, although overtly encouraging them, by the war against Iraq that raged from 1980 to 1988. In addition, the strained relations with the United States made them wary of further involvement. Therefore Iran only seldom offered refuge to the insurgents (Bruscino, 2006, pp. 55-56). As of China, the narrow Wakhan corridor was mined and guarded by the Soviets from 1980 onward, making it difficult for Beijing to pursue its support to the rebels, in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split (Bruscino, 2006, p. 56). Remained the Durand Line, forming the border with Pakistan, to which millions of Afghan refugees fled throughout the war. The lack of infrastructure on this portion of the border and the multiplicity of mountain passes between the two countries made it undefendable from a counterinsurgency standpoint (Dudik, 2009, p. 2; Bruscino, 2006, p. 57). The city of Peshawar

was chosen by the international sponsors to serve as the main centre of dispatchment for aid, under the watch of the Inter-Services Intelligence (Farr, 2019, p. 73; Bruscino, 2006; Hoodbhoy, 2005, p. 24). The city had been the refuge of several resistance parties in exile and were the headquarters of the main jihadist movements (Giustozzi, 2009, p. 44; Bruscino, 2006, p. 57).

Numbering as high as 20,000 per year, caravans would be assembled in the towns surrounding Peshawar, such as Miranshah or Parachinar (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 100). It then crossed the mountain passes of the Suleiman ranges, to reach the main supply bases on the other side of the border, Zhawar being one of them (Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 317, 351). Although some caravans were crossing through trails – which numbered from 100 to 300 – , in 1984, ten out of the twenty-five roads leading from Pakistan to Afghanistan were controlled by the Mujahadin, and all of those coming from Iran (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 100; Bruscino, 2006, p. 58). A Mujahadin commander recalls the Logar route, starting at Parachinar to cross to the Afghan town of Jaji, Paktiya province. From there, they would follow the mountains until the plain of the Logar river, were they would have to wait until they made sure no Soviet activity was planned in the area (Jalali & Grau, 1999, p. 351). This flat location seems to have been considered by the Mujahadin as more dangerous than the highlands of the border, where Soviets could cut off supply routes by destroying caravans with more ease.

Pakistan would also be used in several locations for recruitment, training and casualty evacuations. The PDPA regime was aware of such use, denouncing in 1985 the presence of Chinese instructors on Paksitani soil (Farr, 2019, p. 74). Three years later, more than half of the Mujahadin in the province of Nangarhar had been trained in Pakistan. The refugee camps were also safe-havens from which up to 70,000 people supported the Mujahadin effort as of 1990, about a third of them in Iran and the rest from Pakistan. Over the whole length of the conflict, no more than a tenth of the Mujahadin were based in Pakistan. Yet, the number of insurgent crossing the border increased drastically as the war went on, from 2,000 in the first years to

10,000 in 1989 (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 114). Even before the Saur Revolution, the authorities of Islamabad had welcomed the fundamentalists fighting Daoud's regime, training up to 5,000 of them in Peshawar (Amin, 1984, p. 378). The campaign of the fundamentalists lasted until 1976 and resumed two years later, few months after the Saur Revolution (Hoodbhoy, 2005, p. 18). Moreover, Pakistan served as the hub for the first jihadist to gather, train and then cross to Afghanistan strengthening the ranks of the resistance by thousands (Hoodbhoy, 2005). Jalali and Grau (1999, p. 339) describe the Mujahadin safe-havens in Pakistan as "essential for the survival of their force". This sentence can be understood almost literally, as several insurgent leaders explain that the wounded would usually be sent to Pakistan to be treated and recover, as well as prisoners for detention (Jalali & Grau,1999, p. 276; 312, 314). Mujahadin commanders would also regularly travel to Peshawar to meet with other officers, and many rank-and-files combatants visited their families who had fled to Pakistan (Jalali & Grau, 1999). Reinforcements could also be sought when area near the border were under attack of the counterinsurgents.

Sanctuaries played a determinant role in the Mujahadin's capacity to evade governmental control, allowing them to organize in mountainous hinterlands to conduct raids and ambushes. The insurgents managed to sustain the fight long enough from their safe-havens to emerge out of the first stages of the war as a viable resistance option for both future recruits and foreign sponsors. Pakistan's function of recruitment and training ground, casualty evacuation and retreat location and hub for the launch of supply caravans was also allowed by the mountains which first determined the delineation of the Durand Line. The multiplicity of trails, which were reactivated during the war, following no less numerous valleys and passes made it impossible for the counterinsurgents to effectively forbid border-crossing activities. As of internal sanctuaries, their location's inaccessibility made them defensible for the rebels at best, and incredibly difficult for the Soviet and AFDRA to hold for prolonged periods of time.

... yet too weak

So far, the present analysis has detailed the mechanisms that allowed the rebels to remain "too secure", in the words of Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan (2009, pp. 574-575), and how the Mujahadin went through the "initial period of vulnerability", effectively reducing the prospects of government victory (Mason & Fett, 1996, as cited in DeRouen & Sobek, 2004). Remains to demonstrate the mechanisms that undermined rebels' strength, making them sufficiently weak for the government to overlook the possibility of a negotiated settlement, and for the insurgents to fail capturing the state rapidly.

The Mujahadin were a loosely organized grouping of different factions and parties that clashed with each other, and when they did not, struggled to initiate joint operations. No centralized command structure existed, resulting from the resistance's origin, a wide array of contrasting movements (Jalali & Grau, 1999, p. 401; Giustozzi, 2009, p. 43). While the Islamists attempted to create a form of concentrated hierarchical rule under a religious umbrella, local dignitaries who mainly initiated the fight resisted this initiative. Due to the extensive travel time that the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan forced upon delegates, the difficulties of communicating and controlling local guerilla officers from headquarters was further exacerbated. Only Hekmatyar's Hizb-I-Islami imposed a system of party commissars to ensure that local antennas were following the orders. Let alone the intra-factional disagreement, up to seventeen parties were officially recognized by Pakistan and Iran. The myriad of competing organizations led leaders of smaller groups to shift from one faction to another, or to the government (Giustozzi, 2009, pp. 43-46). In the year 1982 and 1983, just short of 600 Mujahadin groups signed ceasefire agreements with the PDPA regime (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 148). However, this does not mean that these ceasefires were enforced, and even less that they lasted. Nevertheless, Giustozzi (2000, p. 148) estimates that these groups' defection brought from 2,000 to 3,000 combatants to reinforce the government's ranks. Moreover, when factional

leadership overlapped with local political structures, the latter would take over the decision-making process, further fragmenting the power of headquarters. As an example, during operation Magistral, the inhabitants of the area had not fled to Pakistan and were still residing in their home. Thus a significant portion of the Mujahadin engaged in the defence of the Satukandav and Khadai passes were local tribesmen. The tribal council of the region consequently made the decision to fight against the Soviet offensive, instead of the faction's leaders (Jalali & Grau, 1999, p. 168).

In the first stages of the war, the Mujahadin organized their forces on the traditional tribal raiding party, the *lashkar*. This force structure would assemble for a short period of time, and once the campaign was over, would disband. This meant that most of the combatants at the beginning of the conflict were part-timers, that would go back home after an offensive, weakening the efforts to implement a working chain of command (Amin, 1984, p. 386; Jalali & Grau, 1999, pp. 149-152). With the arrival of foreign sponsors, this mode of warfare was gradually replaced by more cohesive insurgent groups. Foreign aid did not help the consolidation of command structures, nor inter-factional cooperation. International sponsors could always dispatch the supplies to another organization, leading Mujahadin leaders to struggle with increasing combat operations to prove their relevance rather than working on command structures (Giustozzi, 2009, p. 44).

The Soviet efforts to reduce the porosity of the Pakistani border, if at first ineffective, made a difference from 1985 onward. Spetsnaz units intercepted about a tenth of the caravans crossing the passes and covered 60% of the Durand Line (Giustozzi, 2000, pp. 100-101). Airstrikes on caravans also became more efficient in 1985, and the decision to seize the high-ground in 1987 led to a drastic increase in the capacity of the government to close off the transborder (Bruscino, 2006, p. 62; Giustozzi, 2000, p. 102). In addition to be exposed to counterinsurgents' ambushes, the caravans carrying supplies for the Mujahadin were forced to

give up a significant part of their freight and money along the route. When the caravan travelled across another group's or tribe's territory, a fee had to be paid, leading to the disappearance of about 40% of their supplies.

This section has focused on how mountains affected Mujahadin's strength and capabilities, discussing the mechanisms that led them to be sufficiently secure to avoid being rooted out by the counterinsurgents, while being unable to gain enough power to take power. The establishment of LOCs across the Hindu Kush and Suleiman ranges revealed to be both an advantage for transporting supplies unnoticed and an inconvenient in assuming control over the multitude of groups fighting the government. Yet, the extent to which mountains hindered rebel strength is less clear and their lasting weakness seems to originate from other factors. The geographical constraints that shaped the Afghan infrastructure network allowed the rebels to harass governmental LOCs while stopping and resuming fighting at will. Still, the Mujahadin never managed to seize a major population centre until spring 1991, when Khost surrendered (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 235). In fact, they never managed to capture an enemy stronghold of more than a couple hundred defenders (Giustozzi, 2000, p. 114-115). Internal dissensions maintained strategic planning and the conduct of operations difficult to achieve. These factors added to one another, leading the insurgents to be undefeatable, yet not powerful enough to be offered a negotiated settlement that would not be perceived as an "honourable surrender", in spite of the so-called pacification initiative of the PDPA (Giustozzi, 2000, pp. 147-153).

Discussion

The processes through which insurgents became sufficiently secure to emerge from the initial period of vulnerability and subsequent stages undefeated appears to rely on their capacity

to retreat to and hold rugged terrain. Yet, their lack of cohesiveness and inability to grow strong enough to extract concessions from the government seems less related to mountainous hinterlands. Other factors such as factionalism, foreign support and organizational shortcomings manifest themselves in explaining the second dynamic.

The preceding analysis has shed light on the mechanisms that have permitted the prolongation of the war between the Mujahadin and the PDPA regime, by testing the theoretical framework proposed. Nevertheless, it suffers from several shortcomings. First, by focusing solely on the combat events that occurred in the mountains, it disregards mechanisms possibly specific to plains, or alternatively, not specific to mountains, which should therefore be discarded as a part of the broader causal chain linking mountains to increased duration. Second, the generalizability of the micro-correlations to other cases is limited by design. To verify whether such framework can be extended to other countries, a similar analysis should be conducted, measuring to what length the causal chain uncovered here can be found in other cases (Chandra, 2006, pp. 12-13). Moreover, the sources were selected for their suitability with the research project, but were produced in a different aim, hindering their informational value. An in-depth field research, including interviews with the first concerned, with questions directly related to the mechanisms at play would be greatly beneficial to collect primary sources.

Conclusion

Increased incidence of rebellion and combat events in mountainous areas has led scholar to devote more attention to the micro-dynamics of civil war emerging from geographical features. From the positive effect of insurgencies fighting in rugged terrain on intra-state conflict duration demonstrated by Buhaug and Lujala (2005), this paper has attempted to detail the chain of smaller causal mechanisms leading from combat events in mountainous locations

to a longer lasting civil war. This was done by investigating the struggle of the Mujahadin against the PDPA regime, from 1978 to 1992. While mountains were determinant for rebels to evade the state's reach, other causes hindering their power to target were at play. The theory tested has proven its explanatory power when concerned with the establishment of safe-havens and insurgents power to resist, however it was less conclusive in detailing their capacity to effectively challenge the state.

Several implications can be drawn from the results of this contribution. In terms of research, detailing the specific dynamics that geography imposes on belligerents' behaviour in civil conflicts is crucial. Similar process-tracing methods need to be applied when studying other environments and conflict. Moreover, there is a necessity to investigate the role of the state in negotiated settlements using the same framework as Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch and Saleyhan (2009) of power to resist and target in relation with geographical features. In addition, the rising cost of power projection in mountainous environment, coupled with the establishment of sanctuaries in them may be related to a broader set of factors leading to a situation of quagmire, affecting duration. Further inquiry with the lens of Schulhofer-Wohl's (2020) quagmire framework can bring valuable insights to the matter. For policy-making, the effect of mountainous environment and their proneness to insurgency difficult to root out should be borne in mind, both domestically and internationally, the latter when contemplating foreign military intervention in a mountainous country.

Bibliography

Adamec, L. W. (1973). Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Vol. 2: Farah and Southwestern Afghanistan.

Amin, T. (1984). Afghan resistance: Past, present, and future. *Asian Survey*, *24*(4), 373-399.

Boulding, K. E. (2018). *Conflict and defense: A general theory*. Pickle Partners Publishing.

Bruscino, T. A. (2006). *Out of Bounds: Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare* (p. ix109). Fort Leavenworth, TX: Combat Studies Institute Press.

Buhaug, H., & Lujala, P. (2005). Accounting for scale: Measuring geography in quantitative studies of civil war. *Political Geography*, *24*(4), 399-418.

Buhaug, H., & Tollefsen, A. F. (2015). Insurgency and Inaccessibility. *International Studies Review*, *17*(1), 6-25.

Buhaug, H., Gates, S., & Lujala, P. (2009). Geography, rebel capability, and the duration of civil conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *53*(4), 544-569.

Caputo, M. L., Bianchi, M., & Baglioni, S. (2023). Migrating to Scottish insular communities: how remoteness affects integration by shaping borders and identities. In *Assessing the Social Impact of Immigration in Europe* (pp. 111-128). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Chandra, K. (2006). Mechanisms vs. Outcomes. *APSA Qualitative Methods Newsletter, 4(1),* 6-13.

Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, *56*(4), 563-595.

Côté, I., & Mitchell, M. I. (2017). Deciphering “Sons of the Soil” Conflicts: A Critical Survey of the Literature. *Ethnopolitics*, *16*(4), 333–351.

Cunningham, D. E., Skrede Gleditsch, K., & Salehyan, I. (2009). It takes two: A dyadic analysis of civil war duration and outcome. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *53*(4), 570-597.

De Rouen Jr, K. R., & Sobek, D. (2004). The dynamics of civil war duration and outcome. *Journal of Peace Research*, *41*(3), 303-320.

DeRouen Jr, K. R., & Bercovitch, J. (2008). Enduring internal rivalries: A new framework for the study of civil war. *Journal of Peace Research*, *45*(1), 55-74.

Doyle, M. W., & Sambanis, N. (2006). *Making war and building peace: United Nations peace operations*. Princeton University Press.

Dudik, C. E. (2009). *The Soviet-Afghan War: A Superpower's Inability to Deny Insurgent Sanctuary* (Doctoral dissertation, United States Marine Corps Command and Staff College).

Dulaney, C. (2015). Unnecessary Roughness: Examining Terrain, Indiscriminate Violence, and Conflict Duration.

Farr, G. M. (Ed.). (2019). *Afghan Resistance: The Politics Of Survival*. Routledge.

Fearon, J. D. (2004). Why do some civil wars last so much longer than others?. *Journal of peace research*, *41*(3), 275-301.

Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American political science review*, *97*(1), 75-90.

Giustozzi, A. (2000). *War, politics and society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*. C. Hurst and Georgetown University Press.

Giustozzi, A. (2009). *Empires of mud*. St. Martin's Press.

Giustozzi, A. (2021). Afghanistan after the US Withdrawal. *asia policy*, *16*(3), 57-74.

Grau, L. W. (1996). *The Bear Went Over the Mountain: Soviet Combat Tactics in Afghanistan*.

Headquarters, Department of the Army. (2000, November). *Mountain Operations.* Retrieved from https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-97-6.pdf

Hoodbhoy, P. (2005). Afghanistan and the genesis of global Jihad. *Peace Research*, *37*(1), 15-30.

Jacob, F., Kann, O., Danielsson, S. K., Shaw, J. M., Janz, N., Bales, P., Bishop, E., von Bremen, B., Clemis, M. G., Horncastle, J., Parker, L., Paz, Y., Steinberg, S., Svoljsak, P., & Demy, T. J. (2017). *War and Geography : The Spatiality of Organized Mass Violence* (F. Jacob, S. K. Danielsson, H. Kümper, J. M. Shaw, & S. Müller, Eds.; 1st ed.). Brill.

Jalali, A. A., & Grau, L. W. (1999). *The other side of the mountain: Mujahideen tactics in the Soviet-Afghan war*. US Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division.

Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The logic of violence in civil war*. Cambridge University Press.

Kilcullen, D. (2006). Counter-insurgency Redux. *Survival*, *48*(4), 111-130. doi: 10.1080/00396330601062790

Klimburg, M. (2001). The situation in Nuristan. *Central Asian Survey*, *20*(3), 383-390.

Kohler, T., Hurni, H., Wiesmann, U., & Kläy, A. (2004). Mountain infrastructure: access, communication, and energy. *Key Issues for Mountain Areas; Price, M., Jansky, L., Iatsenia, A., Eds*, 38-62.

Körner, C., Urbach, D., & Paulsen, J. (2021). Mountain definitions and their consequences. *Alpine Botany*, *131*(2), 213-217.

Lamb, R. D. (2008). Ungoverned areas and threats from safe havens. *Final Report of the Ungoverned Areas Project Prepared for the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy*.

Mason, T. D., & Fett, P. J. (1996). How civil wars end: A rational choice approach. *Journal of conflict resolution*, *40*(4), 546-568.

Moran, D. (2016). Geography and strategy. *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 255-272.

Panjshir Resistance Holds as Taliban yet to Name Government. (2024, April 18). *Asharq Al Awsat*. Retrieved from https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3170841/panjshir-resistance-holds-taliban-yet-name-government

Rustad, S. C. A., Rød, J. K., Larsen, W., & Gleditsch, N. P. (2008). Foliage and fighting: Forest resources and the onset, duration, and location of civil war. *Political Geography*, *27*(7), 761-782.

Schulhofer-Wohl, J. (2020). *Quagmire in civil war*. Cambridge University Press.

Schutte, S. (2017). Geographic determinants of indiscriminate violence in civil wars. *Conflict management and peace science*, *34*(4), 380-405.

Scott, J. C. (2009). *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.

Shamir, M., & Sagiv-Schifter, T. (2006). Conflict, identity, and tolerance: Israel in the Al-Aqsa intifada. *Political Psychology*, *27*(4), 569-595.

Shroder, J. F. (1981). Physical resources and the development of Afghanistan. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *16*, 36-63.

Snethlage, M.A., Geschke, J., Spehn, E.M., Ranipeta, A., Yoccoz, N.G., Körner, Ch., Jetz, W., Fischer, M. & Urbach, D. (2022a). A hierarchical inventory of the world's mountains for global comparative mountain science. *Nature Scientific Data*. doi: 10.1038/s41597-022-01256-y.

Snethlage, M.A., Geschke, J., Spehn, E.M., Ranipeta, A., Yoccoz, N.G., Körner, Ch., Jetz, W., Fischer, M. & Urbach, D. (2022b). GMBA Mountain Inventory v2. *GMBA-EarthEnv*. doi: 10.48601/earthenv-t9k2-1407.

Sun, T. (1994). *The art of war*. Hachette UK.

Tannheimer, M., & Lechner, R. (2022). History of mountain warfare. *Health Promotion & Physical Activity*, *21*(4), 46-53.

United Nations Statistics Division. (2023, May 15). *SDG indicator metadata.* Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-15-04-02.pdf

United States Central Intelligence Agency. (1982) *Afghanistan*. *[Map]* Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/item/83692437/.