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## **The United States Involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War**

### **Afghanistan**

The paper aims at leveraging the geographical, political, economic, and social background of Afghanistan to understand the Soviet-Afghan conflict. The strategic location of Afghanistan has been always admired and sought after by generations of past leaders. It is located right in the middle of Asia and borders the South and East of Asia. Its location serves as a perfect connection between Asia and Europe. Its strenuous terrain of vast mountains across the country and stretching deserts have made it difficult to invade and nations that have attempted have often failed and used a great expense of resources. The rivalry between Afghanistan and Soviet Union does not date to the 1979 Soviet-Afghan war but goes as back as the nineteenth century when the establishment of current borders of Afghanistan occurred. It involved a tug of war between then Imperial Britain and Russia.

Afghanistan is surrounded by Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China. Although the country is landlocked, it is known for its exotic and highly coveted trade routes. The closest coast from the nation is approximately 300 miles away through Pakistan. Although it has vast lands, the climatic conditions and the soils of the country do not support expansive agricultural practices (Fremont 6). The country is an Islamic state that is made up of a majority of Sunni and a minority of Shia. The political scene of Afghanistan has been filled with violence coups and civil wars. The country had been ruled through a monarchy

that was overthrown in the mid-seventies by Khan who formed a government, granting rights to women, among other political and social actions. One of Khan's actions after gaining power was to join the USSR.

However, Khan was overthrown by a communist Taraki. During his administration, he proclaimed to have gained independence from the Soviets but later the Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two nations. This relationship between Taraki and the Soviet Union was viewed as one of the reasons that the Soviets did not invade the country before 1979. They viewed the treaty with Afghanistan as a statement showing that the country was a part of the USSR. The peace did not last long since Taraki became embroiled in a war with Amin. During this war between Taraki and Amin, the Mujahideen, a conservative group of Muslim elders was established. The conflict between Taraki and Amin ended in the death of Taraki, and Amin became a new president of Afghanistan starting the Soviet-Afghan war (Fremont 7).

Afghanistan was an important cog in the grand scheme of the Soviet Union to dominate the nations around them and to spread influence. However, after the death of President Taraki in 1979, the power and coalition between the two countries shifted. The relationship between the new president Amin of Afghanistan and the Soviet Union would, according to most historians, be one of the reasons that the Soviet Union invaded the country and led to a period of war and devastation. President Amin did not respond to the Soviets in a friendly manner and was known to not giving the Soviets a full control of the country. It was also argued that Amin intended to mend the relationship between Afghanistan and America. This relationship severed in 1979, when the Ambassador of the US, Adolph Dubs, was killed (Fremont 26). His death led America to withdraw the assistance they were giving to the country. During the same period, the Afghanistan government was battling with a local militia known as the Mujahideen. The militia was made up of local tribal leaders who did not

support the communist changes that had been brought about by the Khan government. This previous regime had formed a constitution that gave women rights and brought about other social changes that the tribal elders did not support. The tribal leaders did not understand communism or socialism. They believed that these forms of governance and changes belonged to the Western world. They, therefore, intended to preserve the traditions of Afghanistan from corruption by the outside world.

The Mujahideen wanted the country to remain an Islamic state with its traditional values. They launched several guerilla attacks on the government in the protest of the communist changes. These attacks gradually increased over time and the group gained support from the United States. Thus, in late 1979, the Soviet Union moved its military troops into Afghanistan in what seemed as support to the government in fighting the militia (Fremont 37). The following year, the US; led by President Jimmy Carter addressed the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. This would become a 10-year long conflict between the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, the United States, and other Afghanistan allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. During President Carters' address, he argued that every nation in the Middle East had the right to remain sovereign. America changed the script of the invasion to its advantage stating religious and sovereignty atrocities by the Soviet Union. It was a perfect reason for them to become involved in the war.

### **Soviet Interest in Afghanistan**

Over the history of Afghanistan, the country was viewed as a gem in the desert mainly because of its geographical location that linked Asia to Europe. Although the country is landlocked and does not have the best climate for agriculture, it had some of the best trade routes in the region (Fremont 53). Its borders connected various countries in The Middle East, Asia, and Europe. Therefore, this was one of the reasons why the Soviet Union was interested in the country.



The Soviets had political ambitions to expand their territory, dominate both politically, and economically, thus, Afghanistan was an important part of this plan. Additionally, it is argued that the Soviets had desired to have access to the Indian Ocean for a long time. Therefore, they saw their best chance at accessing the Indian Ocean would be through Afghanistan, which, however, landlocked was only 300 miles away from the closest coastal line. Access to the Indian Ocean would mean more international trade routes and consequently more economic dominance. Another factor that has been argued to make the Soviets interested in Afghanistan was to ensure that the West did not interfere or form alliances with nations in the region. Thus, by placing Afghanistan under their control, they would ensure that America's foothold in the region would be weak, and they would remain politically dominant in the region (Fremont 36).

### **Soviet-Afghan War**

The Soviet Union launched a full attack on Afghanistan in December of 1979. However, in July of the same year, President Carter had given the green light to the Central Intelligence Agency to form propaganda and financially support the Mujahideen in their fight against the national government. This support escalated the civil unrest in the country even after the death of the former President Taraki. The Soviets had been closely monitoring the situation and after Amin became Afghan president, they attempted to assassinate him several times in an attempt to salvage the country from the Mujahideen (Fremont 18).

Thus, in late December, after failed assassination attempts on President Amin, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan at the advice of Yuri Andropov, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union. During the first attack, President Amin was killed and quickly replaced by Babrak Karmal, a puppet of the Soviet Union. Various Islamic insurgents in the country quickly came together to fight against a common enemy becoming a more unified Mujahadeen. They were supported by their neighboring governments, mainly Saudi Arabia

and Pakistan. Other countries such as the United Kingdom, China, and Egypt would join in much later. However, their biggest financier was the United States government that contributed millions of dollars into the war (Fremont 17). Although the United States played a huge part in financing the militias in Afghanistan, they strained the Soviet Union financially, to an extent that they could not afford to be in the war anymore. The Soviet Union had spent over 15 billion dollars during 10 years of being involved in war with Afghanistan. Finally, the coalition of these nations, the relentless effort of the Mujahideen, and the high cost of the war drove the Soviet Union away from the country.

### **America's Reaction**

After the Soviets' successful invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter, in January 1980, addressed this issue stating that the Soviet Union had defiled the sovereignty of the country and that Afghanistan had a right to be free (Fremont 40). He implored the world to rise against the Soviet Union and stop their invasion into the region. Another immediate response from the US was that the government ended the exportation of various products to the Soviet Union such as grain, and technological equipment.

Additionally, the government limited the fishing rights of the Soviet Union. The United States would boycott the Olympic Games that would be hosted in the Soviet Union (Fremont 41). The US would then begin to fund the Islamist militia groups, an effort that they had been carrying on until the end of the war. Further, the United States rallied other nations to help stop the invasion. This rally brought about support from countries such as Egypt, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia. The US had supplied the Mujahideen with military weapons that helped them support the Soviet army financially. For instance, they provided them with anti-aircraft missiles that had helped the militants fight back the air attacks from the Soviet Union. The United States took the Soviet Union's invasion in Afghanistan as an opportunity to escalate the cold war. They viewed it as an opportunity to



revenge against the Soviets. Earlier in America's history, the Soviets had participated in America's war against Vietnam. Therefore, this was a perfect opportunity for the US to exact their revenge on them.

### **American Interest and Involvement**

According to historians, there were various reasons that America intervened in the war. The main reason was to halt the advancement of the Soviet Union both politically and geographically. The two nations were involved in the cold war during that period, and America had taken the containment approach rather than a full physical attack. Therefore, by intervening in the war and stopping the progress of their communism, America would contain the spread of communism across the world (Fremont 69). Another reason was that America was highly motivated to intervene in the war in order to gain influence in this region. The Soviet Union had more control in this region than the United States. Therefore, by pushing the Soviets back and ensuring their downfall, America would guarantee that they would take control of the politics of the region and enhance their foreign policy there.

### **Consequences of the United States Involvement**

The main consequence was the depletion of the resources of the Soviet Union. Due to the financial support and military equipment offered to the Mujahideen, the Soviet Union struggled to break them down and take over full control of the nation. The invasion of Afghanistan was meant to be a quick operation since the Soviet Union had experience in many other instances around the region. However, the involvement of the US; meant that they spent more resources. At the end of the war, they had spent approximately 15 billion dollars. The cost had become too much for the Soviet Union to continue the war. Additionally, the US had successfully rallied several allied countries to support the Mujahideen resistance. These two factors were the eventual reason that the Soviet Union finally left Afghanistan in 1989.

The United States had launched propaganda agendas in Afghanistan in July 1979 to destabilize the communist government of President Amin. According to Fremont, America had spent nearly five hundred thousand dollars creating and spreading propagation (72). As discussed earlier, this action fuelled the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan. However, it was an advantage to the Americans, since they had developed a relationship with the Mujahideen leaders. They would use this relationship to finance the militia during the invasion and help end the Soviet Invasion.

### **Conclusion**

The Soviet-Afghan war was not a war of two nations, rather a war of the Soviet Union against a multitude of nations led and instigated by the United States. The paper has provided evidence that shows that, although the United States' involvement in the war helped end the war, it was partly responsible for its escalation in the first place. The paper has identified the main reasons why the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan ranging from its geographical location, to fear of the country allying with the West. Further, the paper has shown that, although America intended to protect the sovereignty of Afghanistan, its main intention in the war was to contain the progress of the Soviet Union. The research paper looks into all the accounts that led to the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan, the consequent war that broke out between these two nations, and finally the intervention of the United States in this conflict. The paper further looks at the social-political state of Afghanistan before the 1979 invasion and the consequential conditions of the country both politically and socially after the war ended. The paper aimed to clarify the main reason why the United States got involved in the conflict, whether if it was an attempt to maintain the political sovereignty of Afghanistan and its religious purity, or the US has their own interests in the war.

Works Cited

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