

# Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: The United States' Aid to the Mujahadeen and the Jihad against the Soviets

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On a July morning in 1979, the day before the United States' anniversary of independence, a Georgian man stood solemnly in his office, hands in his pockets, peering out across the south lawn. The heat outside was a stifling mix of humidity and stagnant winds, emotions of what he had just done hung heavy in the air. As he turned around to face the cavalcade of aides and secretaries bustling through their business, he appeared unyielding and determined. Moments prior President Jimmy Carter had signed a presidential mandate that would authorize the funding of anti-communist guerilla fighters in Afghanistan known as the Mujahideen. The plan had been put together and forwarded by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. This arrangement would be known as Operation Cyclone and would lead Soviet Russia into its own particular version of America's embarrassing Vietnam Conflict, through augmenting the resistance of the Mujahideen, Muslim fundamentalist fighters who harbored no love for the Communists.<sup>1</sup> The combat between the two superpowers during the Cold War would be catalyzed in the shadows over the land and lives of a people that many Americans at the time did not know existed. America seized the opportunity to embarrass their global competitor in a costly military loss, as well as inflict very real damage to Soviet military might through the direct attacks of the Mujahideen. Unfortunately an unseen consequence would ferment in the region after the war, stemming from the legacy that United States' foreign policy left behind: righteous indignation, interference with foreign governments, and inserting ourselves as the world's moral character despite violent resistance from America's former allies.

Some five months after Independence Day, during an address to Congress, the President angrily announced to the gathered crowd, "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War."<sup>2</sup> In a speech later that day, addressed to the Nation, President Carter blasted the invasion as a "callous violation of international law and the United Nations Charter." Fifty nations, he went on, had petitioned the U.N. Security Council to condemn the acts of the Soviet Union. Carter also delayed the United States Senate from ratifying the SALT II treaty, and reduced international trade on

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<sup>1</sup> John Prados, "Notes on the CIA's Secret War in Afghanistan," *The Journal of American History* (September 2002): 466.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Urban, *War in Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 56.

technology, fishing privileges, and grain exports, as well as threatened a United States boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics to be held in Moscow. The President also vowed assistance in the form of food, military equipment, and other necessities to Pakistan and other nations in the region; showing definite willingness and determination to halt the aggression of the Soviets in attempting to crush the Afghanistan resistance. Carter ended his speech simply saying: "The United States will meet its responsibilities. Thank you very much."<sup>3</sup> The Soviet invasion that President Carter had referred to had taken place in the evening on December 27, 1979 when Soviet troops quickly assaulted key government installations in the Afghan capital city of Kabul.<sup>4</sup>

### **Political Background of Afghanistan**

Political and religious turmoil has always plagued Afghanistan, much of this resulting from military coups amongst rival political factions. During the middle part of the twentieth century, it was realized that the socio-economic system ruling Afghanistan was a two handed institution, based on a feudal society on one side, and imperialism on the other.<sup>5</sup> This condition led many politicians in Afghanistan to see a need for change, but also proved to be one of the greatest obstacles standing in the way of progress. People had become loyal to their local landlords, which made unity and centralized power difficult to achieve.

Afghanistan's political leadership rested with a king whose very actions gave rise to the circumstances that spurred a growth of Marxist thought. King Zahir Shah aimed to turn the traditional dictatorship into a growing constitutional monarchy but decisively failed due to the lack of preparedness of the primitive Afghan country, the king's own hesitancy over permitting the development of necessary institutions for a functioning government, and administrative incompetence that compounded economic difficulties.<sup>6</sup> On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1965, Nur Mohammad Taraki and a group of Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries grouped together in Taraki's home to form the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The immediate goal of the party was to

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<sup>3</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan: Actions to be Taken by the United States" (Presidential address, delivered to the Nation, Washington, D.C., January 4, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 95.

<sup>5</sup> Beverly Male, *Revolutionary Afghanistan*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, N.C., Duke Press Policy Studies) 32.

form a socialist society in Afghanistan based on the principles of Marx and Lenin.<sup>7</sup> The PDPA sought to modernize the government of Afghanistan and bring the people into an international world through education and political action. Most of their recruiting was made amongst the already-educated: the students and teachers. As the PDPA grew in members it required, as many Communist parties did, an expansion of leadership in order to maintain unity amongst ever widening political gaps and the PDPA splintered into competing factions.

In 1973, King Mohammad Zahir Shah's cousin, Mohammad Daoud, staged a non-violent coup with the support of the PDPA. Daoud had taken power while Zahir was on a trip to Rome<sup>8</sup> and quickly implemented many politically-isolating changes as well as attempts at eliminating Islamic extremism in favor of Soviet-leaning policies. Daoud's progressive policies upset the highly ritualistic society that permeated Afghan culture, as well as contributed to further economic downfall amongst the Afghan people. Under Daoud's rule Afghanistan floundered, and came short of the changes necessary to bring Afghanistan out of the failing feudal system due to his politically repressive and economically over-reaching plans. Many historians see the end of Daoud's friendship with the Soviets as the result of a crucial conversation between the president of Afghanistan and Secretary Brezhnev of the Soviet Union. During the exchange, Brezhnev had acted the part of the insidious benefactor demanding payback for years of assistance in order to control policies in Afghanistan. The plan backfired and Daoud exclaimed in anger, "Afghans are masters in their own house and no foreign country could tell them how to run their own affairs."<sup>9</sup> This caused Daoud to look to the west for assistance in the form of financial and military support instead of continuing the long tradition of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

In April of 1978 Daoud was killed during a violent military coup d'état known as the Saur Revolution. The PDPA, who had been isolated and left out of mainstream governance, seized the reins of power and became the very definition of revolution, changing all manners of Afghan life. The PDPA implemented distinctive changes, many of which ran in the face of traditional Islamic ideology; they changed the national flag, painted school buildings red, encouraged education and rights for women, cancelled all rural debts, and began to impose land redistribution measures that upset the clan and tribal system of the

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<sup>7</sup> Male. *Revolutionary Afghanistan*, 36

<sup>8</sup> David Loyn, *In Afghanistan: Two Hundred years of British, Russian and American Occupation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), 136.

<sup>9</sup> Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*, 66.

Afghan country society.<sup>10</sup> The abrupt changes sparked by the use of force and alienating government tactics drove a growing resentment amongst the rural population. As events spiraled out of control, the Islamist extremists now had a readily identifiable enemy in the PDPA government. The communist shock tactics of governance were a threat to their ways of life and it was necessary to conduct a resistance protecting their conservative values against democracy, progress, the education of girls and godless communism.<sup>11</sup> As 1978 began to draw to a close and upheaval in the countryside continued, the PDPA was near collapse. The party was again split between factions, and the Mujahideen were gaining strength. On December 5<sup>th</sup> of that year the newly established Khalqi regime made a grand public display of pro-Sovietism. The Soviet Union and the newly established Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) signed the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship, which would pledge the two countries to support one another in the “creation of an effective security system in Asia on the basis of joint efforts by all the countries of the continent.” The pact also contained a clause that would allow the DRA regime to petition the Soviet Union for military assistance.<sup>12</sup>

The Afghan leader Taraki made a call to the Soviet Union for military aid, dressed as Afghani soldiers so they would appear as troops who were ethnically similar to Afghans from the North. When the Soviets asked Taraki what had become of the thousands of Afghan soldiers who were sent to Moscow for training over the past ten years, he replied only that they had become “Muslim reactionaries.”<sup>13</sup> It took nine months for the Soviets to agree and when they arrived they found a decidedly different situation than previously anticipated. The leader Taraki had been overthrown and murdered by his advisor Hafizullah Amin, who was not in high favor with the Soviets. They believed him to be a stooge of the Central Intelligence Agency due to his time spent in the west, calling him an “ambitious, cruel, treacherous person...insincere and two-faced.”<sup>14</sup> The Soviet Union then looked to Babrak Karmal, a founder of the PDPA who had been cast aside as an ambassador, to place at the head of the Afghan Communist government. He was not given the high command until the invasion on December 27<sup>th</sup> after Amin had died in a firefight with Soviet attackers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, . 139.

<sup>12</sup> Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 140.

<sup>14</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion*, 95.

### US Foreign Policy: Why help the resistance?

“What Are the Soviets Doing in Afghanistan,” the title of a memorandum sent to National Security Advisor Brzezinski in September of 1979; the first line of the memo read: “Simply, we don’t know.”<sup>16</sup> In 1979 the United States held limited intelligence as far as the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan. Luckily for the U.S., the Soviets also had little intelligence as to what the United States was planning. U.S. intelligence at the time was worried that Taraki’s communist regime in Afghanistan might collapse, inviting the Soviets to intervene and strengthen the communist agenda there. This could lead to Pakistan, Iran, and maybe even China supporting the Afghan rebels. General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan, a political ‘thorn in the side’ of the Jimmy Carter administration, might then ask the United States to “openly oppose or deter any Soviet military thrust across Pakistan’s border.”<sup>17</sup> It was evident to the CIA and other intelligence agencies that the recent Soviet foreign policy, with regards to the Persian Gulf area, was that “Moscow’s activities are guided by geopolitical considerations (i.e., concern for ports and strategic access) and by the desire to counter Western (and Chinese) influence positions.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, “one long-term Soviet objective in the Middle-East was the creation of an anti-Israel, anti-American front composed of Gulf and Middle-East states under Soviet leadership.”<sup>19</sup>

The United States had become worried after the 1974 oil embargo on shipments to the west from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The embargo had caused gasoline prices in the United States and Western Europe to rise and had contributed to economic downturns across the Western world. This was a clear and present representation to the dependence of the free world’s interests in the Persian Gulf. The Middle Eastern country that continued to sell oil to the States despite the embargo was Iran. The Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had been a staunch supporter of the United States. This support eventually led to his downfall in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini, who installed a theocratic Islamic regime.<sup>20</sup> Less than a

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004) 48.

<sup>17</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 43.

<sup>18</sup> Carol R. Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and The Gulf in the 1980’s*. (Boulder, CO: Westview press 1989) 20.

<sup>19</sup> Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and The Gulf*, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Robert J. Pauly, Jr. *US Foreign Policy and the Persian Gulf: Safeguarding American Interests through Selective Multilateralism*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 28.

month later, the Soviets invaded neighboring Afghanistan. This caused many Western intelligence officials to feel concerned that Moscow might eventually attempt to control the Gulf through the use of force.<sup>21</sup> The aggression by the Soviets prompted President Carter, who had been troubled by the hostage situation caused by the Khomeini coup, to issue an extremely resolute address to Moscow: "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."<sup>22</sup>

As Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's preeminent "cold warrior," gathered intelligence and information about the building situation in Afghanistan, it grew apparent that the Soviets would act decisively in order to save the foundering communist government. In a memo to Carter entitled "Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan", Brzezinski spelled out his feelings of the Soviets possible invasion. Brzezinski voiced fears that the Soviet military power would crush the Afghans mercilessly, as they had done years before over the Hungarians in 1956 and the Czechs in 1968. Brzezinski wrote: "We should not be too sanguine about Afghanistan becoming a Soviet Vietnam. The guerrillas are badly organized and poorly led. They have no sanctuary, no organized army and no central government—all of which North Vietnam had. They have limited foreign support, in contrast to the enormous amount of arms that flowed to the Vietnamese from both the Soviet Union and China. The Soviets are likely to act decisively, unlike the U.S. which pursued in Vietnam a policy of 'inoculating' the enemy."<sup>23</sup>

Brzezinski had earlier laid out a plan for the CIA to channel medical kits and other aid to the Afghan resistance. "It is essential that Afghanistan's resistance continues," he wrote to Carter. "This means more money as well as arms shipments to the rebels, and some technical advice. To make the above possible we must both reassure Pakistan and encourage it to help the rebels. This will require a review of our policy toward Pakistan, more guarantees to it, more arms aid, and, alas, a decision that our security policy toward Pakistan cannot be dictated by our nonproliferation policy. We should encourage the Chinese to help the rebels also. We should concert with Islamic countries both in a propaganda campaign and in a covert action campaign to help the

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<sup>21</sup> Pauly, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Persian Gulf*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Jimmy Carter, "State of the Union" (Presidential address, delivered before a Joint Session of Congress, Washington, D.C., January 23, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 51.

rebels.”<sup>24</sup> In March of 1979, a Pakistani official related to a CIA executive officer while discussing assistance to the Mujahid rebels, that without a firm commitment from the United States, Pakistan “could not risk Soviet wrath.”<sup>25</sup>

Questions over the possible success and repercussions of enabling the Afghan insurgency were prevalent in the CIA and State departments. It was uncertain that any degree of support would be sufficient to halt the Soviet spread of influence into the oil rich Persian Gulf. In March of 1979, Deputy National Security Advisor David L. Aaron presided over a meeting between members of the State and Defense departments. During the meeting Department of Defense representative Walt Slocombe raised the question if there was any true value in keeping the Afghan insurgency afloat, “sucking the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire.”<sup>26</sup> Aaron responded by asking the key question: “Is there interest in maintaining and assisting the insurgency, or is the risk that we will provoke the Soviets too great?”<sup>27</sup>

This proved to be the main issue when attempting to funnel funds to the Mujahid fighters, what level of support could the United States figuratively get away with, without prompting an international response, or worse yet, Soviet accusations. Brzezinski said in a Top Secret memo to the White House, a week after Soviet invasion: “Our ultimate goal is the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, even if this is not attainable; we should make Soviet involvement as costly as possible.”<sup>28</sup>

From April to July of 1979, the SCC would decide on a wide range of possible aid to the resistance fighters. These included:

- A small-scale propaganda campaign publicizing Soviet activities in Afghanistan;
- Indirect financial assistance to the insurgents;
- Direct financial assistance to Afghan émigré groups to support their anti-Soviet, anti-regime activities;
- Nonlethal material assistance;
- Weapons support; and
- A range of training and support options<sup>29</sup>

The overall mood of the meetings was heavily intent for an active role in assisting fighters, but only through nonlethal assistance.

<sup>24</sup> Coll. *Ghost Wars*, 51

<sup>25</sup> Robert Gates. *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How they Won the Cold War*. (New York : Simon & Schuster 1996) 144.

<sup>26</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 145.

<sup>27</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

Eventually the plan signed by Jimmy Carter on July 3<sup>rd</sup> would provide monetary aid by the CIA covertly through Pakistan to assist the Mujahid rebels. Initially, around half a million dollars was allocated for assistance, almost all of the money being drawn within six weeks.<sup>30</sup>

When Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1981, his administration took the role of “cold warriors” more seriously, developing a heavy-handed and consistently growing support for the insurgency. The Reagan administration contributed more than \$625 million in aid to the Islamic insurgency groups, as well as around \$430 million worth of commodities to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan.<sup>31</sup> One CIA observer noted that, “overall US covert action funding for the year, as of September 1989—that is nearly ten years after the war began—was estimated at nearly \$2 billion.”<sup>32</sup>

### The Invasion and the Mujahideen

The Soviet massing of rapid-response troops initially began on Christmas Eve in 1979 when Soviet heavy transport planes landed in Kabul’s international airport. They carried roughly 4,000 troops and equipment,<sup>33</sup> but would only be the beginning of the initial invasion forces. Three days later, the KGB directed a full-scale invasion of Afghanistan’s capital city of Kabul and the surrounding areas. Due to misdirection and particularly clever ruses by the Soviet forces, the Afghan army provided little resistance. In one particularly comical episode, Soviet representatives had sold the story to an Afghan armored unit that new tanks were to be delivered to that unit; but as diesel was in short supply the fuel in the existing tanks would need to be siphoned out in order to fill the replacements upon arrival, which left the armored unit uselessly immobile.<sup>34</sup> Other measures particularly aimed at reducing the combat effectiveness of the standing Afghan army were taken. Soviet advisors sometimes instructed Afghan units to turn over their ammunition for inspection, and due to the decade of rapport that had developed between the two militaries; in some cases the Soviet advisor’s suggestions were adhered to without question.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146.

<sup>31</sup> Hafizullah Emadi, “New world order or disorder: armed struggle in Afghanistan and United States’ foreign policy objectives”. *Central Asian Survey* vol 18.(1999). 59.

<sup>32</sup> Emadi, “New world order or disorder,” 59.

<sup>33</sup> Edward R Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press 1985), 12.

<sup>34</sup> W. Stroock. “Afghanistan: The Soviet Union’s Vietnam.” *Military Heritage* 11. (August 2009): 48.

<sup>35</sup> Stroock, “Afghanistan: The Soviet Union’s Vietnam,” 48.

By dawn on December 28<sup>th</sup> the Soviets had possession of all important government buildings and controlled most Afghani military installations. The initial Soviet invasion force was represented by elements of the 105<sup>th</sup> Guard Division which secured the strategic positions in the capital in preparation for the inclusion of 300 tanks and APC's of the 360<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division and an entire host of supply trucks driving towards Kabul. Some eighty miles to the east, two more motorized divisions from the Red Army; the 201<sup>st</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> made up the armored column that would occupy Faizabad and Baghlan.<sup>36</sup>

The resistance of the Afghani peoples proved staunch from the very beginning. By the end of the first week of January 1980, barely two weeks since the night of invasion, Soviets had recorded more than 4,000 firefights.<sup>37</sup> As the Mujahideen engaged Soviet forces along roads, highways, and outside of critical installations, the Soviet's superior firepower quickly overwhelmed them and caused a retreat into the mountainous terrain. The freedom fighters adopted a guerrilla-style tactic of combat. The massive Soviet force followed the Afghanis into an unfamiliar countryside with unfamiliar combat requirements. Partly due to the Soviets inability to establish a handle on the main Mujahideen fighting force, the invading Soviet military began to wage war on the civilian population of Afghanistan, causing a refugee exodus of massive proportions. Here, their aim was to eliminate any possible local support the Mujahideen might garner from the villages and their civilian populations.<sup>38</sup> This particular tactic yielded little success; the destruction of their homes led many of the Afghani people to resent the Soviets. This ultimately helped the Mujahideen, who were becoming ever more adept at simply disappearing into the difficult terrain or melting directly into the very population the Soviets had been aiming to dissuade from assisting the freedom fighters.

As the invasion and occupation continued, many Mujahideen realized the fighting would continue for quite a while. The war had produced a dire need for improved weaponry and a stable supply of ammunition. The Mujahideen, although brave and zealous warriors, rarely made great modern soldiers. The average fighter refused to partake in sabotage missions, preferring instead to combat the Soviets head-on. They similarly disliked field craft and were reluctant to crawl under fire, as these were not seen as glorious and honorable ways to fight.<sup>39</sup> Prone to bouts of excessive enthusiasm for combat and the possible honorable death in the *Jihad* against the Soviets, the Mujahid

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<sup>36</sup> Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Stroock, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Stroock, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*, 50.

fighters would often fire excessively and inaccurately whenever they had the opportunity without thought of supplies.<sup>40</sup> The obstacles faced by the Mujahid commanders when searching for supplies from external sources lay in the Mujahideen's political disunity. The leaders of the Peshawar Seven rejected any proposals of declaring a unified government-in-exile, understanding that to do so would be admitting to their followers that they were not in the field fighting; which was not only dishonorable but practically condemned in the *Jihad*.<sup>41</sup> The United States' had a dog in the fight early in the war; through Operation Cyclone the CIA had contributed an estimated \$325 million in early 1984.<sup>42</sup> These funds of support typically came in the form of arms that were copies of the Soviet Kalishnikov assault rifle, RPG-7s, 122mm rockets, mortars, and land-mines<sup>43</sup> purchased from Egypt which were originally Russian supplied from the Six Days War in June of 1967.<sup>44</sup> The source of armaments from Egypt ceased, however, after the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981.<sup>45</sup>

American support continued to come from the CIA filtered through neighboring Pakistan. The closest thing to a central command structure was the Afghan Bureau of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which was led by General Mohammed Yousaf. <sup>46</sup> President Regan's presidency dramatically increased the amount of spending that was to be allotted to the Mujahideen, increasing to between \$30 and \$50 million a year during 1980-83.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately the CIA took a great deal more control in the actual operation of the 'aid' than Mujahideen leaders or even ISI commander General Yousaf would have liked. Yousaf later attributed a "never-ending source of friction between ourselves (the ISI) and the CIA arose over their apparent total ignorance of military logistics."<sup>48</sup> General Yousaf went on to insinuate that the entire operation was conducted with great detriment to both the Mujahideen fighters, as well as the American taxpayers, claiming that "the CIA spent the US taxpayers' money to provide third-rate, and in one instance totally unserviceable weapons, for use against a modern

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<sup>40</sup> Edgar O'Ballance. *Afghan Wars 1839-1992: What Britain Gave Up and the Soviet Union Lost*. (London: Brassey's 1993) 119.

<sup>41</sup> O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, 66.

<sup>43</sup> O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> O'Ballance, *Afghan Wars*, 119.

<sup>46</sup> Stroock, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*, 50.

<sup>47</sup> Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 122.

<sup>48</sup> Mohammad Yousaf. *Afghanistan-The Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower*. (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 1992), 83.

superpower.”<sup>49</sup> The less-than-reputable circumstances under which the CIA was purchasing arms for the resistance were not hidden from the American public. In an article in the *Washington Post* dated May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1987, the author writes: “We have found that the CIA’s secret arms pipeline to the Mujahideen is riddled with opportunities for corruption. The losers are the poorly equipped guerrillas fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, and the American people whose congressional representatives have been betrayed by the CIA.”<sup>50</sup>

After Mikhail Gorbachev took control of the Soviet Union in 1986, he announced plans for a phased withdrawal from Afghanistan, which he famously called “a bleeding wound,”<sup>51</sup> which was exactly what the United States had sought to do by funding the resistance. During the fundraising campaign for the fight, Representative Charlie Wilson stated, “there were 58,000 dead in Vietnam, and we owe the Russians one.”<sup>52</sup> Such was the thoughts of American officials as the Reagan Presidency picked up steam and Reagan’s “Cold Warrior” nickname was realized. The Reagan administration declared its policy of covert support against the Soviets in March of 1985 as Ronald Reagan signed a new decree: National Security Decision Directive 166.<sup>53</sup> Funding for 1986 was increased by more than \$125 million over what it was in 1985 for the purpose of buying weaponry of all kinds.

In late 1985 or early 1986 the CIA began to supply the advanced Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems to the Mujahideen fighters via Pakistani officials.<sup>54</sup> With these new and highly accurate weapon systems the Mujahid fighters had a reliable and fearful method of defeating the plague of Soviet air-support. The Stinger missiles were incredibly successful for the freedom fighters; the first day they were used in combat the Mujahideen scored a 75% success rate. Their success caused the Soviets to implement night-flying operations until five months later, when the CIA developed a targeting system allowing the Stinger’s effectiveness at night as well.<sup>55</sup> With the introduction of these new anti-aircraft weapons, the Mujahideen had a deadly and effective way of combating the Soviet air-support, which was the largest bane to Mujahid fighters during the ten-year struggle. So successful were the Stingers that the Mujahideen began to attribute them as a kind of “magic amulet” that would protect the wielder from the Soviets, and the

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<sup>49</sup> Yousaf, *Afghanistan-The Bear Trap*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> Yousaf, *Afghanistan-The Bear Trap*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Stroock, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union’s Vietnam*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 163

<sup>53</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 349.

<sup>54</sup> Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 350.

resistance fighters became even more emboldened in their fight than before.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout military skirmishes over the next three years, the Mujahideen would drag the Soviet Union through a devastating conflict, ruinous to the Afghani countryside. Throughout the course of the war, 1,814 schools, 31 hospitals, 11 health centers, and almost 9,000 miles of phone cable were destroyed, along with roughly 1.5 million casualties.<sup>57</sup> The conflict caused Afghanistan to resort back to its pre-industrial, feudalistic economy. Ultimately the Soviets decided to withdraw their troops in late January of 1989, as the only options the Soviets faced were to renew their commitment, or to lose, “because they clearly were not winning.”<sup>58</sup> The Mujahideen had become well armed, and now had a decade of experience in fighting the Soviet Red Army. Red Army commanders never seemed to grasp the concept that in order to defeat an insurgency, it is first necessary to win the loyalty of the civilian population. Due to this, the Soviets had been forcing millions into Pakistani refugee camps, from which the Mujahideen had a “limitless pool of angry youth” from which to recruit.<sup>59</sup> On February 15, 1989, the Soviets had officially withdrawn from Afghanistan, and Pakistani station-chief of the CIA Milton Bearden sent a two-word message to Langley, VA; it said simply, “WE WON.”<sup>60</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The United States, through subversive means, had helped combat the superpower Soviet Union, it had cost the United States millions, but Congressman Charlie Wilson said, “I have been of the opinion that this money was better spent to hurt our adversaries than other money in the Defense Department.”<sup>61</sup> Operation Cyclone was a counter-interventionist strategy intended to drag the Soviets through their own bloody “Soviet-Vietnam,” and halt possible aggression from Moscow towards the Persian Gulf. The Mujahedeen fighters would come to attribute their fight with the downfall of the Soviet Union, and it is certain that the war they won was paid for by American tax dollars and Afghani blood. Some have since attributed the terrorist attacks on Western culture by Islamic extremists to the training and funding from the CIA along with the Western-leaning reforms of former President

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<sup>56</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 350.

<sup>57</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> Gates, *From the Shadows*, 350.

<sup>59</sup> Stroock, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Vietnam*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 185.

<sup>61</sup> Emadi, *New World Order or Disorder*, 59.

Daoud, which included political representation for women.<sup>62</sup> The argument being that America had no place or authority to place pressures on other peoples about how they should live their lives and what morality to follow. Ultimately the goal of the CIA was to defeat the Soviets and win the Cold War. What happened afterwards in Afghanistan was the Afghans problem; as Charlie Wilson once said, Afghanistan was “the only place in the world where the forces of freedom are actually fighting and killing Russians.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 158.

<sup>63</sup> Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 158.