

NATO troops in Afghanistan find themselves in a similar situation to the failed Soviet invasion and are also waging a campaign which is "unwinnable in military terms", according to a Ministry of Defence analysis reviewed at Telegraph.co.uk by Ben Farmer on 15 March 2013

Both the NATO campaign and the 1979 invasion were initially attempts to impose "ideology foreign to the Afghan people", whose aims were quickly dropped when they ran into difficulty.

NATO, like the Soviets, has been unable to "establish control over the country's borders and the insurgents' safe havens", or "protect the rural population", according to the paper written by retired officers for an internal MOD think tank.

"The [Soviet] 40th Army was unable to decisively defeat the Mujahideen while facing no existential threat itself, a situation that precisely echoes [the Nato coalition's] predicament".

As combat troops leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the country will again be left "with a severely damaged and very weak economic base", reliant for years on vast sums of international aid.

The paper, Lessons From the Soviet Transition in Afghanistan, was prepared for the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), to provoke internal debate and challenge current military thinking.

The MOD said it did not represent the government's position, or "any belief within the MOD that the Nato campaign is 'unwinnable'." But its conclusion that there are "an extraordinary number" of parallels with the doomed Russian intervention will make uneasy reading for politicians. The campaign has cost nearly 450 British lives and billions of pounds.

World opinion had judged both "as failed interventions" and both Nato and the Soviets had faced "increasing domestic and financial pressure to abandon the enterprise", the paper said.

The eventual success of the Nato withdrawal from Afghanistan "is likely to be judged on the same criteria as those used objectively to judge the Soviet transition", including "the longevity and effectiveness of the incumbent central government".

A spokesman for the MOD said that "in contrast to the Soviet experience, the international community has committed to long-term support for Afghans as they shape their country over the coming years".

"We are in Afghanistan to protect the UK's national security by helping Afghans to take control of their own. We are not, and never have been, trying to build a perfect Afghanistan – rather one that does not again provide safe haven for international terrorists. We have also always been clear that the situation in Afghanistan will not be solved by military means alone."