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Milestone: NATO's Occupation of Afghanistan as Long as Soviet One

By Jason Ditz

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9 years and 50 days – that is how long the Soviet Union tried, and failed, to successfully occupy Afghanistan and install a pro-Soviet regime. From their late 1979 invasion to their withdrawal in early 1989, Soviet troops struggled against an Islamist insurgency that eventually toppled the pro-Soviet Najibullah government and sent the Soviet Union itself spiraling into the depths of bankruptcy.

9 years and 50 days is also [how long the US-led NATO occupation of Afghanistan has been going on now](#). In much the same way, from the late 2001 invasion to the current day, NATO troops have struggled against an Islamist insurgency.

Of course by February 15, 1989, when the last Soviet troops left the nation, [the writing had been on the walls for many months, and the Gorbachev government had been withdrawing troops](#). By contrast NATO just cemented several more years of war in the country at its most recent summit, and officials are openly talking about keeping troops there for decades.

The Pentagon [insists that even the 2014 “transition” date](#) is at best an aspirational one, and other NATO officials have said there is no exit strategy of any kind in place. This suggests that NATO has designs on making their own failed occupation dramatically longer than the Soviet one, though despite the lack of exit strategy [a number of officials concede that this war is unlikely to have any better of an end result](#).

