



Examining the Implication of the Afghan-Soviet War on Pakistan

Abstract: *The Soviet-Afghan War was a crucial event in the Cold War era that had far-reaching implications on global politics and regional stability. The article explores the history of the conflict, including the political situation in Afghanistan prior to the invasion, Soviet strategies, and the significance of the war. The article also sheds light on the foreign policies of the United States during the Cold War and its role in the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Furthermore, the article delves into the role played by Pakistan in the Soviet-Afghan war and its impact on regional dynamics. The article provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of international and regional factors that shaped the outcome of the Soviet-Afghan War.*

Key Words: Soviet-Afghan War, Cold War, US Foreign Policy, Afghanistan, Pakistan

Introduction

The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union on December 25, 1979, began what would become known as the Soviet-Afghan War and would continue on until February 1989. The communist government of Afghanistan requested assistance from the Soviet government in its fight against anti-communist Muslim militants. The Soviet government responded to this request by taking action. During the conflict, the government of Pakistan, led by President General Zia-ul-Haq, together with the assistance of the United States, provided backing to a group of rebel forces known as the Mujahadeen. These forces fought against the army of the Soviet Union. The United States of America, in conjunction with the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan,

provided funding for the Mujahadeen, which is often regarded as the most extensive and protracted covert operation conducted by the United States. The United States portrayed its support for the Mujahadeen as a response to the shock and horror caused by the entrance of SU in Afghanistan as well as a way to control the sovereignty of Afghanistan, its territorial integrity, and religious freedom. This was done in order to justify the US's support for the Mujahadeen. The war resulted in an astounding 1.5 million civilian losses, as well as deaths among Mujahadeen and Soviet forces, and it forced millions of Afghans to flee their homes. The withdrawal of Soviet forces led to civil conflict in Afghanistan, which in turn paved the way

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for the Taliban to seize control of the country in 1996. (Hickman, [2018](#))

The crisis in Kabul was brought to the attention of the world by Pakistan, and Pakistan was at the forefront of international efforts to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan's role in these efforts was critical. Without the support of Pakistan, Afghanistan would not have been able to mount an effective resistance against the Soviet Union, and the country would have had little chance of emerging victorious. The government of Pakistan provided a safe haven for the Mujahadeen and helped enable the passage of weapons from other nations to support the Mujahadeen's efforts in the struggle that was taking place in Afghanistan. Pakistan gave aid to the Mujahadeen because it believed that the Soviet Union posed a threat to its national security. The Soviets intended to travel via Afghanistan and Pakistan on their route to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. This put Pakistan in the line of fire for a potential invasion. In addition to this, Pakistan was also under constant attack from India, a nation that was a Soviet Union ally at the time. Due to the difficult environment in which it is located, Pakistan was forced to make significant decisions in order to safeguard its territory. In addition, Pakistan extended its borders to allow millions of Afghan refugees who were looking for a safe haven to enter the country (Saikal, 2012).

Soviet-Afghan War: History, Strategies, and Significance

Cold War

The Soviet Union had a strict communist regime inspired by Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. While the United States identified itself as a capitalist and democratic state. The US opposed the Soviet's communist ideology and its foreign policy of expansionism, which threatened US economic and strategic interests. Both

states entered into the vicious cycle of competition to expand their influence and achieve global hegemony. US and Soviet Union never went into direct armed conflict against each other, instead, they waged proxy wars, to counter other's influence, in Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, and Yemen, and carried out other violent conflicts throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Hickman, [2018](#)) .

Soviet Policies during Cold War

It was intended to expand its territorial as well as ideological influence all around the globe to oppose capitalism. The pattern of their policies during the cold war changed with time. During the 1950s, spreading communist ideology was the core of Soviet foreign policy as many analysts argued. The Soviet Union was supporting communist parties militarily as well as ideologically all around the world. The Soviet Union intervenes in Vietnam, Korea, and Afghanistan to support communist parties in their war against anti-communists. Later on, in 1970, the Soviet policies of confrontation towards the west changed. The armed race was interspersed with arms control agreements, former enemies became friends. While tensions between the Soviets and their communist allies such as China and Czechoslovakia were increasing. Gorbachev, with his New Political Thinking, reaffirmed the non-intervention and emphasized norms of humanity. Gorbachev's policies of non-interventionism resulted in the collapse of communist regimes in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary and a democratic system emerged in these states followed by the reunification of East and West Germany in 1989. Meanwhile, Gorbachev's reforms weakened the Soviet communist party, and the power is shifted to the constituent government of the Soviet bloc (Julie, 2016).

The Political Conundrum in Afghanistan

Afghanistan had a lengthy history of political instability and military conflict prior to the Soviet-Afghan war. From 1933 to 1973, the country was ruled by King Muhammad Zahir Shah. In July 1973, this monarchy was overthrown by Daoud Khan, who proclaimed himself the first President of Afghanistan. Daoud first aligned himself with the Soviets but then he realized that if he only became independent of the Soviet Union his government would miss the opportunity to gain aid from non-Soviet states. As a result, in 1975 Daoud Khan distanced its government from the Soviet Union and became an ally with anti-Soviet countries such as Pak, SA, and the US (Julie, 2016).

Afghan people were unfamiliar with communism and its principles and saw it as a non-religious, incompatible ideology with Islamic beliefs. Consequently, the opposition to the Taraki government began to grow and Afghanistan fell into civil unrest. In September 1979, Hafizullah Amin, the party comrade of Taraki, was because of deadly rivalry ousted him from office. The US secretly provided aid to anti-Taraki insurgencies which set the stage for multiple uprisings along the country. With this extreme civil unrest, Soviet secretary general Yuri Andropov said "The Soviet Union must act decisively to replace Amin and shore up Afghan communism" (Khalidi, 1991).

On December 25, 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, assassinated Hafizullah Amin, and installed a new communist regime under the leadership of Babrak Karmal. Following the invasion, various anti-communist and Islamic rebel groups in Afghanistan emerged to form anti-communist mujahadeen. With the help of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the US-funded millions of dollars in aid and also provide military support to mujahadeen,

which enabled them to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan in 1989 (Hickman, 2018).

US Foreign Policy during Cold War

During the cold war, the major aim of US foreign policy was to spread its influence and power while preventing the spread of communism. The United States adopted the strategy of containment, the policy first presented by George F. Kennan in 1947, which states that communism would go, or else it would spread to neighboring countries. The policy of containment was adopted by President Henry Truman as a part of his Truman Doctrine in 1947, in which he states that the US foreign policy would support people whose sovereignty and security will be threatened by the Soviet Union. The US sent its troops to Vietnam and backed South Korea, in her battles against communists, as a part of its containment policy. This strategy of containment was also cited as the official reference behind US support for Mujahadeen.

Significance of the Afghan-Soviet War

The US and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had a drastic and long-term effect. Millions of lives were lost and millions of Afghans were displaced. The conflict also solidified the concept of Jihad, created the breeding ground for terrorism, provided the place for Al Qaeda, and gave a way to their rise. Taliban, the veteran fighters of the Afghan-Soviet Jihad, struggled for power after the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Ultimately, Taliban leader Mullah Umar succeeded to seize power in 1996 and promised stability and peace. But the Taliban regime was very brutal toward its citizens, especially toward women. Mahmood Madami in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* described the Taliban as "Tragically, though, the Taliban, born out of a brutalized society, was to brutalize it further". On the other hand, the Soviet

Union never recovered from the financial loss because of the war, which resulted in the fall of the Empire in 1991 (Roy, 2013).

US Foreign Policy in Afghan-Soviet War

USA's Role in Afghanistan during the Soviet Invasion

The popular belief is that the US started funding Mujahadeen after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan because they wanted Afghanistan to protect its sovereignty. But contrary to this belief, the US provoked the Soviets to invade Afghanistan. US foreign policy during the cold war was not always defensive, as Henry Kissinger in July 1973, states that "Our strategy has been to create an environment within which the Soviets will be forced to take hostile acts, if they do, from as peaceful a base as possible." Eight years after the Afghan-Soviet war, Robert Gates who was the senior director of the CIA revealed US support for mujahadeen. They have justified its actions and said that, the US government "knowingly increased the probability" that the Soviet Union would attack Afghanistan. Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski in his interview with a French newspaper defended the US decision of supporting Mujahadeen by saying, "That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of luring the Russians into the Afghan trapp. We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war". Despite these confessions, the perspective that US aid to the mujahadeen began as the reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan still pervades in the public memory of the Soviet-Afghan war. The US still portrays that the Afghan-Soviet war was a Cold War catastrophe for them and they were blindsided by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Mamdani, 2006)

US Support for Mujahadeen

US aid for tribalist and Islamic uprisings begin as early as July 1979. Between 1979 and 1992 US almost funded \$3 billion two different factions of Mujahideen fighting against Soviet

Union. The US sent various armed training materials along with a well amount of budget, and drugs in and out of Afghanistan via Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence agency (ISI). In the next years, US aid for mujahadeen increased steadily. Till 1985, Mujahideen received almost \$250 million annually to buy food, medicine and weapons. Mathew Euralker, an American director for Afghan American Educational Fund, estimated that almost \$380 million to \$400 million worth weapons and other military hardware were sent to the Mujahadeen. US government sent Buffalo guns, night-vision goggles and advanced telescopes to Mujahadeen via ISI In 1986, to turn the tide, the US gave mujahadeen Stringer anti-aircraft missiles, which crippled the Soviet air power and ended the war (Gates, 2008).

Strategic Values of the Afghan-Soviet War to the US

The United States was determined to maintain the resistance of Mujahadeen to prevent soviet victory. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan poses serious threats to the US interests in the region. Soviet annexation of Afghanistan would allow Moscow to reach its old-age goal of having access to the warm waters and come closer to the oil fields of the Middle East. US strategy was to engage the soviets in a long, costly war and made it very costly. Robert Gates, former director of CIA, states that "there was value in keeping the Afghan insurgency going, [and] sucking the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire." US government aimed to intensify the conflict to inflict as much damage to the soviets as possible, so that, they could diminish the soviet influence in the region and shatter its

dream of reaching warm waters (Ruland, [2016](#)).

Pakistan's Role in the War

The Soviet Union's hold on Afghanistan was weakened thanks in large part to Pakistan's assistance to the Afghan Mujahideen, which ultimately resulted in the Soviet troops leaving Afghanistan in 1989. This result was viewed as a big Cold War success for the United States and its allies. By providing training, funding, and arms supply to the Mujahideen, Pakistan played an important part in the resistance effort against the Soviet-backed Afghan government. The Pakistani intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), played a key role in coordinating these efforts with the support of the United States and other Western countries. As a result of Pakistan's involvement, the Afghan resistance was able to put up a formidable fight against the Soviet troops, which ultimately contributed to their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It is historically proved that Pakistan, under the leadership of President Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, supported Mujahadeen in their war against the Soviets. Without the help of Pakistan, there could have been no effective resistance of Afghans and there are few chances to draw the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), with the aid of the CIA, organized operations for Mujahadeen, and provided them with arms, training, money, information, and drugs.

In exchange for providing the US with intelligence on Soviet actions in Afghanistan, Pakistan received economic and military aid worth billions of dollars to support the Mujahadeen. CIA, along with Zia-ul-Haq, portrayed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a war against Islam and recruited young men from Muslim countries. CIA supported and helped ISI's mission of recruiting religiously motivated volunteers from all around the Muslim

world. Ahmed Rashid writes that "With the active encouragement of the CIA and Pakistan's ISI, who wanted to turn the Afghan jihad into a global war waged by all Muslim states against the Soviet Union, some 35,000 Muslim radicals from 40 Islamic countries joined Afghanistan's fight between 1982 and 1992. Tens of thousands more came to study in Pakistani madrassas. Eventually, more than 100,000 foreign Muslim radicals were directly influenced by the Afghan jihad." (Weinbaum, 1991)

Pakistan supported Afghan Mujahadeen in their war against the Soviets because the Pakistani government had fulfilled its objectives during the war. Pakistan was worried about the possibility of attack from the Soviets through Afghanistan from the North and from Indians through the South an ally of the Soviet Union. There were also deep concerns within Pakistan that Moscow would ignite an ethnic separatist movement in Baluchistan through material support. The President of Pakistan, Gen Zia-ul-Haq, helped his regime. Zia's rule would have fallen apart without the war in Afghanistan and the outside support it received, especially from the United States. Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, president of Pakistan, positioned the nation as a "front-line-state" and protector of Islam against Soviet-sponsored communism, which aided him in obtaining financial support from powerful nations and establishing his rule. The ultimate objective was to establish a post-war Afghanistan in order to establish the Durand Line as a recognized international boundary. With these goals in mind, Pakistan supported Mujahadeen during the Soviet-Afghan War (Ahmed, 2011).

US-Pakistan Dynamic during the Afghan War

US government recognized that it requires close ties with the Pakistani Government and ISI because, without a close relationship

with Pakistan, it is impossible for them to provide aid in by providing military equipment to the Mujahadeen fighting against the Soviets. To diminish Soviet influence in the region and safeguard its interests, the US government offered Zia a \$3.2 billion aid package for economic and military assistance, which he accepted delightfully. US president Ronald Reagan recognized Pakistan as a key their key ally. John Cooley in his book *Unholy Wars* writes that "Pakistani support for the operation was the most vital component, as its geographical and ethnic ties to Afghanistan provided a secure base to flood the country with weaponry. The CIA was to supply arms, finance, and training for the Mujahadeen, but it must be provided through Pakistan and not directly from the CIA". Cooley further writes about US and Zia strategies of aid provision: "Zia placed three absolute conditions for allowing shipment of the arms. First, the countries concerned were to maintain absolute silence about the shipments. Second, arms and other war supplies were to be shipped to Pakistan by the fastest available means. Third, the shipments by air were to be limited to two planeloads per week". Thus, Pakistan played a very important role in arming and training Afghan Mujahadeen to fight Soviet Military forces with the aid of the United States (The New York Times, [1989](#)).

The End Game

The US, Britain military Intelligence (MI-6), and the ISI also sent armed forces into the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, which shaped the war differently in the favor of Afghan Mujahadeen. With the anti-aircraft missiles used by Mujahadeen, Russian Air Force continued to lose their warplanes daily. With so much economic and military loss, the Soviets withdraw from Afghanistan in February 1989. The Soviet Union could not bear this economic and

military loss and got disintegrated in 1991 and fifteen new democratic states emerged. Thus, the United States succeeded in its mission of damaging the Soviet Union economically and politically (Coll, [2005](#)).

Meanwhile, in Pakistan any immediate threats to Pakistan's sovereignty from foreign military became remote. Zia died in a plane crash in 1988 and after two months of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Benazir Bhutto was democratically elected as a Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bhutto made new Afghan Policies and move towards a political solution of the situation and crippling the wings of the Army. In May 1989, Bhutto dismissed ISI General Hamid Gul from his position. Dismal of Gul by Bhutto was seen critically in that Bhutto is struggling to assert her control domestically. However, the ousting of the guys did not lead to the expected modification of Afghan policies, and the Army strongly denied any restriction of ISI's power. Bhutto appointed General Shamsur Rahman Kallu as the head of ISI, who was never more than a figurehead. The ISI and Afghan policy was directly controlled by Pakistani military head General Aslam Baig and he assured Mujahadeen that there would be no longer a policy change. General Gul, after resigning from his post, continued to be consulted by the Military on important matters (Khan, [2021](#)).

Conclusion

Throughout the course of the Cold War, the Soviet Union engaged in a number of different programs with the goals of extending its sphere of influence and advancing the cause of communism, not only within its borders but also in those of other nations all over the world. Throughout the time of the Cold War, one of the most important focuses of Soviet foreign policy was to advance the cause of communism in other parts of the world. The Soviet Union was under the impression that communism

represented a political and economic system that was better than capitalism, and they considered it as their responsibility to spread this philosophy to other nations. The Soviet Union provided financial, military, and logistical support to communist parties and revolutionary organizations in countries all over the world, assisting them in their endeavors to capture the power and establish communist regimes. These parties and movements were supported by the Soviet Union. In addition to advancing communism in other parts of the world, the Soviet Union also implemented policies with the goal of preserving its authority over its own population. The Soviet government did all in its power to stifle dissent and resistance to the governing Communist Party. This included maintaining tight control over the media, education, and other institutions of Soviet society. This included the use of repression, monitoring, and censorship, as well as the use of propaganda to promote the messages and ideas of the government.

The pursuit of strategic objectives and military might was another essential component of Soviet policy throughout the duration of the Cold War. In order to combat what it saw as a danger posed by the United States and its allies, the Soviet Union worked to keep a robust military presence and forge strategic relationships with other nations throughout the world. This included the construction of military facilities in foreign nations, the development of nuclear weapons, and the pursuit of space travel as a means of displaying technological superiority. In general, the Soviet Union's foreign policy during the Cold War was defined by a mix of aggressive expansionism, internal repression, and an emphasis on military and strategic goals.

This was the case throughout the conflict. Even though the Soviet Union was ultimately unsuccessful in its efforts to spread communism to other countries and maintain control over its own people, the legacy of Soviet policies during the Cold War continues to shape the geopolitical landscape of the world today. This is due in large part to the fact that the Cold War was fought between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

Despite the fact that Pakistan was able to safeguard itself from the possibility of an invasion by the Soviet Union, the country had to pay a very high price for its participation in the war. Zia-ul-efforts Haq's to Islamize Pakistan were directly responsible for the country's descent into religious divisiveness, Islamic radicalism, and extremism. Polarization along religious lines and other forms of extremism are the primary contributors to Pakistan's stagnant political and economic development. ISI was able to more than double its strength and became a religiously politicized tool of the Pakistani government and military as a direct result of the war between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union. The involvement of Pakistan's armed forces in the political process is considerably more extensive than before. This conflict gave rise, in the contemporary era, to the concept of jihad, which would eventually evolve into the phenomenon of worldwide terrorism. Moreover, the struggle helped to solidify the groundwork for the establishment of Al-Qaeda. Muslims are the ones who suffered the most from this American-initiated Jihad, but for some reason, they are the ones who are depicted as terrorists all across the world.

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