

Research report

Forum: Historical Security Council
Issue: Simulating the Soviet-Afghan proxy-war in the context of the cold war
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Introduction

Following the second World War two dominions and their allies bump heads in an intense geopolitical contest of which power bloc is to come out on top in the still ongoing rivalry, more commonly known as the Cold War. The aforementioned power blocs being on one side the 'First World', the western bloc led by the United States as the most significant and powerful member, and on the other side the 'Second World', the eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union as the most notable and dominant member. The general consensus is that the Cold War was a, although the two superpowers constantly threatening one and other, 'war' without many casualties, mostly played out in the political theatre. And when one merely takes into consideration what played out in the western world this consensus makes sense. However, the world is larger than exclusively the western world; we must realise how much impact especially the United States and Russia have on the rest of the world and the repercussions this influence has.

In this report we will specifically look at the impact the proxy-war, that later contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union, had in Afghanistan. To already give one a rough idea of the impact the war had in Afghanistan, here is some estimated information about Afghan civilians: Between 562.000 and 2.000.000 killed, and roughly 5.000.000 refugees outside of Afghanistan. Important to note is that all this happened between the 24th of December 1979 and the 15th of February 1989, which is less than a decade.

One must realise that understanding the issue is vastly arduous. The number of involved parties is countless, not only world-renowned superpowers, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union, are involved, but numerous civilian rebellion groups also have a finger in the pie. When many different parties are engaged in a conflict, many different interests should all be taken into consideration when making decisions, especially when making influential, game-changing resolutions.

Additionally, one should realise that Afghanistan is a country with many different ethnic groups inhabiting it. The graveyard of empires, a nickname given to Afghanistan because of its harsh and uninviting environment, where many forces such as those from India and the far East had failed to cross the deserted area, reemphasizes exactly what was just described. It was, however, inhabited by many different tribes, who were able to survive in the many valleys covering the country, living completely isolated from world politics and conflicts. In the 19th century modern imperialism motivated the British and the Russians to take as much terrain as possible, cautious of each other's presence. Afghanistan naturally formed as a border between the two superpowers. The British did attempt to take control of Afghanistan, but after minor disputes the British were not able to take charge, hence allowing Afghanistan to become an independent state.

Definitions of key terms

Proxy War

Third parties being used to fight the battles of, often larger, more powerful, governments or organisations. In general, smaller organisations, such as rebellion forces and mercenaries, are

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used as what one would call a proxy. In the instance of the Soviet-Afghan Proxy War though, the Afghan government was used as a proxy for the USSR. The Mujahideen was used as a proxy by many different nations, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Jihad

Jihad is the Arabic word for 'struggle'. It is described in the Quran numerous times as the devotee's struggle to be a pious Moslem. In the context of this report (and how it is mostly conceived as in western civilisation), it will refer to 'holy war'.

Guerrilla Warfare

Guerrilla warfare is a concept of warfare in which small 'unorganised' forces attack regular forces. Guerrilla is mostly unexpected, and tires and disrupts the opponent.

Puppet State

A puppet state is a government or state that is controlled by another, more powerful country, yet appearing to be independent.

Pashtuns

The Pashtuns are an ethnically Iranian group but are more commonly known nowadays as Afghans.

Capitalism and Communism

A capitalism-based economic system is one in which businesses and industries are owned and run by private persons for financial gain. When the community controls the nation's trade and industry and each person's share is determined by his or her needs and ability, the socioeconomic system is referred to as communism. The US being capitalist and the USSR being communist caused many tensions during the cold war.

General overview

After the second World War, political and military tensions between the mentioned power blocs rose, this is what we call the Cold War. Initiating the Cold War were ideological and political disagreements, for example the fear of communism in the United States, between the Soviet Union or USSR and the United States of America, after they had defeated the Axis in conjunction. Also, the invention of nuclear weapons and the fear of a country producing and using these weapons of mass destruction, naturally caused conflict between the power blocs. This dispute did not narrowly only affect the United States and Russia, and the place where the

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Cold War left its detrimental footprint and where the consequences are still influencing everyday life is Afghanistan.

Shortly after Afghanistan became independent it was renamed '*the Kingdom of Afghanistan*', accepted into the League of Nations, and remained in relative peace and stability. The king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, was constantly modernising the kingdom and made sure to be on good terms with both the USSR and the United States, both powers funding the modernisation and development of the kingdom. In 1973, Shah went to Italy to get eye treatment when a coup d'état was initiated by Daoud Khan, who was his cousin. Reasons for the coup were a famine a few years earlier that was badly handled by the king and the king failing to implement laws the parliament had recently passed. Instead of going back to Afghanistan and attempting to fight his way back on the throne, Shah abdicated from the throne, becoming the last Afghan monarch to this day. Khan promised the country economic growth and prosperity and had struck up good ties with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist party that was gaining an increasing amount of following in the landlocked country. By 1978, Khan had not been able to improve the economic situation or living standards and had also lost the good connection to the USSR, whilst leaning more to the First World for aid. One more thing one should know about Khan is his love for the Pashtun people, he was a Pashtun himself and believed that parts of Pakistan belonged to Afghanistan. Eventually, the PDPA lost their trust in Khan and saw him as a threat to the nation rather than a forward-thinking leader. This climaxed into another coup, more commonly known as the Saur Revolution.

The Saur Revolution, in contrast with the previous coup of 1973, was significantly more violent, leading to a long period of death and destruction in Afghanistan. The coup obviously had a socialist nature, because it was led by the PDPA, and was undoubtedly supported by the largest communist power in the world, the USSR. Daoud Khan was killed in his palace, after this Afghanistan went through another name change and was named '*the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan*', the country gained a new prime minister, Hafizullah Amin, and a new president, Nur Muhammad Taraki. The new regime, though, once again was not liked by the people, leading to riots in 1979.

At the same time various groups of fighters, from different ethnicities, started emerging throughout the entire country, some of these groups were even able to win terrain. The groups' collective name was the Mujahideen, which in Arabic means nothing less than 'those engaged in Jihad'. Not having the facilities to fight against the Mujahideen, Taraki asked the Soviets for help, who were hesitant, to say the least, to join the force. For reasons we will not go into, Amin had Taraki killed and declared himself both president as well as prime minister. When an entire division of the Afghan army joined Mujahideen, the Soviets properly got involved, fearing another Islamic State government. The Soviets then assassinated Amin and instated Babrak Karmal as the new leader of the so-called 'Soviet Puppet Government'. The invasion was going well for the Russians, and all left to do was eliminate the rebellions, Mujahideen.

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From now on the Afghan army was under control of the Russians. The Soviet Union (Afghan army) occupied most large cities and important landmarks, but eighty percent of the country was still in hands of the Mujahideen. The new mission for the Soviets was: eliminate the Mujahideen. During the Cold War, when the Soviets were involved internationally, undeniably the capitalist Americans were going to be involved too, always on the opposing side. In this instance this meant that they supplied the Mujahideen with weapons and money. The Americans were not the only suppliers to the Mujahideen though, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and surprisingly even China also aided the rebel group with money and weapons. The conflict was mostly seen by the public as a Muslim group retaliating against their foreign aggressor, crowning it a Jihad. The Jihad attracted people from all over the world, who were willing to fight for their religion, one of these people being Osama Bin Laden. The Mujahideen was growing stronger, more powerful, and militarily skilled by the day.

The Soviets did not hold back regardless. Many battles were fought out, especially between 1980 and 1985. The Soviets usually outnumbered the Mujahideen, the rebellions Guerrilla tactics however, caused many troubles for the Soviets.

The popularity of the war strongly declined in the Soviet Union, when people realised they were not close to winning the war against the Mujahideen. So, in 1985, the progressive new leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in order to close 'the bleeding wound' which was Afghanistan, named a new puppet president, Mohammed Najibullah, who showed a willingness to negotiate with the Mujahideen, and, in 1986, organised a ceasefire. After the Geneva accords in 1989, the Soviets finally left Afghanistan, having achieved nothing.

Major parties involved

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union or Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was a communist union and the largest country, surface-wise, globally. Being the largest communist party, naturally, they became the United States' number one political concern, after the defeat of the Axis. The Soviet Union is generally seen as the main aggressor in this issue by western countries. The Soviets on the other hand saw the invasion as protecting the Afghan people from the western powers and an attempt to uphold the long-lasting ties with the Afghan government. The dispute will later be one of the reasons for the downfall of the Soviet Union.

India

India was one of the countries of the pro-Soviet Union. They did not get much choice; they were militarily and economically dependent on the USSR. India failing to condemn the invasion has been said to be a huge issue in the relationship between Afghanistan and India, even until today.

The Mujahideen

Throughout history, the term, *mujahideen*, is used frequently, for example, during the British raj the Muslim resistance was called mujahideen, the literal meaning being 'holy warriors'. In the context of the Soviet-Afghan proxy war, mujahideen is used to name the group of different guerrilla forces that were often supported by the first world. Although these different groups disagree slightly on certain smaller topics, the main focus is to eliminate Soviet influence in Afghanistan (and the whole Middle East for that matter). One of the groups descending from Mujahideen is the Taliban.

The United States

The United States stood on the opposite side of the conflict from the Soviets. Former US president Jimmy Carter thought that the Soviet presence was a threat to western influence in the region and was afraid the Soviets would gain access to the Indian Ocean. The United States, still under Carter, started funding the Mujahideen in order to offer resistance to the USSR. The Pakistani army was also funded by the US in the same time period.

Pakistan

The Pakistanis, like most surrounding countries, felt threatened by the sudden Soviet presence. The Pakistani army received funding from the US which was, moreover, funnelled through to the Mujahideen. Pakistan took in many Afghans, who had fled from the Soviet-controlled government.

The United Kingdom

Contrary to popular belief, which is that the United Kingdom acted in support of the US, the UK actually started funding the Mujahideen earlier than the US, and before the Soviets took power. The Mujahideen received more weaponry and other supplies from the UK, in contrast to the monetary aid of the US. The UK was also involved directly in the conflict in Afghanistan.

Timeline of Key Events

1973	Coup d'état initiated by Daoud Khan
1978	Saur Revolution
1979	The new regime of the Saur Revolution leads to riots
1980	The USSR instates a puppet government in Afghanistan
1980-1985	Many battles between the Afghan army (Soviets) and the Mujahideen
1985	Gorbachev becomes the new leader of the USSR
1986	Ceasefire between the Mujahideen and the Afghan army
1989	Geneva accords.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

King Zahir Shah remained one of the favourites of the Afghans. The UN recognized the ex-king as the potential key to political stability if the Soviets were to leave the premises. The Guerrillas were a lot less fond of the idea of the return of Shah. When the ex-king went to negotiate with the Mujahideen, Pakistan refused to grant him a visa, wanting a conservative Muslim government installed.

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Possible solutions

As this is the Historical Security Council, we will act as if we are still in the middle of the conflict. Below will follow several possible solutions, assuming the stated above.

Starting off, it will be appropriate for America to use the money it currently spends on war to promote peace and rehabilitation. It should announce the end of the occupation or the date of withdrawal as a practical gesture, and then bring up all their security concerns and other important issues for debate.

Also, regional nations and international organisations like the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the United Nations may be involved in this. However, the biggest obstacle keeping us from the peace process now is American policy.

The primary way in order to achieve peace would be through open dialogue between the parties involved. Creating an appropriate atmosphere to do this in though is the toughest part. This, however, could be achieved by, for example, exchange of prisoners and opening of embassies. The measures should create a foundation for the much needed trust between all parties.

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