

The book raises methodological issues, because the interviews are not even remotely contemporaneous with the events they describe. Maurer's subjects were interviewed 10 to 40 years after their experiences in Vietnam. This long interval makes it impossible to discern to what extent those interviewed have modified their views as a result of the war's outcome or in what ways the passage of time has altered their recollection of events. It is hard to conceive that the author's subjects were as discerning and prescient in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as they were in the 1980s when interviewed. For these reasons, the historian needs to handle these interviews cautiously. It would be imprudent to accept them unreservedly as accurate historical documents.

Yet, these interviews matter. They offer deeply felt personal insights. The perception and eloquence frequently expressed in them reveal how deeply the war still affects many of those who served. My advice is to skip Maurer's introduction and investigate the interviews.

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Bocharov, Gennady Nickolayevich. *Russian Roulette: Afghanistan Through Russian Eyes*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

The author of this book is a correspondent for one of the more progressive and civilized Soviet publications, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* or *Literary Gazette*. He was in and out of Afghanistan throughout the war and produced some of the better — which is to say, less mendacious and rubbishy — coverage of that miserable event. During the Brezhnev period *Literaturnaya Gazeta* was the most progressive — which is to say, least abominable — Soviet paper probably because it was the publication targeted at the intelligentsia.

The book is structured as a series of anecdotes in which the correspondent's experiences are alternated with stories from the point of view of Soviet soldiers. These anecdotes resemble short stories and each one points a moral. The morals are without exception depressing. It was a truly horrible and pointless war in which, evidently, everyone involved knew that all the officially-given reasons for it were lies. In one section Bocharov sets out to find out whether anyone knows what the war was really about. An Afghan refugee doesn't know: there is war there, that's all. A Soviet private soldier doesn't know: he was drafted, dropped down in the middle of it and was told that it was his "internationalist duty." But he doesn't know what that is either — not even his political officer could give him a satisfactory explanation. Finally Bocharov asks General Gromov, the commander: he doesn't know either; Bocharov should ask someone else. No one today will attempt to

answer the question — it was another part of the disaster wished upon the people by Brezhnev and company and the ideological imperative. Indeed, these days, the Afghanistan disaster has rather been buried together with the other disasters. It's another pile of skulls to be set beside all the others.

The Afghanistan war did turn out to be the Soviet Union's Vietnam — it was an unsuccessful war, with no purpose that anyone can convincingly defend, a horrible war with numerous atrocities and, like Vietnam, the war has given to the Soviet population a great unwillingness to do it again. Not the least of the reasons why the Soviet government has committed itself to return all the troops stationed outside the borders is because of the Afghanistan war. Bocharov's book explains some of the reasons in the stories he tells.

The book is not a history: few dates are given and the only way the episodes can be approximately timed is by internal evidence; but history is not the point. It is a book of impressions; a book which tries to show the effect of the war on the Soviets involved: nothing is said about the suffering and destruction they visited on the Afghans except in passing. We learn a little about the facts of the war and of these the most interesting are the descriptions of the censorship and control system. At one point Bocharov discovers that the censorship, like the economy, is run on a norm or quota system. One of his stories, about a wounded soldier saving the life of an officer, is spiked. When he protests he is told that the quota for stories about wounded soldiers is four in the next six months for the central Moscow press and that he has already, in an earlier story, taken one of the slots. Bocharov describes the guiding philosophy of the censorship as that of reversed binoculars — diminish the negative. Stories about Soviet-Afghan cooperation can always be printed, even if it's the same story over and over again; atrocity stories never.

As the official line was that the Soviet "limited contingent" had been invited in by the Kabul government, beating the CIA by days or hours, no journalist could go wrong by repeating this as often as he wanted. The Soviet press pumped this stuff out endlessly. The Armed Forces paper told us in 1985 that US imperialism started meddling immediately after the "April [1978] Revolution"; the paper of the *Kosomol* told us that the Soviets in Afghanistan were defending Ukraine and Siberia. CIA involvement was eagerly claimed: "bandits" using chemical weapons (how could Afghans use chemical weapons? They're not something that one carries around in a hip pocket) were, of course, trained by US instructors. Sometimes they were trained by British or Germans or French or Saudis; but, in all cases, sinister foreign enemies were behind the resistance. Bocharov's book makes it clear that the easy way to do well as a correspondent in Afghanistan was to make these stories up. No one was ever going to take you to task for inventing another CIA-inspired and supplied terrorist scattering explosives in schoolyards or another rocket with an American-made orphanage-seeking warhead.

Bocharov himself admits to having constructed stories too, and he intimates that everyone he met — reporters, diplomats and generals — was busily telling the Kremlin what they knew it wanted to hear. In any case, nothing else had any chance of getting out of Afghanistan. He also makes it

clear that nearly everyone knew that they were participating in a falsehood. The soldiers he speaks of soon realize that they have been lied to and he paints a picture of young Soviet draftees as sheep pushed to slaughter and being slaughtered by rulers who didn't care, weren't told the truth and didn't want to hear it anyway. He offers no explanation why the war continued for half its time under Gorbachev except to observe that wars are much easier to start than they are to finish.

If *perestroika* can be compared to a river, the Afghan war was surely one of the streams that fed it. The lies and the suffering were one thing; they were bad enough but there was one thing worse. There had been greater suffering and plenty of lies in the Great Patriotic War but, at least when that was over, people could say what it had been for.

The book is typical of the revisionism going on in the USSR today. The publishers do not indicate whether the book was published in the USSR but it doesn't matter if it wasn't because similar things are published all the time now. The Soviets are picking through the trash of the past trying to find out how they got to the precipice. Bocharov gives the Western reader an impression of the limitless disgust and shame that the contemplation of their country's past causes the contemporary Soviet citizen freed at last to read and speak a few words of truth. It is not a surprise that so many of them are seeking an answer in the pre-Bolshevik period when things seem to them, after seventy years of Communism, to have been cleaner and simpler.

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*Note: the opinions expressed in this review are those of the author and are not to be taken as those of the Department of National Defence or the Government of Canada.

Patman, Robert G. *The Soviet Union in the Horn of Africa. The Diplomacy of Intervention and Disengagement.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

[Editor's note: This review was written several months before the collapse of the Marxist-Leninist regime in Ethiopia.]

Robert Patman notes that his study was originally written as a doctoral dissertation. It is a densely detailed, rich, but occasionally "massive" one, not always a "good read," especially for those not as familiar with the regional politics of the Horn as the author is. But detail is supplemented with useful and valuable chapters on the concepts of intervention and disengagement.

The author asks why the Soviets shifted support exclusively to Ethiopia and away from Somalia in the Ogaden conflict of 1977-78. If it could