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WHOSE WAR IS IT ANYWAY? HOW AFGHANISTAN TURNED INTO A BATTLEFIELD  
OVER GLOBAL HEGEMONY DURING THE COLD WAR

by

KATHRYN SHAPIRO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York.

2020

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During the Cold War

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in  
Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

Whose War is it Anyway? How Afghanistan Turned into a Battlefield over Global Hegemony

During the Cold War

by

Kathryn Shapiro

Advisor: Professor Karen Miller

Traditional scholarship depicts the Cold War, which began immediately after World War Two and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, as a battle of freedom and democracy over communism and authoritarian control. Cold War propaganda cartoons often show an Uncle Sam figure facing off against the Soviet Union, or a Soviet Bear reaching out to grab and control Western Europe. While this may have been popular Cold War discourse, a close look at internal documents from the United States Government at the time reveals that the United States was more interested in protecting resources and their role as a global super-power than with protecting the freedom of the people around the world. This paper uses the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 as a case study of how the American Government hid behind ideology while pursuing their self-interests in select countries across the globe. More specifically, this paper focuses on the Carter and Reagan Administrations, and I argue that President Carter and his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski sought to induce a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a means to trap the Soviets in a stalemate, ultimately draining them of their resources. While the Reagan Administration is typically credited with draining the Soviet Union of their power, internal memos from National Security Advisor Brzezinski prove that it was actually the Carter Administration that developed the strategic policy of luring the Soviet Union

into Afghanistan while aiding anti-communist rebels to fight against the Soviets. The latter half of the paper will focus on how the Reagan Administration worked to prolong the Soviet's presence in Afghanistan for as long as possible, despite public speeches and meetings where the Reagan Administration blamed the destruction in Afghanistan on the Soviets refusal to withdrawal. To help prove how the United States worked to create the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and use it as a tool to win the Cold War, I will rely on archival research from both the Carter and Reagan Administrations, as well as archival research from the Gorbachev Administration in the Soviet Union. Ultimately, this paper aims to show how the United States intentionally created turmoil in Afghanistan designed to drain the Soviet Union of their power, all the while claiming they were aiding the anti-communist rebels as a means to protect the Afghani people from the Soviets. By illustrating the United States deceptive foreign policy in Afghanistan during the Cold War, I hope readers will be weary of foreign wars where the United States claims it is involved because of ideological beliefs.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for instilling the importance of education in me and for their constant support. I would also like to thank Madiha Zahir for introducing me to the beautiful, complicated country that is Afghanistan.

I am beyond grateful to Professor Karen Miller for advising me through this project and for the many hours she spent reviewing my work and providing much needed insight on scholarly writing. Her dedication to both global studies and teaching inspires me greatly.

*The state never has any use for the truth as such, but only for the truth which is useful to it  
whether it be truth, half-truth, or error.*

Friedrich Nietzsche, 1874

## **Introduction**

Traditional Cold War literature depicts a spirited battle over competing ideologies: American liberalism and freedom versus Soviet-style communism, where the state and government act as one. At the time, politicians from both sides presented the opposing ideology as an existential threat to their beliefs and way of life. By instilling fear of a communist takeover or Western expansionism, both sides were able to justify interventionist policies to protect their allies. A close look at scholarly literature on the Cold War, however, suggests something else entirely. Scholars such as Professor Odd Arne Westad argue that the Cold War was actually a battle over resources and unipolar hegemony that resulted in long-term negative outcomes for third-world states.<sup>1</sup> I build on this insight and attempt to show how the United States' was less concerned with spreading ideology and more focused on eliminating Soviet power and influence throughout the globe, while simultaneously protecting and expanding their resources and global standing. I also demonstrate that hawkish Cold War foreign policy transcended political party and was embraced by Conservatives and Liberals alike (I will later examine how Republican President Reagan continued foreign policy created under Democratic President Jimmy Carter). In *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (2018), Austin Carson makes a similar argument that both liberal and conservative U.S. Presidents during the Cold War engaged in aggressive and hawkish foreign policy—a practice often associated with Republican Cold

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<sup>1</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

Warriors.<sup>2</sup> My contribution to this field deals with the periodization of détente and how and when it ended. Traditional scholarship (which will be reviewed in this paper) attributes the end of détente to the Reagan Presidency. On the contrary, I argue that détente ended with the Carter Administration through his aid to third-world countries fighting against Soviet allies. If this is true, which evidence suggests it is, scholars will have to rethink the period of détente and the key players in keeping—and breaking—the peace. My thesis is unique in that it focuses on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 as an example of the true motivation behind US Cold War politics. By analyzing the United States’ foreign policy in Afghanistan under both President Carter and President Reagan, it becomes clear that the United States’ main purpose in the Cold War was to defeat Soviet influence. More specifically, evidence suggests it did not matter to the United States’ the type of government in Afghanistan (and elsewhere in the world), so long as it was not a part of the Soviet sphere of communism and influence. In the pages that follow, I will rely on archival evidence to show how the United States manipulated Afghanistan as a tool to achieve their Cold War aims, at the expense of the Afghani people who continue to suffer to this day.

### **Literature Review**

In *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and The Making of Our Time* (2005)<sup>3</sup>, Yale Professor Odd Arne Westad focuses on US and Soviet interventions during the Cold War and analyzes how these interventions shaped the world we live in today. More specifically, Westad claims that the most important aspects of the Cold War did not take place in Europe but instead involved political and social developments in the Third World, especially in

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*.

<sup>3</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

South Asia and Africa. <sup>4</sup> To Westad, the Cold War was largely a continuation of colonization inasmuch as it consisted of the spread of Super-Power beliefs and conflict with anyone who resisted the will of the Super-Power. While Westad focuses on several countries in the global south, his handling of the United States intervention in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion works alongside my analysis of US policy. His insights about the ways that the Third World was involved in the Cold War provide a foundation for my claims here. While Westad focuses on the Reagan Administration and spends little time discussing President Carter's tenure, my focus here emphasizes the continuities between President Carter and President Reagan's handling of the Cold War. In the chapter titled "Reagan's Offensive", Westad attributes increased US involvement in Afghanistan as a result of President Reagan's belief that left wing radicalism posed a threat to US interests. While I agree with Westad that this was Reagan's belief and motivation, I expand on this argument and suggest the same belief and motivation to end left-wing radicalism was also shared by President Carter. Indeed, I argue that it was President Carter who spearheaded the United States' policy of aiding Afghan rebels to defeat the Soviet-backed left wing regime. According to Westad, a large reason for President Reagan's intervention in Afghanistan was because he viewed third world leaders as corrupt and wanted to spread American values and morality to the region.<sup>5</sup> Respectfully, this is where I diverge with Westad's analysis on Afghanistan. While I do not doubt the claim that Ronald Reagan viewed third world leaders as corrupt, evidence suggests that the reason for the United States' actions in Afghanistan was centered around the notion of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a Soviet satellite state. This is further proven by the fact that after the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 365.

United States' turned its back on the country and showed little interest in its future leadership so long as it was free from Soviet influence. What's more, I argue that Reagan's actions in Afghanistan were anything but moral—he and his administration infiltrated the region with advanced weapons and aircraft and supported fundamentalist Islamic groups that disregarded human rights in order to fight against the Soviet Union. While I part with Westad on the reasoning behind the United States' involvement, I agree with him on two major aspects: the importance of the fall of Iran in reshaping US foreign policy and the importance the US placed on Islam in defeating the Soviet Union. Indeed, Westad writes that after the US backed Iranian coup d'état in 1954 that Iran became the United States' biggest ally in the region, even surpassing Israel.<sup>6</sup> Westad argues that Iran's importance to the United States partially stemmed from its desire to combat Arab radicalism and maintain a Western-friendly region (for example, consider Iran and the United States' efforts to defeat the Soviet-aligned Baath Party in Iraq).<sup>7</sup> When the Shah lost power in 1979, Westad argues the United States was forced to find another ally in the region to protect US interests. Like I will argue later on in this paper, Westad suggests that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would not have been as intense (or happened at all) if Iran never underwent its revolution in 1979. Both Westad and I argue that because the United States lost Iran as an ally and pillar of Western interests (such as free markets and access to resources), the US began increasing aid to rebel groups opposing communist regimes. As a result of this increased aid to the rebel fighters, the Soviet Union likewise began to fear its security and influence in the region and felt they had no option but to invade to protect the communist government in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Finally, with regards to Islam, Westad highlights how the United

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

States' exploited the religion to unite Muslims in the region (of all descents) against the spread of communism. Both Westad and I argue that by the United States declaring itself as a protector of religion in the region, the United States was able to position itself as an ally of Muslim nations working alongside them to defeat communism.

While much is known about President Reagan's aggressive policies towards the Soviet Union, President Jimmy Carter is often overlooked as a key player during the Cold War and instead is viewed as a soft-spoken President focused largely on human rights around the world. On the contrary, I argue in this paper—and divert from most literature—that Jimmy Carter was more of a staunch Cold Warrior than he is given credit for, and that he was actively involved in working to bring the collapse of the Soviet Union. While most scholars, such as Professor Nicholas Sarantakes, view détente as ending with the Reagan Administration, I argue that the policy of détente ended with the Carter Administration. In "*Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and The Cold War*" (2011) historian and US Naval College Professor Nicholas Sarantakes positions the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an event the Carter Administration had trouble deciding how to respond to.<sup>9</sup> While it is true that President Carter's Cabinet was often divided on foreign policy decisions, evidence from the Digital National Security Archives reveals how President Carter, along with National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, worked to induce a Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in order to trap the Soviets in a stalemate and advance US interests of defeating the Soviet Union. Whereas Sarantakes views the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an offensive Soviet decision to protect their interests in the region, I argue the Soviets intervened as a response to increased US involvement in the region,

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<sup>9</sup> Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*, 76.

and that the Carter Administration made the offensive policy choice to fund rebel groups to bring down the Soviet-backed regime. A more accurate understanding of the events that led to the Soviet invasion are important as it provides us with an opportunity to reconsider the Carter Presidency and his contribution to the United States ultimate success in the Cold War. What's more, a proper understanding of US involvement in Afghanistan sheds light on perhaps the main purpose of the Cold War—not to liberate suffering people from oppressive communist regimes, but to spread unchallenged US influence and hegemony in all corners of the globe.

This thesis is also in conversation with *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan* by University of Amsterdam Professor Artemy Kalinovsky.<sup>10</sup> Professor Kalinovsky similarly credits Odd Westad's *The Global Cold War* as a seminal work of understanding the conflict in Afghanistan between 1979-1989. Indeed, my thesis fits in conversation with both *The Global Cold War* and *The Long Goodbye* as we all make similar claims that US involvement in Afghanistan served as an opportunity to deliver a blow to the Soviet Union at the expense of the Afghan people. In *A Long Goodbye*, Kalinovsky's primary focus is to examine the factors that forced the Soviet Union to remain in Afghanistan for ten years, despite initial Soviet reports claiming they had little to no interest in becoming further involved in Afghanistan at all.<sup>11</sup> In order for Kalinovsky to reach a firm answer, he analyzes US foreign policy measures in Afghanistan which also serves as additional evidence for my thesis. Perhaps Kalinovsky's most controversial claim—and where I agree with him the most—is his assertion that the Cold War policy of détente (the period of relative peace during the Cold War) ended under the Carter

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<sup>10</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Administration, before the Russians invaded Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> This is a diversion from traditional literature, which views the end of détente as following the Soviet invasion and the United States' subsequent boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. To help support his argument, Kalinovsky cites both President Carter and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski's moral belief that the spread of Soviet-style communism around the globe posed an existential threat to the United States.<sup>13</sup> More convincingly, Kalinovsky also cites the Carter Administration's support for the (at the time) Socialist country of Somalia against Soviet-backed Ethiopia during the Ogaden War (1977-78).<sup>14</sup> For Kalinovsky, this highlights hawkish behavior not usually attributed to the Carter Administration. What's more, the reference to the Ogaden War also helps to prove my argument that the United States' (under both Carter and Reagan) was more concerned with preventing the spread of communism than with creating liberal, open-market democracies. This is not to say the United States' did not want or benefit from open-market democracies, but more important was defeating the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. Because this was the United States' primary goal, officials were willing to work with socialist (Somalia) and fundamentalist (Afghanistan) regimes to defeat Soviet expansionism.<sup>15</sup>

Another major claim by Kalinovsky is that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the least-desired option for the divided politburo.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the text, Kalinovsky details numerous attempts by the Soviet Politburo to strengthen the communist PDPA party in Afghanistan diplomatically, including attempts to unify the divided Khalq and Parcham factions<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, Kalinovsky argues that the Soviet Union knew an invasion of Afghanistan

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the Ogaden War, see JACKSON, "The Ogaden War and the Demise of Détente."

<sup>16</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 18,19.

would be costly and lead to global criticism.<sup>18</sup> Because Kalinovsky portrays (and provides evidence to support) that the Soviet Union viewed an invasion as the least-favorable scenario, he explains that the ultimate decision to invade on December 24, 1979 resulted from heightened turmoil in the Persian Gulf region, such as increased fighting within the PDPA and increased Afghan resistance.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, Kalinovsky's analysis that the Soviet Union invaded because of increased regional turmoil sheds light on my argument that the United States' actively worked to induce an invasion to trap the Soviets in Afghanistan by contributing to its greater instability (I will explore later in this paper the various ways the United States' intensified the chaos in Afghanistan to their advantage). Both Kalinovsky and I argue that the fall of Iran in 1979 was monumental in redefining both Soviet and American foreign policy, and that Afghanistan was of little global significance until the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 20.

**CHAPTER ONE: WHY AFGHANISTAN? A LOOK AT EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE 1979 SOVIET  
INVASION**

**The Rise and Fall of U.S. Relations with Iran: 1953-1979**

A central argument of my paper is that the United States' (starting under President Carter) only shifted its attention to Afghanistan in 1978/ 1979 because of the total collapse of their relationship with Iran. The United States formed a strong alliance with Iran following World War Two largely thanks to the pro-American Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979). Iran proved so important to U.S. interests that in 1953 President Eisenhower (along with Winston Churchill) authorized a covert operation in Iran to remove democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadegh from power, with permission from Reza Shah Pahlavi.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the covert operation was fueled by Cold War tensions—Iran nationalized their oil reserves under Mossadegh in 1953 and expelled British Petroleum from Iran, creating fears among the Eisenhower Administration that they would lose their biggest ally and trading partner in the region.<sup>2</sup> The coup d'état successfully removed Mossadegh from power, replaced him with U.S.-backed General Fazlollah Zahedi, reinstated Reza Shah Pahlavi and made him more powerful than ever before.<sup>3</sup> After the coup d'état, the United States and Iranian Monarchy underwent a period of over 20 years of partnership and good will, with Iran producing up to six million barrels of the world's oil per day.<sup>4</sup>

Nineteen seventy-eight proved to be a tumultuous year not only in Afghanistan but for Iran as well. Internal unrest in Iran began to rise over the rule of U.S. backed Reza Shah Pahlavi,

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<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt, *Counter Coup: The Struggle Over the Control of Iran*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "The Oil of Iran."

who many Iranians believed to be indifferent to the growing number of poor and suffering Iranians and more concerned with the elite and their relationship with the West.<sup>5</sup> For the Carter Administration, discontent over Reza Shah Pahlavi could not have come at a worse time. Not only did threat of a revolution jeopardize America's alliance and influence in Iran, but it also meant a large country with major resources, that borders the Soviet Union and was fostering anti-American sentiments, would potentially be open for Soviet influence. On December 12, 1978 (less than a month before Reza Shah Pahlavi was forced to flee Iran), U.S. Ambassador to Iran George Ball wrote a letter to President Carter listing concerns over the impending revolution in Iran.<sup>6</sup> Titled "*The Issues and Implications of the Iranian Crisis*," Ball argued that if Iran were to fall to the Soviet Union (which we now know it did not), the world's oil supply would be at danger and the Cold War balance-of-power match would officially tilt towards the Soviet Union.

<sup>7</sup> Further highlighting the importance of Iran to the United States, Ball wrote

The collapse of the Shah's regime is far more significant than a localized foreign policy crisis with exceptionally high stakes; it challenges the basic validity of the Nixon doctrine. We made the Shah what he has become. We nurtured his love for grandiose geopolitical schemes and supplied him the hardware to indulge his fantasies. Once we had anointed him as protector of the Persian Gulf, *we became dependent on him*. Now that his regime is coming apart under the pressures of imported modernization, we have so committed ourselves as to have no ready alternative. (Emphasis mine)<sup>8</sup>

In terms of the hardware mentioned by Ball, the United States provided the Iranian Air Force with 7.5 billion dollars-worth of highly sophisticated military equipment and had a "pipeline of orders" of American ships and naval systems ready to be sent to Iran at Reza Shah

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<sup>1</sup> Roosevelt, *Counter Coup: The Struggle Over the Control of Iran*.

<sup>6</sup> Ball, "Issues and Implications of the Iranian Crisis," December 12, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Pahlavi's request.<sup>9</sup> It is true that before the Carter Administration began sending aid and military weapons to Afghanistan, it was supplying Iran with F-15 fighter planes and laser-guided bombs—US manufactured technology so new that the United States' Military had just began to use it themselves in Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> Ball went so far as to say that if the Soviet Union increased its aggression towards Iran, the United States should at least consider invasion and occupying the Southern part of Iran where the oil fields were located.<sup>11</sup> Ball justified the potential occupation of South Iran by not only mentioning the shift of the Cold War balance-of-power to the Soviets, but by claiming US allies (including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States) would then have to deal with hostile forces next to the Gulf.<sup>12</sup> Ball's severe warning about the consequences of an Iranian revolution is telling for several reasons. First, it puts into perspective how important the United States' relationship with Iran up to 1979 was, which explains why the Carter Administration reacted so strongly (i.e. considering invasion) in what otherwise could have been what Ball considered a localized crisis.<sup>13</sup> Ball himself admits that the United States' was totally dependent on Iran as not only an oil exporter but also as a pillar of Western values in the region.<sup>14</sup> On February 11, 1979, however, Sayyid Khomeini, (referred to by the West as Ayatollah Khomeini) officially took power and Iran underwent a transition from a Monarchy to an Islamic Republic, with Khomeini serving as the Supreme Leader of the new republic. Almost eight months later, relationships between Iran and the Carter Administration reached an all-time low when the U.S. Embassy in Iran was stormed by anti-American Iranian college students, and fifty-two American

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

diplomats were then held at hostage by the Iranian government for over 400 days.<sup>15</sup> While Iran never fell to Soviet influence, I contend that the loss of Iran as an ally was monumental for the United States and forced the Carter Administration to develop a new foreign policy in the Middle East and South Asia. Because the loss of Iran was so devastating to the United States' interests, the United States' then fully engaged in Cold War containment policy in the region to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining further advances and a warm-water port in the Indian Ocean. Once Iran became an Islamic Republic antagonistic to both the West and the Soviet Union, that left Pakistan, India and Afghanistan as the remaining Cold War players in the region, with Afghanistan serving as the only remaining buffer between the Soviet Union and the Indian Ocean. In a later memo by U.S. Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan, Sullivan warned that losing Iran as an ally was an "unthinkable" scenario for American Foreign Policy.<sup>16</sup> Once the unthinkable happened, the Carter Administration had to do whatever it could to save remaining American interests in the Middle East and South Asia, and Afghanistan proved an integral piece of the puzzle in doing so.

### **A Brief History of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has infamously been referred to as "the graveyard of empires" and for good reason. While the British successfully expanded their empire to areas of South West Asia in the 1800s, they were driven out of Afghanistan twice during the two Afghan-Anglo Wars (1839-1842) (1878-1880). While fighting against British rule, the Afghans also successfully established a defined border with Russia in 1895, despite Russian attempts to gain control of the region.<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> "The Iranian Hostage Crisis - Short History - Department History - Office of the Historian."

<sup>16</sup> Sullivan, "US Embassy Tehran, William Sullivan, Cable to State Department 'Thinking the Unthinkable.'"

<sup>17</sup> For more on the Anglo-Afghan Wars, see chapter one of Riedel, *What We Won: America's Secret War in Afghanistan, 1979-89*.

1919, Afghanistan defeated the British for the third and final time and officially declared independence with the Treaty of Rawalpindi. From 1926-1973, Afghanistan existed as a struggling monarchy, plagued with civil wars and the lack of development in the country. In 1933, Mohammed Zahir Shah became the final King of Afghanistan and ruled until he was forced into exile in 1973. While Zahir Shah successfully brought aspects of modernization to Afghanistan, such as the establishment of trade with surrounding countries and accessible education to both men and women, he was unable to fully unite the country. In the early 1970s, leftist groups in Afghanistan (such as the Khalq and Parcham) gained popularity and accused the Shah of being corrupt and out of touch with the people of Afghanistan. As the leftist groups in Afghanistan became more prominent, they relied on their border neighbor The Soviet Union for training and funding.<sup>18</sup> In 1973, while Zahir Shah was out of the country for medical treatment, Army General Daoud Khan (and cousin to Zahir Shah) took advantage of the building leftist momentum and staged a bloodless coup d'état that abolished the monarchy and declared Afghanistan a republic with himself as the leader. While the coup d'état was initially successful, fighting between the Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner) factions threatened the future of communism in Afghanistan. As the Khalq's consolidated power, they exiled prominent Parcham leaders from Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> The Soviet Union became increasingly less confident in President Khan's ability to rule Afghanistan as a communist country, and on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1978, the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew Afghan President Daoud Khan. While denied by the Soviets, archival records reveal that the Soviet Union orchestrated the coup d'état to remove Daoud Khan from power.<sup>20</sup> The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

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<sup>18</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

installed Khalq leader Nur Muhammad Taraki as the new President of Afghanistan. Immediately after Taraki assumed office, Afghanistan broke out into a civil war between conservative Islamic factions that opposed communist rule and the PDPA, which itself remained plagued by internal differences.

### **The Sudden Turn Towards Afghanistan Explained**

Perhaps Vice President Walter Mondale summarized the United States' newfound interests in Afghanistan best—he argued that the Soviets had turned a traditional buffer state into a Soviet satellite state.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, Afghanistan served as a buffer between the Soviet Union and three states—Iran, Pakistan and India—all of which have an entrance to the Indian Ocean and would provide the Soviet Union with a warm-water port if their influence and aggression were to be successful.<sup>22</sup> Mondale argued if the United States were to allow Afghanistan to fall to Russia, the three states with entrances to the Indian Ocean would then be faced with Soviet aggression themselves and be at greater risk of falling to Soviet influence which would result in a complete loss of the region for the United States' interests. National Security Advisor Brzezinski believed the Indian Ocean was of vital importance to the Soviet Union because it would grant their navy with an unprecedented warm water port and easier access to Africa and Western Europe.<sup>23</sup> In support of this theory, General David C. Jones (Air Force General and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) argued that the Soviets actually stood nothing to gain from invading

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<sup>21</sup> "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Afghanistan and instead viewed the country as a steppingstone to the three states that border the Indian Ocean.<sup>24</sup>

To trap the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Carter Administration made the decision to take advantage of the Islamic rebel groups fighting against communism in the region. This was a calculated and strategic Cold War move because prior to the Cold War and the watershed events of 1979 the United States' had little to no strategic relationship with Afghanistan or investment to preserve Islam in the region. Six weeks after the PDPA overthrew Daoud Khan and replaced him with Soviet-backed Nur Muhammad Tarakai, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Theodore Elliot wrote a memo to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance summarizing the change of power in Afghanistan—it is important to remember that at the time this memo was written in June 1978, the Soviets had not yet invaded.<sup>25</sup> In the memo, Ambassador Elliot argued that the newly installed PDPA government (under Taraki's leadership) would not survive without support from the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> Elliot highlighted that the conservative Islamic opposition to the PDPA rule was “powerful but disorganized and lacks a central leader”.<sup>27</sup> Considered in a Cold War context, a promising anti-Soviet resistance proved of interest to the Carter Administration and presented itself as a valuable tool in fighting with the Soviets over global superpower and influence.

With newfound interests in Afghanistan and the South Asian region as a whole, the Carter Administration focused all of their attention on strengthening the Soviet resistance. The new policy argued that the Soviet-resistance could be improved with external support and that

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Elliot, “Six Weeks After Afghanistan's Revolution: A Summing Up' Ambassador Theodore Elliot to the Secretary.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

the rebel fighters should engage in guerrilla warfare tactics (such as assassinations and terrorist acts) while using Afghanistan's mountainous terrain to their advantage.<sup>28</sup> This recommendation by Ambassador Elliot just six weeks after the PDPA assumed power reveals how the Carter Administration began viewing Afghanistan as a strategic playing field for the Cold War prior to the Soviet invasion in late 1979.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER TWO: HOW THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION INDUCED THE OFFICIAL SOVIET INVASION**

While I am not arguing that the Carter Administration initially wanted the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan, documents suggests that once the invasion became inevitable (due to internal fighting amongst the communist PDPA), the Carter Administration began developing a strategy to engage with the Soviets in Afghanistan as a means to drain their resources and overall influence in the Middle East/ South Asian region. Internal documents reveal that the strategy of draining the Soviets in Afghanistan and prolonging the conflict was then adapted and continued by the Reagan Administration. The first instance of US covert aid to the Afghan rebels was authorized by Jimmy Carter in the summer of 1979 almost six months before the Soviets invaded.<sup>1</sup> This stands in stark contrast to other scholarly literature such as Professor Sarantakes who argue US aid to Afghanistan began in 1980, only after the Soviets invaded and civil war broke out in the country. In an interview in French Magazine *La Nouvel Observateur*, National Security Advisor Brzezinski revealed how the Carter Administration came to view the Afghan crisis as an opportunity to strengthen their own agenda both at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup> Brzezinski was asked if it was true the Carter Administration began aiding the rebel groups in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet Invasion (this was previously an unconfirmed fact and only speculated to in books and essays recounting the United States involvement). Brzezinski's reply is as follows:

Brzezinski: Yes. According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahiddin began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. But the reality, closely guarded until now, is completely otherwise: Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the

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<sup>1</sup> *From The Shadows*, 146.

<sup>2</sup> "Brzezinski Interview | David N. Gibbs."

president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention [emphasis added].<sup>3</sup>

Brzezinski's answer as to whether or not the CIA aided the mujahideen prior to the Soviet invasion not only confirms previous speculation but also demands a reevaluation of U.S. foreign policy at that time. One might wonder why the United States' wanted to induce (or went forward with policy that they knew would induce) a Soviet invasion of any country, let alone in Afghanistan, a region where the United States' just recently lost their biggest ally. Indeed, it is because the United States' needed to reestablish a presence in the in the Middle East that they decided to aid the rebel groups five months prior to the official Soviet invasion. The United States' hoped that by aiding the rebel groups, the resistance to the Soviet-backed Taraki regime would strengthen, forcing the Soviet Union to intervene. Once the Soviet Union officially invaded Afghanistan, the Carter Administration could publicly display their support for the rebel fighters, citing common clichés such as that the United States' was defending freedom and preventing the Middle East from falling to communism. To be sure, the CIA funding of the rebel groups in Afghanistan was a just one rung on the ladder of draining the Soviets and securing a U.S. presence in the region after the massive blow of losing Iran as an ally.

The Carter Administration's desire to create enough dissent in Afghanistan to force a Soviet invasion came to fruition as 1979 came to a close. In September of 1979, Kabul Radio announced Prime Minister Taraki was officially removed from office and replaced with Hafizullah Amin (also a Khalq in the PDPA).<sup>4</sup> While both Amin and Taraki belonged to the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Press, "Ex-Afghan Leader Is Reported Killed."

Khalq communist party in Afghanistan, Amin's order to have Taraki killed proved to be the last straw for the Soviet Union, as the Soviet-backed PDPA was badly suffering and losing momentum even before Taraki's assassination.<sup>5</sup> On December 24 1979, the Soviet Union (under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev) sent the 40<sup>th</sup> Army into Afghanistan. Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Amin was killed in a coup d'état and replaced with Soviet-loyalist Babrak Karmal.<sup>6</sup> For Zbigniew Brzezinski, everything in Afghanistan was going according to plan.

### **The Soviet Union's Vietnam**

Along with claiming that the Soviet Union posed a lasting threat to Islam, the Carter Administration relied on the funding and success of the rebel fighters to slowly dismantle the Soviet Union's presence in the country. While the United States' funding of the rebel fighters is often associated with the Reagan Presidency, unclassified documents reveal Carter himself spearheaded the project.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, National Security Advisor Brzezinski drew inspiration for the Afghan rebel fighters from the guerilla warfare conducted by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War.<sup>8</sup> By comparing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to America's involvement in Vietnam, Brzezinski was hopeful that the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan would be an unwinnable conflict that would drain important Soviet resources (such as weaponry, soldiers, and support) in the long run and ruin Soviet moral.<sup>9</sup> To be sure, this was a fair analogy and there were several similarities between the situation the Soviets found themselves in once invading Afghanistan and with the United States' pro-longed disastrous war in Vietnam. Indeed, the Carter Administration

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<sup>5</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting."

<sup>8</sup> Brzezinski, "Reflections on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," December 26, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

viewed the Afghan “guerilla fighters” as essential players in defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, during the American war in Vietnam the Viet Cong method of guerilla warfare was essential in preventing American success in the region. While Brzezinski saw the potential for the rebel groups in Afghanistan to cause major damage to the Soviet’s goals in the region, he was also quick to note the present limitations of the rebel fighters and different areas where the rebels could be backed and propped up by the United States.<sup>11</sup> Brzezinski conceded that the Afghan guerrillas were badly organized and poorly led. He called attention to the fact that the Afghan rebel groups had no sanctuary, no organized army, and no central government—all of which was possessed by the Viet Cong. Lastly, (at the time of the invasion) the rebel groups lacked major foreign support—unlike the “enormous” backing of the Viet Cong by the Soviet Union and China.<sup>12</sup>

To address these concerns, Brzezinski recommended actions aimed at bolstering the rebel groups in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> Because the United States’ needed the resistance to the Russian-backed government to continue, Brzezinski called for more money, weapons, and “technical advice” to be sent to the rebel groups (how this happened will be explored in other sections).<sup>14</sup> To achieve this, Brzezinski recommended the United States’ strengthen their alliance with Pakistan by means of sending Pakistan more aid, military weapons, political guarantees, and [redacted] for their own use.<sup>15</sup> These policy recommendations, while seemingly straightforward on page,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

carried substantial consequences and are important in understanding the motivations behind US foreign policy in Afghanistan during the 1970s and 80s. Less important to the United States' was liberating the Afghan people from what the U.S. believed was forced communist rule. Instead, the United States' viewed the internal crisis in Afghanistan—which possessed a weak yet promising resistance group—as an opportunity to strengthen U.S. hegemony in a strategic region where U.S. influence was lacking. Unfortunately for Afghanistan, the Soviet invasion provided the United States' with the necessary conditions to achieve these goals. By working to develop a resistance group in Afghanistan that resembled the tactical approach of the Viet Cong, the Carter Administration saw an opportunity to create a long and exhaustive war in Afghanistan that would ultimately weaken the Soviet's desire to expand power into the Middle East/ South Asian region, leaving a vacuum for the United States' to exploit.

### **The Implementation of the United States Strategic Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan Under President Carter**

Brzezinski was less concerned with the instability in the region as he was with the potential leverage the Soviet Union stood to gain. Indeed, the United States' eagerness to get further involved in the affair is made clear in a December 25<sup>th</sup> memo from Brzezinski to President Carter, where Brzezinski argued the conflict in Afghanistan was ripe for further U.S. involvement, partly because Brzezinski believed global public opinion to be outraged at the Soviet invasion.<sup>16</sup> For the Carter Administration, the conflict presented itself as a way to drain the Soviets of their power and exhaust their resources all the while solidifying US presence in the

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<sup>16</sup> "Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordinating Committee Meeting."

Middle East/ South Asian region. Of course, this was to be at expense of the Afghani people, whose internal struggle over power quickly turned into a hegemonic Cold War playing field of which the United States' viewed as a potential huge win for their long-term self-interests both at home and abroad.

To foster a global response (especially from third world countries vulnerable to Soviet influence) the Carter Administration focused upon existing fears that Soviet communism posed an existential threat to Islam.<sup>17</sup> Because of the rational desire of the surrounding countries to maintain their sovereignty (and thus religion and culture), the United States' realized it could feed into these anxieties and gain Muslim countries as allies against the Soviets. More specifically, Brzezinski argued the United States' should stress the amount of destruction caused by the Soviets in Afghanistan to the surrounding Muslim countries in an attempt to not only gain allies but create further resistance to the Soviet-backed regime.<sup>18</sup> When developing the United States' policy of exploiting Islam to combat communism, Brzezinski argued the US should "concert with Islamic countries both in a propaganda campaign and in a covert action campaign to help the rebels".<sup>19</sup> This is important as it sheds light to the future and substantial propaganda campaign led by the United States' to unite Islamic countries against the perceived threat of communism against Islam. One of the many ways the US administration stressed the perceived danger of the Soviet Union and communism was through the staggering amount of Afghan refugees fleeing their home, often ending up in neighboring Pakistan. At the time of the invasion, 300,000 Afghans had already fled to Pakistan, which itself was ill equipped to handle the ever-

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<sup>17</sup> Brzezinski, "Reflections on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," December 26, 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

increasing number of refugees crossing the border.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, the Carter Administration realized they could capitalize off the intense human suffering in Afghanistan to unite the global community, both Muslim and otherwise. The threat to religion and freedom posed by the Soviets served as the perfect tool for the United States' to spark fear and rebellion in the Middle East, ultimately in the name of jihad (jihad will be later explored in much more detail). While it is certain the anger over the human suffering in Afghanistan would have existed without the American exploitation of it, the U.S. government found themselves in the unique position to fund and train fighters in an otherwise poor and unorganized country.

Once the Soviet Union officially invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979, the Carter Administration had to determine the most effective way to get the maximum amount of aid to the rebel fighters so they could fight against the sophisticated Soviet military. The agreed upon policy (continued by Ronald Reagan) was to funnel aid and weapons through Pakistan so as not to appear as the United States was engaging in a Cold War game at the expense of Afghanistan. While Jimmy Carter publicly expressed support for the rebel fighters, he did want to be seen as participating in regime change in a sovereign country—the same thing the US was criticizing the Soviets of. A CIA Office of the Historian document reveals that when determining the proper amount of aid to send to the rebels just three days after the official invasion, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown agreed that sending aid to the Afghan rebels was necessary but wondered if the US was sending enough to be effective, indicating that aid had already been sent.<sup>21</sup> New to the Administration's plan, however, was sending arms for the rebels through Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

When President Carter inquired to how the Pakistanis' would feel about the US government also sending arms through Saudi Arabia, Secretary Brown replied he believed Pakistan would feel very positive about it (likely because Pakistan assumed they would receive aid from Saudi Arabia as well.)<sup>23</sup> President Carter's concern over how the Pakistanis would feel about the United States also allying with the Saudis to send aid to the Afghan rebels further demonstrates how important Pakistan was in securing the administrations interests in the region. Showing slight pushback against Brzezinski, President Carter noted that news analyst said the Soviets would have "little hope" in putting down the Afghan rebellion at its present state at the time of the invasion on December 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>24</sup> Holding his ground that the United States' must increase support to the rebels, Brzezinski argued that not increasing aid would have a negative psychological impact both on the Pakistanis and Afghan rebels fighting the Soviets at home.<sup>25</sup> What's more, Brzezinski argued that if the United States' was not the leader of spearheading aid to the Afghan rebels, international support for the rebels would be likely to fizzle out.<sup>26</sup> This helps to demonstrate the administrations early policy towards Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion: supply covert aid and support the rebels while attempting to garner international support both for the Afghan rebels and against the Soviet Union. This also highlights what I argue was the constant push by both the Carter and Reagan Administrations to draw international attention to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. Because the Carter Administration sought to make the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as "costly as possible", they needed all the international support and additional aid to the rebels they could get.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> "Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordinating Committee Meeting."

No later than December was a firm policy set into motion by the Carter Administration on how to move forward with draining the Soviets in Afghanistan. While the policy aimed to strengthen US Cold War interests by limiting Soviet expansion, it also revealed the United States' hypocrisy towards international law and President Carter's willingness to set aside human rights concerns through partnering with authoritarian regimes. In a highly classified meeting with the United States' National Security Council, consisting of President Carter, Vice President Mondale, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, CIA Admiral Stansfield Turner and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, it was decided US officials would go to Pakistan to engage in with the Pakistani military on a "high level mission" on how to move forward with aid to the Afghan rebels.<sup>28</sup> To effectively send aid and weaponry to the rebel fighters in Afghanistan, President Carter needed to strengthen the United States' relationship with Pakistan, which shared a largely uncontrolled border with Afghanistan. Despite President Carter's reputation of upholding human rights, he willingly forged a strong alliance with Pakistan President Zia al-Huq, a controversial figure that will be explored later on in this paper.<sup>29</sup> President Carter then decided to increase military sales to Pakistan and engage with the Saudis to help finance Pakistani military purchases, with the ultimate goal of Pakistan transferring the weapons to the Afghan rebels.<sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> This proved controversial because the United States could not legally sell arms on credit to Pakistan because of the Symington Amendment, which banned US military assistance and aid to countries producing nuclear enrichment (this willingness by the Carter Administration to

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<sup>28</sup> "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> For more on the legacy of Zia al-Huq, see Ziring, "Public Policy Dilemmas and Pakistan's Nationality Problem."

subvert—and later completely ignore—international law was a common practice in the Administration’s policy towards Afghanistan and was later fiercely pursued by the Reagan Administration as well). Tellingly, Secretary Vance revealed that Pakistani Advisor to the President for Foreign Affairs, Agha Shahi, had asked him that if the situation in Afghanistan got worse, whether the United States would continue sell military equipment to Pakistan, to which Secretary Vance replied that the United States’ would.<sup>32</sup> This admission by Secretary Vance highlights the willingness of the Carter Administration to ignore international law if the administration stood to gain from it. What’s more, this reflects just how important halting the Soviets in South Asia was to the Carter Administration. If the situation in Afghanistan were to deteriorate, as Shahi suggested, Secretary Vance agreed the United States’ would continue to send military aid to Pakistan, despite the Symington Amendment.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the Carter Administration was willing to ignore international law and continue sending aid to Pakistan, because if Afghanistan fell to Soviet influence, Pakistan (which has an entrance to the Indian Ocean) would then likely face Soviet aggression themselves. This contradiction by Vance also highlights what I argue was the United States’ engaging in foreign policy aimed at Cold War strategy at the expense of the South Asian region. The discussion from this December 28<sup>th</sup> meeting indeed suggests that the Carter Administration was engaging so deeply in Afghanistan and Pakistan not because of their resources or former alliances, but because of what the Soviet Union stood to gain by having a presence in the region. Finally, because Afghanistan itself possessed no nuclear capability, Secretary Vance called for more PL 480 (Food for Peace) assistance directly to Afghanistan as well as more relief for the Afghan refugees.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting.”

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

On November 4<sup>th</sup> 1980, less than a year after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter lost his re-election bid to Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. By the time of the election, the United States government—specifically the CIA—was well under way in its attempt to strengthen the Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union. In his final State of the Union speech, President Carter called the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the greatest threat to World peace since World War Two and stressed the importance of maintaining a Soviet-free Middle East, all the while making no mention of the Administrations funding of anti-Soviet rebel groups.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Carter engaged in Cold War rhetoric claiming that the Soviet Union was actively oppressing the “fiercely independent” and “deeply religious” people of Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> While there is no question the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan violated international law and Afghanistan’s sovereignty, President Carter’s final State of the Union speech helps prove how the Carter Administration used Cold War language and played up Cold War anxieties of the Soviets oppressing free people and attacking religion as a façade while the Administration secretly worked to develop a smooth-running pipeline of money and weapons between the CIA, Pakistan, and the Afghan rebels. Publicly, President Carter reaffirmed sanctions against the Soviet Union and expressed sympathy towards the Afghan people, saying the United States’ respected Islam and was willing to work with all Muslim countries to defeat the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> This proved a perfect opportunity for President Carter to invoke the public outrage Brzezinski called for over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan while simultaneously using Afghanistan as a tool to trap and ultimately drain the Soviet Union of power and influence. While Ronald Reagan

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<sup>35</sup> “State of the Union Address 1980.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

is often credited with bankrupting the Soviet Union, it is actually President Carter and Zbigniew Brzezinski who put the plan into motion.

Despite attempts to keep the funding of rebel groups secret, in the closing months of 1979 Soviet Newspaper *Izvestia* published a report claiming that the CIA was directly engaged in aiding the Afghan rebel groups as well as involved with providing military training to Afghan rebels in Pakistani camp.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, documents have since revealed that President Carter signed off on covert action in January of 1980 which allowed the CIA to purchase Soviet-designed weapons from Egypt and China to send to the Afghan rebels (via Pakistan).<sup>39</sup> Two weeks after the official Soviet invasion, Pakistan received its first Afghanistan-bound arms shipment of rifles from the United States.<sup>40</sup> By February of the same year, Zbigniew Brzezinski flew to Pakistan to meet with Pakistani President Zia Ul-Haq and the two men worked to officially establish an effective pipeline of aid and weaponry to Afghanistan from Pakistan.<sup>41</sup> According to one CIA agent, the United States was not acting as a middleman but instead as a liaison between Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> After meeting with President Zia, Brzezinski then flew to Saudi Arabia where he met with King Khalid and reached an agreement for Saudi Arabia to match each dollar of US aid to the Afghan resistance.<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that by early 1980, the Carter Administration had garnered support for the Afghan rebels in terms of financial aid and weaponry from Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, China and Egypt.<sup>44</sup> Central to the CIA's orchestration of the arms pipeline was plausible deniability of any lethal American involvement in Afghanistan, because according

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<sup>38</sup> Pear, "Arming Afghan Guerrillas: A Huge Effort Led by U.S. - The New York Times."

<sup>39</sup> National Foreign Assessment Center, "Afghanistan Ethnic Diversity and Dissidence."

<sup>40</sup> "Politics of a Covert Action."

<sup>41</sup> *From The Shadows*.

<sup>42</sup> "Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting."

<sup>43</sup> "Politics of a Covert Action."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

to President Carter in 1980, the only action the U.S. government was taking on the events in Afghanistan was sanctioning the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> One of the ways the Administration practiced plausible deniability was by purchasing arms from Eastern Europe and then sending the weaponry to Pakistan, thus avoiding any way to trace the arms back to the U.S.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the CIA under the Carter Administration intentionally purchased arms that would appear to belong to the Soviet Union. In an interview with Harvard Professor Kirsten Lundberg and CIA agent Frank Anderson about the weapons pipeline, Anderson said

“We got Commies to send us guns, and we shipped them around the world and shot them back at them. That is the kind of thing the CIA is meant to do and is good at....The covert aspect of this was a bunch of nations agreeing not to plead guilty to what they were going to do”.<sup>47</sup>

By the time the Carter Administration began to reach its end, the CIA had purchased a total of 30 million in arms for the Afghan rebels, a number matched by Saudi Arabia.<sup>48</sup> When President Ronald Reagan took office in January of 1981, Zbigniew Brzezinski’s plan to trap the Soviets in Afghanistan was well underway. While the Afghan resistance continued to fight for liberation against the Soviets, Ronald Reagan picked up from where his predecessor left off and sought to make the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as costly as possible, not for the sake of the Afghan people but to demolish the Soviet Union’s status as a global superpower.

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<sup>45</sup> “State of the Union Address 1980.”

<sup>46</sup> “Politics of a Covert Action.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

## **How Pakistan Proved to be The Perfect Arena for the United States Policy Games**

President of Pakistan Zia Ul-Haq expressed excitement with the 1980 nomination of President Ronald Reagan, who Zia believed would be willing to send more aid to Pakistan than former President Carter. <sup>49</sup> Indeed, President Zia's desire to become a regional power along with his admiration for Ronald Reagan helped the United States' take advantage of the geographical significance of Pakistan, which served as a pro-Western country boarding the Soviet Union. The United States' alliance with Pakistan initially began under the Truman Presidency in 1947, almost immediately after Pakistan declared independence from India. At the time, the United States' had no relationship with Afghanistan but a strong relationship with Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, a leader interested in modernizing Iran and creating strong ties with the West. In 1959, the United States and Pakistan signed a bilateral Treaty of Cooperation and Defense Agreement designed to further implement the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), a Cold War treaty aimed at containing the Soviet Union. CENTO, previously known as the Baghdad Pact, consisted of Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and (briefly) Iraq and served as a mutual defense agreement against Soviet Aggression.<sup>50</sup> While the United States never officially joined CENTO, it participated as an observer and in committee meetings and signed treaties with the respective individual participants (such as the aforementioned Treaty of Cooperation and Defense with Pakistan). When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan found itself surrounded by turmoil—an enemy on one of its borders and a country facing Russian aggression on the other. For the United States, Pakistan proved to be the perfect country to bolster in order to combat Soviet aggression in the South Asian region. To be sure, the United States and Pakistan already

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<sup>49</sup> Walters, "US EMBASSY PAKISTAN CABLE 10239 TO STATE DEPARTMENT, 'MY FIRST MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ZIA.'"

<sup>50</sup> Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, "The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)."

possessed a strong alliance at the time of the invasion, with the United States' sending over 200 million dollars in aid to Pakistan in 1978.<sup>51</sup> Once the invasion of Afghanistan happened, Pakistan's strategic significance with the United States increased, as the United States' began to rely on Pakistani military bases and their intelligence services (the ISI) to train the Afghan rebel forces. Indeed, both Pakistan and the United States' had shared interests in the region, primarily keeping out Soviet aggression and developing Pakistan as a regional power that promoted Western interests. Because President Zia was unsatisfied with President Carter's 1979 proposed aid package of 400 million dollars, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Gerald Feierstein advised President Reagan on how to create a package suitable for Pakistan's demands. Specifically, Feierstein urged the Reagan Administration to send first-class military weapons to Pakistan (such as the Mirage 2000), as opposed past military equipment President Zia considered insufficient.<sup>52</sup> President Reagan agreed with Feierstein's proposal to increase the amount of aid to Pakistan, and acknowledged himself that the fall of the Shah in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan greatly increased "strategic significance" of Pakistan to the United States.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, the United States concern with creating a suitable aid package for Pakistan demonstrates how using Pakistan as a Cold War instrument to help defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan was a main priority for both the Carter and Reagan Administrations.

When laying out his Administration's policy towards Pakistan, President Reagan explicitly stated he planned to bolster Pakistan's military to help with the support of Afghan

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<sup>51</sup> "Sixty Years of US Aid to Pakistan."

<sup>52</sup> Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, "Pakistan and the US: Seeking Ways to Improve Relations,."

<sup>53</sup> Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, "Pakistan and the US: Seeking Ways to Improve Relations,."

rebel groups fighting against the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> This is a departure from the Carter Administration, who preferred to keep their aid and financial support of the rebels in Afghanistan clandestine. This is certainly not to say President Reagan was entirely transparent with his strategy towards Afghanistan, but he wanted the international community to know that the United States was on the side of the “freedom fighters” and those standing up against Soviet aggression.

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<sup>54</sup> “NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, NSDD147.”

### **CHAPTER 3: RONALD REAGAN'S CONTINUATION OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATIONS FOREIGN POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN**

While the Carter Administration did not have to deal with substantial blowback from the international community regarding their policy in Afghanistan (note the intricacies of the Carter Administration's policies in Afghanistan were not known until much later), the Reagan Administration did receive international pushback, namely from India . When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the United States was already aligned with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and China all in an effort to aid the mujahideen to fight against the Soviet army. This strong Western-backed alliance consisting of major regional players, along with increased aid and military weapons to Pakistan, made Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi extremely weary of the Reagan Administration.<sup>1</sup> At the crux of the tension was what Prime Minister Gandhi believed to be two very different visions for the future of South Asia—India's non-aligned, deeply sovereign and protectionist version (economic liberalization in India did not begin until 1991) and the pro-Western free market South Asia the U.S. sought to create.<sup>2</sup> India's disdain towards America's alliance with Pakistan came as no surprise to the American Government, as Pakistan and India have had a bitter rivalry and engaged in almost constant warfare since the partition of the two countries in 1947 (see the Indian Independence Act of 1947). Tensions between Pakistan and India were again heightened during the Bangladesh War of Independence in 1971, with the double-blow of Pakistan support for the separation of Bangladesh from India and the United States' refusal to give aid to any India during the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kennedy of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Interview with Ambassador Dean.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

According to U.S. Ambassador to India John Gunther Dean, the Nixon government not only refused to provide aid to India during the Bangladesh War, but continued to provide aid to the Pakistani's and strategically sent an aircraft carrier over Calcutta, which the Indian's perceived (correctly) as a sign of pro-Pakistani support by the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

Documents suggest that during the Carter Presidency, the Indian Government knew little about the U.S. aid pipeline from Pakistan to Afghanistan. Indeed, it was not until Indira Gandhi was re-elected in January of 1980 that the Indian Government began to vocalize concerns over the massive amount of U.S. sent to Pakistan. This makes sense when you consider President Carter's aid to Pakistan, designated for Afghanistan, was largely covert and small in comparison to the aid sent by the Reagan Administration. When Reagan took office, much of the controversial programs and policies put into place by President Carter began to come to light, such as the U.S. Government's violation of the Symington Amendment and willingness to ignore international norms prohibiting the further development of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Reagan Administration worked to strengthen the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence, with the goal of making the Pakistan arms and aid pipeline to the rebel fighters (mujahideen) as efficient as possible.<sup>4</sup> While President Reagan had his eyes on the long-term goal of draining the Soviets in Afghanistan, India viewed a stronger and more advanced ISI as detrimental to their national security.<sup>5</sup> To make matters worse for India, the United States Government (under both Carter and Reagan) teamed up with the Chinese Government to send millions in aid to Pakistan. Since Pakistan's split from India in 1947, China had previously supported Pakistan in its numerous

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

wars against India and (like the United States') viewed India as leaning towards the Soviet Union. When discussing Pakistan's nuclear program, U.S Secretary of Defense Harold Brown (of the Carter Administration) and China's Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping both agreed to "set aside" concerns of Pakistan's nuclear program and instead focus on strengthening Pakistan to help combat Soviet aggression in South West Asia.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, both officials made this agreement because they viewed reducing Soviet power in the region as more important than maintaining a steady record on enforcing international law. Essentially, it proved more advantageous for the United States and China to promote Pakistan as a steppingstone in their plan of draining the Soviet Union instead of punishing it for violating international laws. While Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping agreed with sending aid to Pakistan, he also encouraged Secretary Brown to keep the support to Pakistan secret, as India had already called out the United States for its blatant support for Pakistan (despite Pakistan's nuclear program) and accused the U.S. of providing Pakistan with information on uranium.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this proves how the Carter Administration dismissed international law because their interests of gaining leverage against the Soviet Union outweighed previous laws and customs prohibiting the aid to a country developing nuclear weapons. While this practice of turning a blind eye to non-proliferation to advance US interests is more commonly attributed to the Reagan Administration, as mentioned by Professor Artemy Kalinovsky, evidence shows it was in fact first put into effect by the Carter Administration. While President Reagan received condemnation from India for his administration's alliance with nuclear Pakistan, it was actually the Carter Administration at the head of the policy.

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<sup>6</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation Between Secretary of Defense Brown and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## **Developing Nuclear Programs in Pakistan and India: How Pakistan Got Away with Their Rogue Nuclear Program**

Despite the stark contrasts between India and Pakistan's respective nuclear programs, (with India's being far more transparent and civilian-g geared), the Reagan Administration refused aid to India—citing their developing nuclear program—but sent billions in aid to Pakistan. To be sure, this was a part of President Reagan's long-term Cold War strategy in the region, in which Pakistan proved a vital player in draining the Soviets and thus was met with appeasement by President Reagan. Official reports revealed India abided by the International Atomic Energy Agency's guidelines and had a transparent nuclear program, whereas Pakistan's program was largely secretive and in violation of IAEA guidelines.<sup>8</sup> Like his predecessor, President Reagan ignored international norms for the sake of the United States' advantageous alliance with Pakistan. Indeed, President Reagan himself expressed that a strong relationship with Islamabad was the "crux" of U.S. success in the region and that his administration would do whatever necessary to maintain Pakistan's faith in the United States.<sup>9</sup> India founded its nuclear program in the 1940s, before the Non-Proliferation Treaty was created.<sup>10</sup> According to Indian officials at the time, India's goal was to use 500 tons of thorium for energy production.<sup>11</sup> In 1974, India detonated a nuclear device as a way to show military and technical superiority in the South Asia region, especially against Pakistan. By the time India tested their nuclear device in '74, the largely successful Non-Proliferation Treaty was in effect. Importantly, India had not signed the NPT and claimed its nuclear program is for civilian use only. India also made an effort to keep

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Kennedy of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Interview with Ambassador Dean.

<sup>9</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration."

<sup>10</sup> Charles Kennedy of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Oral History Interview with Ambassador Dean.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

its nuclear program transparent, and for the most part allowed inspectors and foreigners into the nuclear facilities.<sup>12</sup> What's more, India has published financial and technical reports on their nuclear program, readily available to the public. Unlike India's accessible nuclear facilities, Pakistan's nuclear program has largely been kept secret and under tight wraps by the ISI. Indeed, in the 1970's Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said it was the goal of Pakistan's nuclear program to create a nuclear weapon.<sup>13</sup> What's more, Pakistan had a large enrichment facility in the city of Kahuta which was not justified as a civilian program (like India's), because Pakistan lacked the ability to build nuclear power stations. What's more, Pakistan worked to produce enriched uranium, which serves as fuel for nuclear armaments.<sup>14</sup> Also unlike India, Pakistan refused to disclose monetary and technical reports for their nuclear program.<sup>15</sup> While it was the goal of India's nuclear program to reprocess spent fuel to recover plutonium to reduce waste, Pakistan had no such civil goal and instead worked to enrich uranium.<sup>16</sup>

When recounting his time as Ambassador to India in the 1980s, John Dean illustrates how the Reagan Administration dismissed international law and created great instability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan as a means to secure U.S. interests in the region, mainly to strengthen the Afghan rebel-forces against the Soviet aggression. Specifically, Dean stressed the relationship between the American CIA and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). According to Dean, the DEA could not perform inspections for drug trafficking outside of the U.S. without permission from the CIA. Thus, the DEA was essentially under control of the CIA when

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

operating abroad. This is important because the CIA prohibited the DEA to adequately investigate Pakistan, which was not only funneling arms from the United States' to send to Afghanistan, but drugs (specifically heroin) as well.<sup>17</sup> To deliver the arms to Afghanistan sent by the United States to Pakistan, the ISI created two secret paths into Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> One route relied on Pakistan Air Force transports, while the main route was operated National Logistic Cell, a state-owned transportation organization. The influx of arms and drugs was so prevalent in Pakistan during the 1980's that Prime Minister Bhutto said Pakistan society was dominated by the "kalatchnikof rifle" (AK47S) sent by the United States and heroin.<sup>19</sup> During the height of the aid pipeline, it is estimated that Pakistan's opium output to Afghanistan increased from 270 to 800 tons from 1979-1987. Indeed, this shows how the Reagan Administration's aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan transformed an already-corrupt Pakistan to a militant and drug-fueled society, in the name of American interests in the region.

When the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported in August 1981 of the lack of safeguards at Pakistan's nuclear powerplant in Karachi, an unnamed U.S. Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence observed that Pakistan was not concerned with the agency's findings.<sup>20</sup> More specifically, the IAEA found evidence in Karachi of a large amount of irradiated fuel that contained enough plutonium for a nuclear explosive. India in turn accused the United States of providing Pakistan with information on nuclear enrichment.<sup>21</sup> Not only did Pakistan show little concern over the IAEA'S findings, the Pakistani Ambassador in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "Acting Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence, National Foreign Assessment Center, to Director and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, "Warning Report – Nuclear Proliferation."

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Washington told the Reagan Administration it would refuse pressure to upgrade their nuclear safeguards in Karachi.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the U.S. Special Assistant to Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence chalked up Pakistan's apathy of the IAEA'S findings to Pakistan President Zia believing it would not affect United States' aid and military assistance to Pakistan (he was right).<sup>23</sup> In response to the IAEA's findings, President Zia said Pakistan would never abandon its right to conduct non-military nuclear research, despite that the finding revealed Pakistan did not possess the technology to do so.<sup>24</sup> The IAEA'S 1981 findings also mark one of the first times Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi expressed serious concern to the Reagan Administration. At the 1981 Cancun Summit on Cooperation and Development, Prime Minister Gandhi voiced that the United States' military aid to Pakistan, specifically of F-16 aircraft, and continual support of Pakistan despite their development of nuclear weapons posed a "national security threat" to India.<sup>25</sup> Despite India's valid concerns over its neighbor developing nuclear weapons, the Reagan Administration continued to send arms and monetary aid to Pakistan. This also shows how President Reagan continued his predecessor's tight alliance with Pakistan, as President Reagan increased aid to Pakistan not even seven months into his first year of his administration. What's more, President Reagan dismissing Prime Minister Gandhi's concerns over national security sheds light to the United States' main priority at the time—creating a legitimate resistance and challenge for the Soviet Union in South West Asia. This is not to say the Reagan Administration was unaware of the very real consequences of a nuclear Pakistan. At the beginning of his term in 1981, the Special Assistant to the Proliferation of Nuclear Intelligence warned President Reagan

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Walters, "US EMBASSY PAKISTAN CABLE 10239 TO STATE DEPARTMENT, 'MY FIRST MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ZIA.'"

<sup>25</sup> Acting Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence, "Warning Report-Nuclear Proliferation."

that a proliferated country such as Pakistan could spark a chain reaction in the region.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, the Assistant warned that increased proliferation increases the chances of loss of arms control as well as the opportunity for terrorists or subnational groups to obtain nuclear materials.<sup>27</sup> Privately, the Reagan Administration justified its tight alliance with Pakistan as a way to build confidence in the Pakistan Government that they do not need nuclear weapons and are protected by the Americans.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, however, an advanced, armed and powerful Pakistani military meant stronger resistance to the Soviets in Afghanistan which served to benefit the United States' Cold War interests.

### **Ronald Reagan's Russian Bear Trap: How his Administration Prolonged the Soviet War in Afghanistan**

While Zbigniew Brzezinski and President Carter devised a plan to get the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan, it was up to the Reagan Administration to exhaust them of their resources. To do so, one of Reagan's central strategies was to portray the United States as protector of the third-world and preserver of Islam, when in reality the policies he invoked had the sole intention of advancing U.S. Cold War interests. When writing one of the many National Security Directives on Afghanistan, President Reagan stressed it was of utmost importance that the Soviet Army not defeat the rebel fighters.<sup>29</sup> For Reagan, the longer the Soviets were in Afghanistan fighting against the rebel groups, the better for the United States' ultimate end game of draining the Soviets. According to Reagan, the brutal fighting between the Afghan rebels and Soviet

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<sup>26</sup> Acting Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence, "Request for Review of Draft Paper on the Security Dimension of Non-Proliferation."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 147."

<sup>29</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

Union would serve to an example for other third-world countries (most with weak militaries), that the Soviet Union was willing to invade militarily if it suited their interests.<sup>30</sup> More specifically, Reagan wanted to demonstrate to the Third World that the Soviet Union was not the protector of third world interest but instead an aggressor. Indeed, Reagan hoped this would be a deterrent for other third world countries to align with the Soviet Union and instead inch closer to the United States', who positioned itself as the liberator of the Thir World from Soviet aggression.<sup>31</sup> For President Reagan, the United States' aid to the rebel groups in Afghanistan served as an example of the United States' commitment to anti-Soviet insurgencies in other contentious regions, such as Central America and Africa.<sup>32</sup> It was important for the Reagan Administration that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—and the United States' response—not appear as an East- West confrontation but as a third world struggle, of which the United States' would appear as liberators and the Soviets as the aggressors.<sup>33</sup> Like the Carter Administration, Reagan also viewed the importance Islam in the region as a tool to defeat the Soviets. In his policy objectives, Reagan stressed the importance of surrounding Muslim countries knowledge of Soviet actions in Afghanistan. Similarly, the Reagan Administration believed fellow Islamic countries would be outraged by the atrocities performed by the Soviet Union, and that this outrage would inspire Muslim people around the world to join the effort of defeating the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Because of this shared belief, President Reagan looked to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco and the Sudan as countries with significant Muslim populations likely

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<sup>30</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

<sup>31</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

<sup>32</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

<sup>33</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

<sup>34</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

to be outraged by the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> While publicly allying with the aforementioned countries to preserve Islam and defend the Afghan rebels, the Reagan Administration quietly hoped to gain military bases and more access to the oil-rich region.<sup>36</sup> To be sure, citing Islam to gain pro-Western allies was a disingenuous policy by both the Carter and Reagan Administrations, as they had little concern in preserving Islam but instead saw the religion as a tool to increase their global super-power status. Indeed, the Reagan administration launched a fierce propaganda campaign to unite Muslim countries against the Soviet Union.

One of the many ways the Reagan Administration worked to foster pro-American sentiments in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion was through the American Friends of Afghanistan project (AFA), a 501(C) established in 1979 to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> President Reagan utilized the organization to instill democratic principles for the people of the Afghan resistance. While providing education for education's sake itself would be noble of President Reagan, I argue that because of the unique situation Afghanistan was placed in—caught in the middle of a Cold War fight—Reagan's desire to provide education to the Afghan resistance was a move to strengthen animosity towards The Soviet Union and increase the power of the resistance. Indeed, a look at the goals of the Afghanistan Democratic Education Project helps prove this. The Education Project only applied to eligible students living in areas controlled by the resistance and to men actively fighting in the resistance against the Soviets.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, the Education Project (totaling 180,000 dollars in

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<sup>35</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 99."

<sup>36</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 99."

<sup>37</sup> American Friends of Afghanistan, "National Endowment for Democracy Project Proposal. 'Afghanistan Democratic Education Project,'"

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

US funds) aimed to establish twenty education centers at the “freedom fighters” make-shift military bases and to supply the literacy centers with documents that focused on life in Afghanistan before the Soviet invasion.<sup>39</sup> The freedom fighters were also provided (and trained) with video minicameras to record their everyday life fighting against the Soviets to provide video documentation of the war for the people of Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup> Along with the video footage of the war, the Education Project also relied on and distributed cassette tapes with recordings in Dari and Pashto to provide civilians of the Afghan resistance with news and commentary of the war.<sup>41</sup> The cassette tapes were mixed with anti-Soviet war commentary as well as Afghan folk tales and music in order to appear familiar and trustworthy to the Afghans.<sup>42</sup> While the Education Project provided the Western-based curriculum and materials, teachers at local schools were selected off recommendations from the mujahideen (the Afghan rebel fighters).<sup>43</sup> For the Reagan Administration, these centers were used to demonstrate to both the resistance and civilians just how damaging the Soviet invasion was to life in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> While there is no question the Soviets committed mass atrocities in Afghanistan, President Reagan’s reliance on the Education Project is certainly disingenuous for several reasons. First off, it is the central argument of my paper that the American’s saw the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as likely and thus worked to make the invasion happen and to make it as costly as possible for America’s strategic benefit. One of the ways both the Carter and Reagan Administrations worked to make the invasion as costly as possible was by highlighting the damage caused by the Soviets to Afghan people and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

the status of Islam in the region (see Brzezinski's *Reflections on Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan*). So, while the Education Project focused on the terrible actions from the Soviet Union, the motivation behind providing the documents and video footage was double-sided at best.

At home in the United States, President Reagan worked tirelessly to increase U.S. support for the Afghan rebels. To increase domestic support for the Afghan rebel fighters, President Reagan called for increased United States Information Agency (USIA) programming on the war in Afghanistan, concentrating on Soviet bombing in both Pakistan and Afghanistan and the subsequent refugee crisis.<sup>45</sup> Another one of the ways President Reagan often rallied for support for the Afghans was to emphasize the role of the rebels as “freedom fighters” willing to fight and die for liberty—a cause familiar to the history of the United States.<sup>46</sup> To pull on patriotic beliefs, President Reagan declared March 10, 1982 the official day of Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> National news crews and representatives from Japan, Thailand, Kenya and Austria all gathered in the East Room of the White House to hear President Reagan and a young girl refugee from Afghanistan speak. In her speech, the Afghan girl thanked President Reagan and his administration for all of their help against the Soviet Union and presented President Reagan with an Afghan flag to symbolize freedom and hope for Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> In the President's speech, Reagan expressed his admiration for the Afghan people fighting for peace and freedom in what he called an “unprovoked attack”.<sup>49</sup> I argue that this statement of an unprovoked attack from the Soviets by President Reagan is extremely untrue and misleading. Previously mentioned evidence shows

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<sup>45</sup> “NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 270.”

<sup>46</sup> “NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166.”

<sup>47</sup> “Proclamation 5309 -- Afghanistan Day, 1985 | Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - National Archives and Records Administration.”

<sup>48</sup> *President Reagan's Speech on the Afghanistan Day Proclamation in the East Room on March 10, 1982.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

how the United States', under President Carter, instigated the Soviet invasion to trap the Soviets in the region (see *From the Shadows*, p146). Moreover, the longer and more intense the fighting against the Afghans and Soviet Union, the better for the United States' Cold War interests. Reagan went on to talk about the very real damage done by the Soviets and the killings of innocent people in villages.<sup>50</sup> This is undisputable. However, both President Reagan and President Carter actively worked to intensify the fighting (and added to the death toll) by flooding the rebels with sophisticated weaponry, such as the F-16 bomber.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, both Carter and Reagan worked to create a skilled and sophisticated resistance capable of competing with the one of the worlds most advanced militaries.

### **Ronald Reagan and The Mujahideen**

When President Carter authorized aid to be sent to the Afghan-rebel fighters, there was no official group or unified faction fighting against the Soviets; instead, the aid was sent to the rather vague resistance fighters to strengthen an ill-equipped force to be able to fight against the sophisticated Soviet Army. By the time Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the Afghan rebel fighters had better organized and unified (to an extent) to defeat the Soviets and became referred to globally as the *mujahideen* (meaning fighter of jihad). Initially, the rebel fighters were trained by U.S. Green Berets and the Pakistani ISI in clandestine military bases in Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> The Reagan Administration was so dependent on the mujahideen to entrap the Soviets in endless-fighting that they conducted performance goals and frequent measures of effectiveness.<sup>53</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>52</sup> Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq*.

<sup>53</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 166."

one of the staples of the Reagan Administration's policy in Afghanistan was to have the mujahideen as powerful and strong as possible to maximize the Soviet's losses. For the United States', this was actually a long term strategy aimed at devastating the Soviet Union not only in Afghanistan but at home and abroad as well.<sup>54</sup> By spreading the news of the atrocities happening in Afghanistan, the Reagan Administration created a perfect storm to weaken the Soviets—discontent at home because of the longevity of the war and high death count, outrage by surrounding Muslim countries who felt Islam was under attack, and condemnation and boycotts from the international community. It is estimated that between 1981-1980 alone the CIA funneled 60 million US dollars to Afghanistan in support of the Mujahedeen, an amount matched by Saudi Arabia.<sup>55</sup> Along with monetary aid to the Mujahedeen, the United States' also supplied the group with up to 2,500 missiles – including advanced Stinger Missiles (specially requested by President Zia of Pakistan)—that were used by the United States for the first time in the Vietnam War.<sup>56</sup> CIA director William Casey also encouraged the Mujahedeen leaders to radicalize and recruit Muslims to come to Afghanistan to conduct jihad against the Soviets.<sup>57</sup> It is estimated that between 1982-1992, 35,000 Muslims came from surrounding countries to fight with the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

Like all aspects of the United States' policy in Afghanistan, the U.S. relied closely on Pakistan to strengthen the mujahideen. The United States' not only provided arms and military training to the mujahideen, the U.S. (along with Saudi Arabia) funded the mujahideen's

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<sup>54</sup> "NSDD - National Security Decision Directives - Reagan Administration, 99."

<sup>55</sup> Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy Toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq*.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

education through madrassas based in Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> The madrassas taught an extremist version of Islam with textbooks and teaching materials provided by the United States and Saudi Arabia.<sup>60</sup> For poor and orphaned boys in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Madrassas were often the only option of schooling.<sup>61</sup> Viewed in a Cold War context, Madrassas were a perfect solution for President Reagan's strategy of uniting Muslims to conduct jihad against the Soviets.

### **The Gandhi's and Ronald Reagan: A Battle of South Asia**

As the war in Afghanistan marched on, President Reagan worked to extend the war and make it as costly as possible for the Soviet Union. Unsurprisingly, India (under Indira Gandhi) tried its best to bring the conflict to an end by pressuring the United States. Because there was no way to verify that all of arms sent to Pakistan from the United States went to the mujahideen fighters, politicians at home and abroad raised concerns over a rogue group accessing arms from the 'leaky pipeline'. Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi (and later Rajiv Gandhi) frequently expressed concern that the ISI would use a portion of the military equipment sent over by the United States to launch attacks against India. When Indian officials pressured the Reagan Administration on their extensive aid to Pakistan, the go-to U.S. response that was as long as there are Soviet troops in Afghanistan, the United States' will continue sending aid to Pakistan<sup>62</sup>. To push back against this claim, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi argued that the military equipment sent over by the United States was unnecessarily sophisticated.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, Rajiv Gandhi criticized the U.S. for providing Pakistan with harpoon missiles, which are deployed off naval

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<sup>59</sup> Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan Under the Taliban*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Dean, "Congressman Solarz' Meeting with Prime Minister Gandhi."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

ships and advanced tanks that cannot navigate the mountainous terrain in Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> I contend that the Reagan Administration sent such advanced weaponry to Pakistan to appease the ISI's demands and ensure a tight alliance between the two countries. Similar to how the Carter and Reagan Administrations were willing to ignore Pakistan's nuclear development to maintain influence in the region, the Reagan Administration was willing to send Pakistan advanced weapons to secure an alliance crucial to U.S. interests. An unhappy ISI meant risking the success of the United States' long-term goal of draining the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, which was something the Reagan Administration was unwilling to do. For Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, this meant having to deal with an increasingly aggressive and unchecked neighbor on their border.

Along with criticizing the type of military equipment the Reagan Administration sent to Pakistan, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi also criticized the lack of U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union on reaching an agreement in the region. Starting as early as 1982, India worked to bring the Soviet Union and United States together to reach an agreement on the future of Afghanistan. Like his predecessor Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi accused the Reagan Administration of prolonging the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in an attempt to bleed the Soviets of power.<sup>65</sup> I argue that the hard bargain mentality possessed by President Reagan (and outright refusal to meet the Soviets in the middle) was a strategic choice to make the Soviet invasion as costly as possible and diminish their standing globally. In meetings between President Gorbachev and Indian Foreign Secretary A.P. Venkateswaran, Gorbachev expressed to the Indian official that the Soviet Union would consider withdrawing from

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Dean, "Ambassador Dean Cable, 'Subject: Afghanistan.'"

Afghanistan if he felt confident Afghanistan would remain “neutral and unaligned”.<sup>66 67</sup> Because the Reagan Administration did not want a timely Soviet withdrawal (remember National Security Advisor Brzezinski called a quick Soviet victory the “worst outcome possible”<sup>68</sup>), the U.S. refused to accept Soviet propositions for an agreement on Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union offered proposals on a settlement in 1987, President Reagan doubted the seriousness of the proposals and cited increased Soviet military aggression at the Pakistan border as justification for increased U.S. aid to Pakistan and the mujahideen.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, this refusal to reach a timely agreement on Afghanistan helps to prove my argument that the United States’ (under both Carter and Reagan) viewed the conflict as beneficial to U.S. long-term interests in so far as the Soviet Union ruined their credibility in the region and suffered substantial loss. Because this was the goal of the United States’, India, the Soviet Union and the U.S. engaged in over of five years of mundane talks before reaching a suitable agreement on Afghanistan.

Despite the Soviet Union’s alleged willingness to leave the region if Afghanistan existed as neutral and non-aligned, the Soviet Union became unhappy with Afghan President Babrak Karmal (who they installed in 1979) and replaced him with Mohammed Najibullah in 1986. For President Reagan, the installation of Najibullah as President of Afghanistan amidst talks of withdrawal confirmed the United States’ long belief that the Soviet Union wanted Afghanistan as a satellite state and gave President Reagan another reason to justify prolonging the war.<sup>70</sup>

Alternatively, the Reagan Administration conveyed they would only agree to reaching a solution

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Dean, “Ambassador Dean’s Cable “Subject: Meeting with Prime Minister Gandhi, December 6.”

<sup>68</sup> Brzezinski, “Reflections on the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” December 26, 1979.

<sup>69</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*.

<sup>70</sup> Haig, “Cable from Secretary of State: Letter to President from Prime Minister Gandhi.”

on Afghanistan if Karmal was disposed and an interim-government took place of the Soviet-backed PDPA.<sup>71</sup> It is worth noting that while the Reagan Administration refused to consider any solution to the war in Afghanistan that resulted in a Soviet-friendly Afghan Government, President Reagan advocated for former King Zahir Shah to oversee the potential interim-government in Afghanistan.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, this highlights yet another contradiction in U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan at the time—while President Reagan refused to reach an agreement that did not include a “fresh start” without the Soviet-backed leadership, he called for U.S-backed Zahir Shah to oversee the future of Afghanistan. While the Reagan Administration publicly called for self-determination of the future of Afghanistan post-Soviet withdrawal, they worked behind the scenes to bring back Zahir Shah, the last King of Afghanistan who was overthrown in a largely popular coup d’état in 1973.

As the war in Afghanistan waged on, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi became increasingly concerned about fundamentalist groups in Pakistan that received support from Zia and the United States.<sup>73</sup> To be sure, India no longer viewed the mujahideen as a group conducting jihad against the Soviets, but as a powerful military operation that had the power and equipment to attack India.<sup>74</sup> Prime Minister Gandhi expressed to the Reagan Administration that President Zia’s role in supporting the mujahideen no longer had the same basis as it once did, and that President Zia had begun using aid and military weapons to promote Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>75</sup> Gandhi specifically criticized the Reagan Administration for their support of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the

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<sup>71</sup> Dean, “Ambassador Dean’s Cable. Subject: Gandhi/Ryzhkov Meeting: Discussion of Afghanistan.”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Dean, “Ambassador Dean Cable to Secretary of State. Subject: Meeting with Prime Minister Gandhi, June 3.”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

leader of an extremist group in Afghanistan fighting against the Soviets (specifically with their eyes set on Kabul).<sup>76</sup> The United States' willingness to support extremist groups in Afghanistan to wage jihad against the Soviets proved another point of departure for U.S. and Indian interests in the region. While India was addiment about Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the removal of all foreign intervention, Prime Minister Gandhi was unwilling to support a fundamentalist government in Afghanistan. For the United States, the more fundamentalism in the region—inspired by the mujahideen—meant less Soviet influence, which meant a Cold War victory for the United States.

### **The Long Goodbye: The Superpowers leave Afghanistan**

1988 served as a consequential year for the battle over South Asia for two main reasons: the United States' closest ally and staunch supporter of the Afghan rebels Pakistani President Zia Ul-Huq was killed in a plane crash, and the United States and Soviet Union agreed to meet in Geneva, Switzerland to reach a settlement on Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> While it is true President Zia and President Reagan had a close relationship where the United States' worked to appease Zia, the immediate continuance of the alliance following Zia's death proves that the United States' partnership to Pakistan wasn't dependent on a specific relationship among two people but instead centered around Pakistan's geopolitical strategic significance in defeating the Soviets. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1988 President Zia visited the Tamewali Test Range, a military launchpad located in Pakistan.<sup>78</sup> President Zia was accompanied by American Ambassador to Pakistan, Raphel Arnold, Chief of the American Mission in Pakistan General Herbet Wasson, and senior officials

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ahmad et al., "Afghanistan: The Making of US Foreign Policy, 1973-1990."

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

of the Pakistan Military.<sup>79</sup> The US and Pakistani officials left the military site on a private plane, which crashed shortly after taking off and resulted in the death of all passengers onboard. Officially, the United States' declared the plane crash as an accident and cited faulty equipment. While the Reagan Administration publicly expressed their condolences for the death of Zia, they scrambled behind the scenes to ensure Pakistan remained the main supporter for the Afghan rebel fighters.<sup>80</sup> It was important to the Reagan Administration that Pakistan at least appear to hold democratic elections to replace President Zia, so Congress would view the billions sent in aid over the past ten years as beneficial.<sup>81</sup> Immediately after Zia's death, new US Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley met with Pakistan General Mirza Beg, who became Chief of the Army after Zia's death.<sup>82</sup> Both men assured each other of their country's commitment to the other and reaffirmed their mutual desire to have the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan's politics.<sup>83</sup> Beg himself said he considered Pakistan and Afghanistan to be "one people" among two nations.<sup>84</sup>

After years of stalled negotiations and disagreements over what the future of Afghanistan would look like, President Gorbachev announced in February 1988 that the Soviet Union would begin to pull troops out of Afghanistan that year so long as the Geneva Accords were signed by March 15.<sup>85</sup> In April of 1988 (just a month after Gorbachev's deadline) representatives from Pakistan, Afghanistan, the United States and Soviet Union met in Geneva, Switzerland to sign

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Oakley, "Cable from Ambassador Oakley, Embassy of Islamabad: 'Subject: Ambassador Oakley's Meeting with General Beg.'"

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ottaway, "AGREEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN SIGNED IN GENEVA."

the agreed upon accords. The Accords largely favored the United States and were contingent on the complete removal of any Soviet-backed government. Importantly, the Accords did not call for a cease-fire and the United States' said it would continue to provide the rebel fighters with arms so long as the Soviet Government continued to provide arms to the Afghan Government.<sup>86</sup> Notably left out of the talks were the mujahideen fighters, who vowed to continue fighting after the Soviet Union was out of Afghanistan. What's more, both Pakistan and the United States—despite signing the Accords—considered the current government of Afghanistan “illegitimate and unworthy of diplomatic recognition” and would only recognize a government determined without Soviet influence.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, both the United States and Pakistan insisted they would not follow the Accords, or consider them legitimate, until the Soviet Union cut off aid to Afghanistan and withdrew all of their 115,000 troops in the region.<sup>88</sup> Because of the refusal to implement a ceasefire and stop arm-shipments, aggressive fighting continued in Afghanistan after the Accords were signed. President Reagan doubted the Soviet Union's commitment to the Accords and accused the Soviets of increasing attacks on the Pakistan/ Afghan border. It is true the Soviets increased aggression in the region after signing the Accords—they successfully reoccupied Kunduz (a city in Northern Afghanistan) and invaded Pakistani airspace.<sup>89</sup> Because of this, President Reagan increased arms sales to Pakistan, including the sale of the F16 Stinger.<sup>90</sup> Amongst the increased violence that followed the Accords, the Soviet Union indeed began to slowly remove their troops in Afghanistan, with the first contingent leaving on May

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Oakley, “Cable from Ambassador Oakley, Amembassy Islamabad: ‘Subject: Ambassador Oakley’s Meeting with General Beg.’”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

16th.<sup>91</sup> Although the Soviet Union slowly began to lessen their presence in the region, warfare in Afghanistan remained strong.

The spike in fighting in Afghanistan during the Soviet withdrawal reflects the true primary goal of the United States' in Afghanistan—to destroy the Soviet's political and economic presence in the region and establish a government friendly with Pakistan and open to Western influence. Had the United States' just wanted a Soviet withdrawal and self-determination in Afghanistan—as expressed time and time again by both President Carter and Reagan—the US would have followed the Geneva Agreements and remained neutral in the future government of Afghanistan. Instead, as the Soviet troops continued to leave the region the United States' continued to send aid and weaponry to the rebel fighters to assist in their fight to topple the existing government.<sup>92</sup> The continued support for the mujahideen came after Afghan President Najibullah called for the complete removal of Soviet troops and said Afghanistan was strong enough to stand without foreign assistance from the Soviets.<sup>93</sup> For the Reagan Administration this proved unsatisfactory and he vowed to continue aid to the rebels until they successfully overthrew the Najibullah Government in Kabul. After talks of bringing back Zahir Shah to hold a loya jirga (a government council) were squashed, the Reagan Administration began to back Burhanuddin Rabbani as the next potential leader of Afghanistan. Throughout the war, Rabanni established himself as pro-Islamist leader of the mujahideen and met with the United States' several times, including a meeting with President Reagan in November of 1988.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ahmad et al., "Afghanistan: The Making of US Foreign Policy, 1973-1990."

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

This marked a slight shift in US aid to Afghanistan, as the US now began to send aid directly to mujahideen leaders (instead of through Pakistan) in hope of establishing one of the leaders as head of the new government.<sup>95</sup> Again, the Reagan Administrations investment in the future leader of Afghanistan directly contradicts his non-aligned stance and call for self-determination for the Afghan people.

By the turn of the new year, the Soviet Union was still in the process of leaving Afghanistan. According to President Gorbachev, the lingering Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was due to increased rebel attacks on Soviet troops and government-held cities in Afghanistan.<sup>96</sup> To be sure, President Gorbachev criticized the Reagan Administration for not following the agreement laid out in the Geneva Accords to equally reduce US involvement in the region alongside the Soviet withdrawal, which resulted in a back-and-forth between Reagan and Gorbachev over who was committed to the Geneva Accords and who was failing to uphold their end of the agreement. In January, Afghan officials predicted Kabul and the Najibullah Government would fall within weeks of complete Soviet withdrawal from the region.<sup>97</sup> While the fighting over Kabul continued, the turn of the new year brought changes to the United States Government—President Reagan left office and was replaced by his Vice President George Bush. As expected, President Bush vowed to continue Ronald Reagan (and President Carter’s) policy towards Afghanistan and worked to aid the mujahideen in toppling the existing Afghan government.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

On January 30, 1989 confident of a complete Soviet withdrawal and fall of the Najibullah Regime, The United States' closed its embassy in Kabul. Upon closing the embassy in Kabul, Jon Glassman, the US Charge d'Affaires expressed optimism about freedom and peace for the future of Afghanistan and said "Goodbye... We are going home".<sup>98</sup> While the US Government publicly expressed optimism about the future of Afghanistan, the embassies actually closed because they feared impending anarchy (and the safety of US diplomats) once the Soviets were completely out of Afghanistan.<sup>99</sup> This illustrates that the United States' (under both Reagan and Carter) had little concern about the people of Afghanistan so long as the region was free from Soviet-backed communist rule. Indeed, the closing of the US Embassy signaled the United States' distancing themselves from Afghanistan. While President Bush had promised the Afghan people that the United States' would play a critical part in bringing stability in the region after the Soviets left, the United States' physical presence similarly decreased as well. Fighting between the current communist government under Najibullah and the rebel fighters reached an all-time high in February, when President Najibullah summoned civilians to take arms to fight against a rebel attack in Kabul.<sup>100</sup> President Bush's administration agreed to continue to send aid to the rebel fighters until the Najibullah regime toppled, again re-establishing the United States' commitment to rid the country of communism and deliver a final blow to the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup> In February, President Najibullah declared Kabul to be under a state of emergency and in March, the Interim Government of Afghanistan (made up of rebel fighters and led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) was officially established and recognized by the Islamic Conference and supported by

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

the United States.<sup>102</sup> By February 15 of 1989, the Soviet Union announced all of their troops had officially left Afghanistan. Despite the official departure and seeming conclusion of the proxy war between the two great powers, intense fighting continued in Afghanistan over the future of the country. Worrisome to the Bush Administration was the fact that the rebels were fighting with advanced military equipment provided by the United States, including F16 Stingers and other surface-to-air missiles.<sup>103</sup> Attempts to buy-back the millions of dollars of weaponry sent by the United States proved worthless. Along with the heightened civil war over the future of Afghanistan (and Soviet departure) came several tragic consequences. Indeed, food shortage was so severe that it was reported 30,000 Afghan children ran the risk of major illness and death from malnutrition.<sup>104</sup> Up to two million people were displaced in Afghanistan alone from the war, with more refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Over two million civilians were killed along with 90,000 mujahideen fighters and 18,000 Afghan troops.<sup>105</sup> Both the United States' and former Soviet Union shifted their attention elsewhere as the Cold War came to a close, having left a mark on Afghanistan the Afghani people would not soon forget. Perhaps former CIA Director Robert Gates summarized best how the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent US involvement was a Cold War battle between the two Super-Powers at the expense of Afghan people when he said "Afghanistan was at least free of the foreign invader. Now Afghans could resume fighting among themselves—and hardly anyone cared".<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal of Afghanistan*.

<sup>106</sup> Gates, *From The Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won The Cold War*.

## **Conclusion**

To be sure, the tragedy of Afghanistan cannot be blamed solely on the Americans. For twelve years, the Soviet Union violated international law by having troops in Afghanistan while waging an unrelenting war that completely divided and wrecked an already unstable country. Many of the two million Afghan refugees were never able to return home, and those who remained in Afghanistan were jobless, had broken families and no real state infrastructure to support them. Many young men (including those who were children during the Soviet invasion and received their education in Madrassas) joined in on the continuous fighting. Despite promises from the United States to help rebuild Afghanistan, US aid came to an end under the Bush Administration. When the Taliban officially came to power in 1992, it appeared to the outside world that stability—albeit resulting from an authoritarian regime—finally reached Afghanistan. Internally, however, Afghanistan remained divided and the civil war continued. It wasn't until the end of the decade that the United States' refocused on Afghanistan and the extremism breeding there and in neighboring Pakistan. Central to the resurgence of attention towards the region was Osama bin Laden's terror group, al-Qaeda, which launched attacks against Americans around the globe (see the Yemen hotel bombings in 1998 and attack of the USS Cole in 2000). Indeed, bin Laden and several high ranking members of al-Qaeda were former mujahideen who previously worked alongside the United States to defeat the Soviet Union. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center marked a turning point not only in the United States' relationship with Afghanistan, but globally as well. The United States invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 with the goals of capturing bin Laden and toppling the Taliban regime, both of which were accomplished. Eighteen years later, however, and the United States

remains in Afghanistan with no clear endgame in sight. One could argue the United States prolonged involvement in Afghanistan resembles the Soviet invasion that lasted over a decade. Since the 2001 invasion, over 2,000 US Military personnel have died from fighting in Afghanistan.<sup>107</sup> Considered altogether, this makes for a tragic story of war, nationalism and revenge for which multiple countries have suffered. It is my hope that the history of Afghanistan and the United States' involvement there serve as a reminder of the dangers of pursuing a national self-interest in countries around the world under the guise of humanitarian intervention.

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<sup>107</sup> Crawford, "Human Cost of the Post-9/11 Wars: Lethality and the Need for Transparency."

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