

# Snake Oil: US Foreign Policy, Afghanistan, and the Cold War

Written by Vincent J. Tumminello II

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/27/snake-oil-u-s-foreign-policy-afghanistan-and-the-cold-war/>

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I – Janitors

*An Introduction*

“Stop here,” the man in the back seat of the dented and dirty Toyota Land Cruiser said to the driver. The bright glare of the laptop made him strain his eyes as he peered at the moving map tracking his location. He quickly hit ‘Ctrl-Tab’ on the keyboard to change from the map software to another program. Reaching into the cargo pocket of his multi-cam trousers, he pulled out a notebook and jotted down two sets of numbers with a pen he took from a Velcro pouch attached to his chest. He keyed his Harris PRC-152 radio and spoke through the bone conduction microphone that was crammed in his ear, “Dismounting.” Checking his equipment one final time, he pulled the slide on his Glock 22 back just enough to see a .40 caliber FMJ round properly chambered. Holstering the weapon, he opened the door

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and stepped out into the crisp Kabul air. They were in that rare sweet spot when the weather had begun to cool from the scorching summer, but had not yet fully embraced the coming winter.

Another car had stopped behind the Land Cruiser- a beaten down Toyota Corolla- and a man of slightly darker complexion, dressed in a sharp grey suit emerged from the passenger side. His attire seemed to suggest 'business as usual', with a small lump betraying a compact 9mm machine gun hanging from his neck under the jacket. The faces of the two men showed similar characteristics- tanned skin, a 5-day old shave, small wrinkles, and dark circles under their eyes- symptoms of long hours, high stress, and little sleep. Though the two were born in different countries, one was American and one was Afghan, they were fighting on the same side of a long, bitter war. Both knew their mission and their enemy all too well. Stepping off at a quick pace, the well-dress Afghan silently followed his American counterpart into the apartment building.

Entering the building through double doors on the western side, we began to climb the stairs. For Afghanistan, the apartment buildings seemed rather modern. The Soviet occupation forces had built them in the 1980s to be used by Soviet administrators and government officials of the Afghan 'puppet' regime. Glancing at the display of a ruggedized device that had the look and feel of a Gameboy, I stopped between the third and fourth floors. I continued as quietly as I could to the door above while the stairs creaked under my weight. The door had a brass number '7' hanging to the right of the frame, slightly askew. After checking the mini-display again to confirm the readout, I turned around and pointed to the number beside the door. The Afghan, following closely behind me, nodded in acknowledgement. Inside the apartment was a man suspected of trafficking money, weapons, and drugs for the Taliban insurgency (and probably other clients as well). Kabul Law Enforcement had obtained a warrant for his arrest- part of a new, Afghan-centric initiative to combat insurgent elements both inside and outside the capital. America had been at war with the Taliban and other insurgent and terrorist networks inside Afghanistan for more than a decade. War inside Afghanistan, however, had endured much, much longer. The old man inside apartment number 7 had been fighting for a long time too, though his enemy had changed over the years. First, was the struggle against the Soviet Union and the PDPA government, then there was the civil war between competing factions of the mujahedeen resistance, and now there was the jihad against the invading Americans, the Karzai government, and the NATO alliance. His long fight, however, was over for now; he would be arrested by Afghan police officials later that night and sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence.

On the route back to our compound, signs of the devastating Afghan civil war that had endured from 1992 to 2001 were still everywhere. While the Taliban facilitator from 'Apartment 7' (as support to the insurgency had come to be known) was indeed a target of Operation Enduring Freedom, he was a product of a conflict that had begun more than 40 years prior. To many Afghans, the Cold War had never left Afghanistan, forced to endure a choice between "a government they rejected and a resistance they feared[1]". The same fundamentalist threats to stability still dotted the country, waiting to destroy the political, economic, and social progress that had been made over the past several years. It was not a new problem, but an old one, created in a different time by a different generation from a different world facing different threats. We were there to clean up. In a sense, we were janitors.

Twenty-two years before Operation Enduring Freedom and the joint US-Northern Alliance fight to oust the Taliban from power, U.S. President Jimmy Carter announced to the nation that the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan[2]: "Fifty thousand heavily armed Soviet troops have crossed the border and are now dispersed throughout Afghanistan, attempting to conquer the fiercely independent Muslim people of that country." The invasion had begun eleven days earlier and the Carter administration had been scrambling to come up with a response. On that day, January 4, 1980, President Carter announced a halt to SALT II negotiations, a series of economic sanctions, and cancelation of much needed grain deliveries to the Soviet Union. Further, Carter announced his intentions to support Pakistan, Afghanistan's neighbor, with both military and economic assistance to "defend its independence and its national security against the seriously increased threat it now faces from the north[3]." The invasion of Afghanistan represented a new breach in the bipolar Cold War conflict between the world's two superpowers, marking the only time the Soviet Union had invaded a country outside the Eastern Bloc[4]. The strategic importance of Afghanistan had been highlighted in a March 1977 intelligence memorandum that suggested the Soviet Union may be running out of oil[5]. Control of Afghanistan would give the Soviets easy passage to the vast Persian Gulf supply, as well as vital sea-lanes and trade routes, an untenable expansion in the eyes of the United States. On January 23, 1980,

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President Carter issued a warning: “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force[6].”

National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski had also begun to search for options short of war to reverse the Soviet expansion. Quietly, he began to negotiate with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to support the mujahedeen resistance that was fighting back against Soviet forces and the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Indeed, the resistance had already initiated attacks inside Afghanistan at the behest of Pakistan. The operation, ran by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) together with Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence Agency (ISI) and funded by the United States Congress, would be known as Operation Cyclone. Under the Reagan administration, the program both expanded and became a blueprint for other covert interventions in Angola and Nicaragua[7]. Covert action, much like in the Eisenhower administration, became a major pillar in the U.S. Cold War strategy had transitioned from ‘containment’ to ‘rollback’. By April 1988, Geneva Accords had been signed, signifying the beginning of Soviet withdrawal. By February 1989, the last Soviet general officer had walked across the border under the red arches of the Afghan-Uzbek Bridge. Even as Operation Cyclone was deemed an unqualified success, U.S. interest began to fade from the region. Success, however, was not the end of the story. By the end of 1991, Congress had withdrawn support for the splintered resistance movement still fighting to wrest power from the PDPA government. An intense civil war remained in Afghanistan, a multi-sided struggle between the PDPA regime and competing mujahedeen factions who sought power in Kabul, the capital city. A dark shadow had been cast over the fractured nation that would not soon yield. Between April 1992, when the PDPA President Najibullah was ousted from power, and September 1996[8], when the fundamentalist Taliban movement seized power, untold civilian casualties mounted amidst a growing humanitarian disaster. Between 1996 and 2001, Mullah Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban and former mujahedeen commander, gradually imposed his vision of an Islamic state across war-torn Afghanistan[9]. Under Mullah Omar, Afghanistan would host and support Osama Bin Laden, and his growing Al-Qaeda movement, which would attack U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the World Trade Center in 2001. Following the withdrawal of both Soviet forces and U.S. involvement, Afghanistan had become an incubator for a radical fundamentalist ideology that continues to threaten international stability and order today. This short history prompts several questions concerning U.S. policy:

- In what ways did U.S. foreign policy and involvement during Operation Cyclone help to create the tumultuous aftermath in Afghanistan that included civil war, allowed for the rise of the Taliban, and created a safe haven for America’s enemies?
- Did the United States miss an opportunity to prevent this outcome and promote stability in Afghanistan during or after Soviet intervention?
- If so, what actions or policies could the United States have pursued in order to create a more favorable outcome in Afghanistan and prevent U.S. military intervention after 2001?

To answer these questions, an investigation must look both within and beyond Afghanistan’s borders, between ethnic boundaries, and towards the many influences that have defined the history of a most fragmented nation. At the state level, the policies and activities of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United States, India, and Iran have played a direct role in the evolution of conflict in Afghanistan. At the semi-state and non-state level, the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism, the role of Pan-Islamism and the ‘Afghan Arabs’, as well as the disparate political parties and military commanders of the mujahedeen resistance combine to weave together a complicated plot. With many villains and few heroes, the epic presented here is indeed a tragedy, pulling the fates of several unlikely partners together. This is the story of how the United States came to invest so much blood and treasure in a country of marginal importance that is defined by competing interests, pervasive corruption, and intractable differences. Welcome to Snake Country- where loyalty can only be rented, solutions are always temporary, and the law of the stronger prevails: “me against my brother; me and my brother against our cousins; we and our cousins against the enemy[10].” While many ingredients drive the plot- greed, ideology, ethnicity among them- the story begins, and ends, with religion.

## II – The Enemy of My Enemy

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## *Fundamental Islam, the Soviet Struggle, and Taking Sides in Afghanistan*

### 1. The SEEDS of Fundamentalism

*The rise of fundamentalist Islam is largely the product of two diverging views on the evolving role of religion in the context of the modern state. This dichotomy, between modernization and fundamentalism[11], is not unique to our story. Opposing forces, magnetically pulling the plot towards an unforeseen conclusion, litter a trail of divine ambitions, political persuasions, and revolutionary violence. Although the arc of history, in regards to any matter, is both long and incomplete, every historian must choose a point from which to begin. This story, inevitably leading towards a clash between a secular superpower and a surging radical movement, begins with a chance encounter between an Islamic Law professor and a Muslim Brotherhood envoy in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, September 1981.*

#### **A Warrior without a Home**

Born on 14 November 1941 in a small West Bank town in Mandate Palestine[12], Abdallah Yusuf Mustafa Azzam began his life on grounds of historic military engagements. The site of resistance from Napoleon's invasion in 1799 to the Arab Revolt of 1936, such a birthplace augured a tumultuous life that would fittingly end with a violent assassination in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1989[13]. This conclusion, however, was far from inevitable for a 7-year-old Abdallah Azzam, who confronted political violence for the first time in 1948. In *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, Thomas Hegghammer suggests that though Azzam did not actively participate, the 1948 struggle against Israeli occupation left a lasting impact on the young child[14]. First, the loss of family lands to the hands of Christian families, later sold to Israel, seems to conveniently frame his transnational struggle against oppression of Muslims. The second impact came from the effects of the war on displaced Palestinians refugees; this, evoking great sympathy for his fellow Muslims, provides explanation for his inclination towards defensive jihad. Indeed, that sympathy would turn to empathy as Azzam himself would become a refugee in twenty years time.

Before he became a respected scholar, Abdallah Azzam was a warrior first. According to his own accounts, Azzam first tasted violence when taking up arms against the incursion by Israeli forces into his village during the Six-Day War[15]. After facing exile from Palestine in June 1967, Azzam continued his fight alongside the Fedayeen in paramilitary operations against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) between 1968 and 1970. With limited income and social standing, the commitment of both training and fighting over an 18-month period strained comforts of both him and his family, who had relocated to Jordan. This direct participation in the struggle against Israel, however, provided Azzam legitimacy that would prove highly useful in the future.

Indeed, Azzam was no ordinary fighter. Throughout his youth, he displayed both pious and academic tendencies, heavily influenced by the teachings of prominent Islamic scholar Sayyid Qutb [16]. Qutb, a respected Egyptian scholar-turned-firebrand activist, was able to use the theories of *jahiliyyah* (religious ignorance) and *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) in the context of political and social determination to inspire revolutionary attitudes against the Egyptian government in the early 1950s[17]. Written in a jail cell after the attempted assassination of President Gabel Abdel Nasser, Qutb's *Signposts* "justified violence against non-believers and urged radical action to seize political power"[18]. Proliferated throughout the Muslim World, 'Qutbism' would eventually endure a long and unpredictable trajectory through the coming decades of the Islamic fundamentalist movement. As a testament to his contributions, Abdallah Azzam earned the nickname 'the Sayyid Qutb of Jordan'[19], gaining prominence within the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. It was during this time that Azzam's popularity began to carry his name and ideas across borders and into the minds of many.

With the dissolution of the Islamic Fedayeen in 1971, Azzam's armed conflict ended. Refusing to join the more radical Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) factions, he began his withdrawal and transition from warrior life. Focusing on academic work in Cairo at the University of al-Azhar, Azzam earned a Ph.D. in the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence in 1973. Later that year, he began teaching Islamic Law at the University of Jordan in Amman, furthering the political thought of Sayyid Qutb and other prominent religious scholars through works such as *The Defence of Muslim Lands*[20], which attempted to establish justification for *jihad* (Arabic for 'struggle' or 'resistance') under Islamic Law. As Azzam's classrooms crowded, his lectures became increasingly radicalized,

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politicized, and critical of the Jordanian government. A heated row over the publishing of religious cartoons in a local newspaper, *Al-Ra'y*, provided a pretext for the university to dismiss the controversial professor in early 1980[21]. He joined Mohammad Qutb, his friend and brother of mentor Sayyid Qutb, on the teaching staff at King Abd al-Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in July of 1980[22]. He was the embodiment of the thoughtful warrior, far removed from his cause in Palestine, seemingly searching for the next great battle. It was in this context that Azzam met fellow Muslim Brother, Egyptian Sheikh Kamal al-Sananiri, who was then on his way home from a forty-day trip to Pakistan[23]. It was September 1981 and Abdallah Azzam, to become known as “godfather of jihad”, would soon put thought to action.

## The Forgotten Emissary

Kamal Al-Sananiri had suffered in the name of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islam. Embroiled in Egyptian government crackdowns against his increasingly militant movement, Al-Sananiri had spent 20 years in prison. There, he met the influential scholar Sayyid Qutb during a stay in the prison hospital. As Al-Sananiri and Sayyid Qutb grew closer, Qutb offered his sister, Amina, in marriage to Al-Sananiri[24]. Following his release, he became involved in the cause of the Afghans. Often relegated to a footnote in history, Sananiri's importance should not be underestimated. He first went to Afghanistan in 1979. He immersed himself in the political intricacies of the conflict and emerged as an emissary among participating factions, leaders, and nations. Afghanistan, notorious for infighting and power struggles, provided fertile grounds for the skilled, albeit unconventional, diplomat. He mediated amongst mujahedeen factions and helped to forge the beginnings of a unified and effective resistance through the creation of the Islamic Union of Afghan Mujahedeen. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, future Emir of Al-Qaeda, recounted in his memoir *Knights Under the Prophet Banner* that mujahedeen everywhere spoke of the great impact Al-Sananiri had in uniting and assisting the Afghan jihad[25].

In November 1980, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood set the paths of Kamal Al-Sananiri and Abdallah Azzam on a collision course. Al-Sananiri was dispatched to conduct a feasibility study to assess the state of the Afghan Jihad from Islamabad. The Brotherhood had long standing ties with the Afghan Mujahedeen, many of whom had studied at Cairo's Al-Azhar University[26]– the same university Abdallah Azzam attended in the early 1970s. Connecting with the emerging support network in Pakistan, Al-Sananiri spent forty days determining progress of the jihad and scope for involvement in the campaign. When he began his journey home in December 1980 by way of Saudi Arabia, he had intended to return with his family to Pakistan and devote himself to the Afghan cause. The Egyptian government had other plans, though, and he would be arrested, tortured, and unceremoniously executed less than a year later. Before any of that could happen, though, Al-Sananiri would complete a journey that would have lasting effects on Afghanistan's history.

No detailed account exists regarding the chance encounter between Abdallah Azzam and Kamal Al-Sananiri. It is known that the two met and discussed the evolving situation in Afghanistan[27]. During the meeting, the fellow Muslim Brothers, connected by mutual friends within the Qutb family, made a pact to travel to Islamabad together following Al-Sananiri's return from Egypt. Though there is no transcript of the conversation, Al-Sananiri must have been persuasive in convincing Azzam of his future role in the Afghan jihad movement- and indeed a new diplomat would be needed in the wake of Al-Sananiri's death. Abdallah Azzam would follow-through on his end of the agreement and travel to Pakistan without his deceased friend in late 1981. He would soon become a central figure in the Afghan jihad and key to the rise of fundamentalist Islam and jihadism in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan[28].

## Seeds of Fundamentalism

In 1952, a *Sharia* (Islamic Law) faculty was established at Kabul University in Afghanistan in cooperation with Cairo's Al-Azhar University. Through this partnership, the teachings of Qutb and other Egypt-based Islamic fundamentalist scholars began to slowly proliferate throughout academic circles in Afghanistan during the 1950s and 1960s. While the influence of these Islamic scholars ultimately sowed the seeds for fundamentalist ideology in Afghanistan, Abdallah Azzam had a significant impact on the future direction of both Arab and Afghan participation and success in the struggle against the Soviets and, later, the United States. First, Azzam heavily promoted ideological penetration

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into Pakistan and Afghanistan. Notably, Azzam was both mentor and, later, partner of Osama Bin-Laden, helping to found both Al-Qaeda and Hamas. The establishment of a base of operation in Western Pakistan, through the creation of the humanitarian organization known as 'the Services Bureau', provided an initial conduit and organized approach to funding, mobilization, and recruitment. Through this conduit, Azzam was able to both inspire and assist several important groups that would eventually decide the fate of Afghanistan in the coming decades. The foundation of the Office of Services represented a turning point in Arab involvement in the Afghan-Soviet conflict, leading to a massive influx of money and support from the Muslim World.

Second, and more importantly, was Azzam's role as diplomat and facilitator. Successfully coordinating between mujahedeen factions, official Saudi government support, support from Saudi charities and organizations, and other wealthy donors, Azzam built a vast infrastructure, both physical and financial, from which the Afghan jihad grew. Despite his obsession with the Afghan cause, it is important to note that Abdallah Azzam represented a global Islamic jihad mission. He saw Afghanistan as part of a larger, defensive struggle against those that sought to oppress Islam everywhere. In his treatise "Join the Caravan", Azzam discussed the importance of Afghanistan as a safe location from which to organize, train, fund, and conduct jihad on enemies of Islam[29]. In this, we can say that Azzam, along with his pupil Bin Laden, was *outward looking*. Azzam and Bin Laden, however, were outward looking in different ways. In promoting his 'classic jihad' doctrine, Azzam advocated along the lines of Pan-Islamism, where the purpose of jihad was to liberate Muslim lands. In contrast, Bin Laden's 'global doctrine' sought to take an offensive battle against perceived enemies of Islam- wherever they may be. We must also note the disparity between this approach to global jihad and the decidedly *inward looking* approach of Mullah Omar and the Taliban movement. Islam, of course, is not a monolithic institution and Qutbism, though a prime influencer, had varying effects on different factions of the religion. Azzam, however, through his ideological penetration and financial mediums, created ink blots from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan to Afghanistan, sparking the fundamentalist movement through a massive influx of material and ideological support from the nation of Islam. Interestingly, as we shall see, Azzam would eventually land on the side of moderate Ahmed Shah Massoud as opposed to the increasingly radical Osama Bin-Laden and Gulbiddin Hekmatyar in the late 1980s as civil war raged between competing Mujahedeen groups. In attempting to arbitrate between the factions that he helped to inspire, Azzam would ironically be assassinated.

Infiltration of the Cold War into Afghanistan in 1979 and the ideological threat of the 'atheist' Soviets created a narrative of ideological clash between communism and radical Islam. Moderates inside the country were pushed towards either end of the spectrum, polarizing the debate and leaving little room in the middle. Historically though, the political culture in Afghanistan was in no way dominated by religion, but rather ethnic allegiances. However, with the influx of fundamentalist ideas and the polarizing nature of the Soviet threat, it is no surprise that the Afghan resistance to Soviet occupation was framed in terms of religion, though differences between Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras continued in the background. The loose collective of parties, tribes, and groups of fighters were known collectively as Mujahedeen, meaning 'Warriors in the Way of God'. The group represented a wide range of religious views, from rather secular to fundamentalist creating tensions that threatened to undermine an effective resistance to the Soviet campaign[30].

It must be understood that, from the beginning of the resistance, the political outcome of post-Soviet Afghanistan was never predetermined. While the proliferation of fundamentalism would prove to have significant influence following Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Azzam and Islamic scholars within the fundamentalist movement were not the only ones to take up the Afghan cause. A massive, state-sponsored influx of money, supplies, weapons, and operational support to competing factions would eventually be a crucial factor in attempts to fill the power vacuum left by the Soviet-backed government. Three countries, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States, played central roles in determining not only the outcome of the Soviet conflict but also its aftermath. These countries would attempt to use the rising Afghan resistance movement to pursue their own political and ideological objectives.

## 2. EXTERNAL PRESSURES

*The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan took place in December 1979 at the height of Cold War tensions between the United States and the USSR. According to accounts by Major General Alexander Lyakhovskiy[31], internal fissures emerged regarding the use of Soviet troops to secure favorable political leadership in Kabul.*

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*Documents strongly suggest that the nine-year Soviet conflict was not a deliberate venture, but the result of mission creep[32] amid reflexive decision-making by the Politburo, who refused to heed the guidance of military council. The greater story of the Afghan-Soviet conflict, however, can be found through the convergence of three disparate agendas. In Pakistan, which had become a pariah state after the execution of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq seized an opportunity to reignite powerful and economically beneficial alliances. The Saudi regime used government support of jihad to gain political legitimacy[33] and align itself with powerful forces within the Islamic faith. The United States used Afghanistan and its resistance movement as a proxy to bleed the Soviet Union, eventually contributing to its collapse. The massive, myopic injection of funding, organization, training, and weapons catalyzed uncontrollable resistance leaders into positions of power and influence. While each of these countries largely achieved its immediate objectives, the willingness to sacrifice long-term stability for short-term gain marked the period and set the conditions for the region's tumultuous aftermath.*

## Zia's Pakistan

### *Pariah State*

When the guards came to visit Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the early morning hours of April 4, 1979, he appeared yellow, pale, and physically weak[34]. It had been nearly two years since a military coup had placed Pakistan under martial law and landed then-President Bhutto in a jail cell. The country was now under the control of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who had declared himself president in September 1978, betraying the promise of an interim-only military government and free elections. Despite the rapid transformation from populism to theocracy occurring outside the Rawalpindi prison walls, Bhutto's more immediate concern was the notice of his execution, given a mere seven hours earlier. Four guards entered his cell and picked up his failing body, placing him on a stretcher. Bhutto's head lifted slightly as he was transported to the gallows, while the rest of him stayed completely still. Grabbing him from under his armpits, the guards stood him up and handcuffed his hands behind his back. A mask was placed over his head while a trailing thought escaped from his mouth: "These..." Neither Tara Masih, the executioner, nor Lieutenant Colonel Rafi-ud-Din, whose ears were mere inches from Bhutto, heard his last words[35]. At 2:04 a.m. on April 4, 1979, Tara Masih pressed the lever- both a concrete (Bhutto died) and symbolic gesture that ushered in a period of isolation for Pakistan on the world stage. The *New York Times*, reporting on the execution later that day, described General Zia as still undecided on the fate of Bhutto in the weeks prior to the execution. Despite a flood of requests for executive clemency from dozens of world leaders, including US President Carter, the uncovering of 'secret documents' suggesting that Bhutto maintained a political hit list gave Zia the final pretext to dispose of his opposition[36]. Coupled with growing concerns in the United States with regard to Pakistan's nuclear program, the decision to execute Bhutto represented the beginning of a significant cooling period- the most recent manifestation in a turbulent history of US-PAK relations. Incidentally, cooling in Pakistan coincided with warming of US-India relations, further increasing tensions between the Zia and the Carter administration[37].

### *The Great Irony of Ali Bhutto*

The story of Ali Bhutto's leadership in Pakistan is crucial to understanding the country's swift transition from an authoritarian, populist, secular government to an increasingly fundamentalist, theocratic, militarized government. As the country's first civilian leader, Bhutto took power directly following conflict with India in the Bangladesh Liberation War, resulting in the loss of a significant portion of Pakistan's land mass and population[38]. Despite a rising wave of revolutionary ideals, Bhutto was not able to reform Pakistan in any meaningful way. He liberally used military force on the civilian population to quell dissent and implemented a series of 'socialist' reforms, further crippling the economy. For a majority of Pakistanis, Bhutto's regime represented a significant decline in living standards, both economically through an increase in cost of living and relative poverty, and politically, in the form of a repressive government[39]. More important to explaining the conditions that allowed for Zia's military takeover, however, was the Bhutto administration's foreign policy. Shortly after taking office, Bhutto began his mission to recover Pakistan's reputation and increase its prominence as a third world power in the region. By pulling out of the Commonwealth and SEATO, Bhutto began a global realignment away from the United States and towards the Middle East. Pakistan's new economic model prompted increased partnership with oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates[40]. The purpose of this realignment was the pursuit of a non-aligned status over the Cold War conflict and

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to re-establish Pakistani reputation as an important third world power. Bhutto's most important foreign policy concern, however, was the looming threat of a nuclear India. While relations maintained cordial with the United States under the Nixon administration (the United States even decided to resume economic aid following Bhutto's request in January 1972[41]), Bhutto attempted to normalize relations with the USSR and established diplomatic relations in Vietnam and North Korea[42].

The historic pivot, away from the United States and towards the Gulf countries, held both apparent economic advantages and unforeseen political consequences. While commercial ties between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan deepened, Wahhabi ideology also proliferated to Pakistan through large-scale work and military exchange programs[43]. Mobilization against the Bhutto regime began by the end of 1973, with Islamic organizations *Jama'at* and *Jamiat Ulema-I Pakistan* seizing on urban bourgeoisie social and economic discontent of policy directives[44]. Infiltrating institutions such as the military, trade unions, and the press[45], *Jama'at* set the stage for a far more ideological social and political future in Pakistan. The anti-Bhutto movement further gained momentum through support from Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi religious establishment and, more importantly, the Pakistani army as well as an organizational base from madrassas, mosques, and anti-progressive trade unions. Bhutto, for his part, became increasingly paranoid that the United States wanted him out. In April 1977, the State Department blocked a shipment of tear gas, citing humanitarian concerns of political repression under Bhutto's regime[46]. Saudi Arabia began to display preferences towards anti-secularization and desire for Islamization while arbitrating between political groups in Pakistan, despite Saudi mediation[47]. Bhutto's fate seemed a foregone conclusion. At this juncture, it is important to see the irony in Bhutto's situation. By turning towards the oil-rich Gulf in an attempt to solve his country's economic woes, he opened the country to radical influence and social instability- ultimately leading to his own demise. On July 5, 1977, the military launched Operation Fairplay, arresting Bhutto, and his cabinet, thrusting the country into a period of brutal martial law.

## *Carter's Chill*

Nuclear non-proliferation throughout the 1970s was a major policy concern of the United States. After negotiating the second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) with the Soviet Union, President Carter commented on the importance of non-proliferation and control of weapon development[48]. Since the underground nuclear test of India in 1974[49], the proliferation issue had become a major concern for Congress. In March 1978, Congress passed HR 8638-PL 95-242, imposing strict nuclear export controls with the aim of halting global proliferation[50]. This 'Nuclear Nonproliferation Act' prohibited the export of nuclear technology to non-nuclear weapon states unless full IAEA safeguards were accepted. Under the Carter administration, however, such non-proliferation strategy seemed to be aimed at Pakistan, not India. Indeed, in July of 1978, Carter initiated a sale of Uranium to India, despite heated debate in Congress about its legality[51]. Carter's preference echoed that of his National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who presented India as one the vital 'regional influencers' that the US should consult on critical issues[52].

Carter's partiality towards India as well as Pakistan's desire to obtain a bomb manifested themselves in an increasingly cold attitude towards Zia. While India was now the world's largest democracy, Zia's authoritarian government provided an increasing contrast in the region. Despite a series of successful negotiations regarding Pakistan's nuclear development[53], and the promise of renewed aid, discovery of a covert acquisition program pushed relations to a new low. Intelligence reports indicated "Pakistan's efforts to acquire foreign equipment for a uranium enrichment plant now under construction have been more extensive and sophisticated than previously indicated[54]." Mounting evidence of deception and transfers of critical equipment prompted Carter to cut all foreign aid to Pakistan in March 1979 under the Symington Amendment, which banned U.S. economic, military, and trade assistance to countries which illegally (without IAEA inspections and regulation) deliver, receive, acquire, or transfer nuclear enrichment technology[55].

## *Meanwhile in Afghanistan*

While fundamentalist ideologies were thriving in Pakistan, the rest of the Muslim World was certainly not standing still. As Qutbism proliferated through university curricula and other intellectual organizations in Kabul, political



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stability began to deteriorate in the early 1970s. A former Prime Minister and member of the royal family, Mohammed Daoud Khan overthrew his cousin, King Zahir, seizing power in a fragmented Afghanistan through a palace coup in July 1973[56]. Daoud initiated closer ties with the Soviet Union, co-opting major Afghan communist movements, including *Khalq* and *Parcham*[57]— the two rival factions within the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) who became bitterly divided over differences in implementation of Marxist ideology. The Soviet Union benefitted from having support in both the ruling party, Parcham- that helped bring Daoud to power, and Khalq, the more action-oriented, revolutionary opposition party. As deep divisions emerged, Daoud began to distance himself from the Marxists altogether, eventually purging his administration of Parcham members[58]. This break would become cemented after Daoud issued a new constitution that was rejected by the Parcham party- who called for all political groups to join against the government.

Highlighting the strategic importance of Afghanistan, first India[59], then Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey all made decisions to recognize the new regime as legitimate under Daoud[60]. Over his five years in power, Kabul would become increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union economically and militarily through aid packages and joint training[61]. Realizing the economic advantages of ties with the Persian Gulf region, Daoud put emphasis on new relationships with oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran by the end of his time in power. This action, along with the break from domestic Marxists influences, proved to isolate Daoud politically from the Soviet Union[62]. In April 1978, a coup was initiated by Khalq elements (with some help from the Parchamis) within the armed forces. The plot was initiated by a government crackdown on political dissenters and social unrest related to the assassination of Parcham leader Mir Akbar Kyber, though planning had already begun earlier. In his book "Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism", Anthony Arnold suggests that the Khalq Hafizullah Amin, who replaced Daoud at the head of the Afghan government after the coup, likely directed the assassination himself[63]. In the course of the uprising, Khalq party executed Daoud and 18 members of his family, seizing power through well-coordinated action[64]. Violent purging by the Amin government, the beginnings of a populist revolution, and attacks from anti-Marxist Islamists from Pakistan created an unstable political situation which ultimately prompted Soviet invasion in December 1979.

In the 1960s and 70s, Kabul University seemed to represent a microcosm of the greater political reality. As government institutions discussed the merits of Soviet ideology, debate between Marxists and Islamists raged in the halls of the university, polarizing students and faculty alike. In 1970 Burhanuddin Rabbani, an Islamic Law professor at Kabul University and future President of post-Soviet Afghanistan, decided to visit at Al-Azhar University in Egypt in order to enhance his credentials and understanding of Islam. While in Cairo, Rabbani grew close to the Muslim Brotherhood and became enthralled with the teachings of Sayyid Qutb. Shortly after returning to Kabul, Rabbani translated Qutb's famous text *Signposts* into Dari, the official Afghan language. He inspired activist students and eventually formed an Islamic youth organization with the help of other prominent faculty. While *Khalq* and *Parcham* fought the intellectual battle on the side of the Marxists, the newly formed *Sazman-i Javanan-i Musulman*, or the 'Muslim Youth Organization', fought for the Islamists[65]. Apart from Rabbani (the groups leader), the organization was host to both Gulbiddin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Massoud- soon to become two of the most powerful Mujahedeen Commanders in the Afghan-Soviet conflict. By 1973, the Muslim Youth Organization became increasingly hostile towards the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA)[66]. When Daoud seized power that year, he oriented the political system in Afghanistan towards Marxist ideology. Soon after forming the new government, Daoud ordered a military crackdown on radical Islamic organizations, citing growing concerns about armed dissent[67]. His fears would eventually be justified. Amid the crackdown, Rabbani, Hekmatyar, and Massoud fled to Islamabad and into the open arms of the Pakistani military[68]. Luckily, for this trio, Pakistan's political system was moving in the opposite direction from Afghanistan's

The Bhutto government received Rabbani, Hekmatyar, Massoud, and approximately 5000 other Afghans, realizing the potential of a resistance movement that could combat Daoud's power. Support for the Daoud's Islamic opposition under Bhutto began over Afghan government policies on the decades-old Pashtunistan issue[69]. Under a program led by Brigadier General Naseerullah Babar, both Pashtuns and Non-Pashtuns trained in guerilla warfare tactics[70]. Chosen to lead the initial armed resistance back in Afghanistan, Massoud led a group of fighters on a series of incursions that ultimately ended in failure. A violent government response to Massoud and his comrades forced them to flee back to Pakistan. This initial failure became a catalyst for factional splits amongst the resistance movement. Massoud, Rabbani and other Non-Pashtun fighters chose to remain with *Jamiat-i Islami*, a nationalist

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resistance group, while Pashtuns led by Gulbiddin Hekmatyar formed *Hizb-I Islami*. Hekmatyar, eager for outside support, found natural allies inside the Pakistani Army and ISI as well as *Jamaat-I Islami*, largely due to shared ethnicity. In this way, the resistance would remain divided, auguring the civil war that would follow the eventual defeat of the Soviets more than a decade later.

## *Pakistan's Transformation*

Riding revolutionary and ideological sentiments, Zia's transformation of Pakistan came swiftly. Ties between the military leadership and *Jama'at* deepened with the integration of Islamic groups into the political process. Zia soon announced amendments to the constitution that effectively undermined the parliamentary system and granted additional powers to his office[71]. Throughout the initial period of martial law, the military implemented an Islamization campaign marking the beginning of social transformations. Realizing that university campuses would drive political opposition and discussion regarding his radical campaign, Zia co-opted the student wing of *Jama'at*, *Jami'at Tulabi-I Islam*. In addition to *Jama'at's* ideological campaign, student unions were banned, along with all political activism, snuffing out a potentially major source of left wing dissent[72]. The official transition towards a theocratic society began in December of 1978, when Zia launched *Nizam-I Mustafa*- a social transformation campaign that reflected both Saudi Wahhabism and ideological cooperation from *Jama'at*. Over the next two years, the military would implement a series of Islamic laws in Pakistan including restrictions on women, dress and appearance, alcohol, sexual activity, and criminal justice.

Just as Pakistani society was changing, so too was the role of both military and intelligence organizations in it. Mirroring the Islamization of social institutions, the armed services echoed Zia's conviction of being a "Warrior of Islam." The important role of religion in Pakistan's military identity drove decision-making and coincided with increased acceptability of participation in armed Islamic conflict throughout Pakistan. Further, the looming existential threat from India tended to drive decision-making. Even before the massive influx of Cold War funding from the United States and Saudi Arabia, Zia implemented large increases in military spending during his first years in power. This funding allowed the military to expand reach into commercial aspects of society, acquiring vast land assets, as well as interests in the fertilizer, oil, gas, and sugar industries[73]. The military also substantially increased penetration into both the foreign ministry and policy-making. The Pakistani intelligence apparatus, the Inter-Service Intelligence agency (ISI), played a major role in the political realm as well. In addition to monitoring dissent groups, the ISI was also responsible for the creation of political parties to undermine opposition[74]. The Soviet-Afghan conflict would be a catalyst for the rise in influence of both the military and ISI, but it is important to note the interconnected nature of Pakistan's political, military, and intelligence organizations. This interconnection will serve as an important explanatory variable when examining the role of the ISI and Pakistan in post-Soviet government transition in Afghanistan.

## *Christmas Surprise*

Having been relegated to a second rate power and ostracized by the international community, Pakistan's luck began to change on Christmas Day 1979. The Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan and taken direct part in the coup and execution of then Afghan President Hafizullah Amin[75]. In addition to igniting international opposition, the invasion gave Zia "a new lease on life" according to Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Warren, diffusing internal military and right wing opposition[76]. In one stroke, the Soviet Union put the final nail in détente, reignited the Cold War, and positioned Pakistan as a nation of the highest strategic importance to the United States[77]. Secretary of State Vance commented, in a telegram to all NATO capitals on December 28, that the Soviet breach of Afghan sovereignty represented a grave security concern for the United States. In addition, Vance and the United States sought to seek international support in condemnation of these developing events[78]. National Security Council staffer Thomas Thornton commented that US attitudes towards Pakistan "overnight, literally...changed dramatically[79]." On December 30, 1979, President Carter sent a telegram to President Brezhnev in Moscow stating, in no uncertain terms that the invasion of Afghanistan "could mark a fundamental and long-lasting turning point" in the relations between the US and the Soviet Union[80]. It was a watershed moment for Zia, who was facing a serious economic crisis domestically[81] and had become a pariah internationally. At a Cabinet level meeting in Washington on December 28<sup>th</sup>, plans were established to open diplomatic ties with Pakistan, including a directive to send Deputy

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Secretary of State Warren Christopher to meet directly with President Zia[82].

While the Soviet invasion allowed Zia to barter from a position of strength in regards to the United States, it also entangled him in an international conflict of super powers. As with the lesser Sicilian cities in the Peloponnesian War, Pakistan had to choose between a near threat (the Soviet Union) and the long-term benefit of allying with a far power (the United States). But allying with the United States came with great risk. If the Soviet Union was successful in Afghanistan, Pakistan might be next. Conversely, if they provoked the Soviets through assistance to a US cause, the Soviets could refuel the insurgency in Baluchistan or elsewhere inside Pakistan[83]. Additionally, Zia's economic woes made rejecting US assistance even more difficult. It was in this mindset that Zia, and his ambassador Agha Shahi, began negotiations with President Carter and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. The United States, for its part, understood Zia's concern: "Whether the credibility and magnitude of U.S. support is sufficient to offset the real danger of Soviet intimidation as well as the potential damage of close associates with the U.S. to their nonaligned and Islamic credentials[84]."

Despite the invasion, the nuclear issue was still of primary concern. Officials worried that as Pakistan got further along the development timeline, the more alarmed India would become[85]. After the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan, policymakers did not dismiss these concerns. There was no desire to change the Symington or Glenn Amendments nor was the fear of further instability in the region diminished[86]. In the view of the Department of State, "no unilateral or multilateral pressure" would convince Pakistan to forego efforts to obtain a nuclear device[87]. Officials did, however, have hopes that diplomatic pressures could prevent Zia from testing a device, a seemingly reasonable proposition considering the risk of conflict escalation with India[88]. While the Reagan administration would eventually deal with other aspects of the US-Pakistan relationship including Zia's human rights record, the *modus operandi* for aid to Afghans, and the restoration of democracy[89], the Carter administration still found itself in a difficult position. To what extent could the United States sacrifice its long-term objectives in the region in exchange for the support of Pakistan in a proxy war against the Soviet Union? On January 14, 1980, the State Department released specifics on the proposed U.S. aid package, which offered \$400 million in military and economic assistance to Pakistan[90]. Zia rejected the offer[91], stating that the package would "buy greater animosity from the Soviet Union which is now more influential in the region than the United States" and labeling it "peanuts"[92]. Inside the Pakistani government, officials feared that such an overt aid package would make them seem a U.S. surrogate against the Soviet Union without adequate backing to offset the threat[93]. It might also be true that Zia simply thought he could get more in exchange for his newfound strategic importance.

While the public spat between Zia and Carter embarrassed the White House, some success was found at the covert level, between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the ISI. Privately, though, the two intelligence agencies began to work out terms for covert support to the Afghan resistance. In February of 1980, Brzezinski met in private with Zia in Pakistan to discuss the possibility of a covert campaign against the Soviets. In the same trip, Brzezinski would cement support for his covert war from the Pakistanis as well as matched funding from Saudi Arabia to the mujahedeen cause[94]. Inside the CIA, Director Stansfield Turner assessed that future Soviet assertiveness in the region would likely depend on its success in Afghanistan[95]. Further, Brzezinski saw the invasion as Soviet attempts to drive for the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, in order to seize control of the world's oil supply. It was through this frame that Brzezinski and other key advisors saw the invasion into Afghanistan, not as an aberration but as a probe to judge U.S. response and a determined effort to expand regional hegemony.

In discussing a framework for US support to the Afghan rebels through Pakistan, two countries worked out a series of ground rules that would endure through the Reagan administration. First, all aid from the CIA would be funneled through the ISI. Further, the CIA would have no direct contact with mujahedeen groups[96]. Pakistani and American thinking seemed to align on these issues. The Pakistanis did not want to be seen as directly involved in the resistance nor did the Americans, for fear of inciting a larger conflict with the Soviet Union. The best way to keep support quiet, the thinking went, was to allow the discrete ISI to handle all interaction with the mujahedeen groups. In order to increase control over the larger effort, the ISI would only support seven recognized resistance groups- six of which were Pashtun and one comprised of mixed ethnicities, led by Rabbani (the field commander Shah Massoud would align with this party named Jamiat-e Islami)[97]. Lastly, to maintain deniability, the US would obtain Soviet-made weapons through Egypt and China, transferring them to the Afghan fighters through Pakistan[98]. In effect, these

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terms allowed Pakistan to dictate the outcome of the war. Specifically, the agreed conditions would play a decisive role in deciding relative power amongst rebel groups and who would fill the power vacuum in a post-Soviet Afghanistan.

Robert Gates, then the director of the Strategic Evaluation Center, recounted that Brzezinski complained in 1980 that the United States was not doing enough to support the Afghan resistance[99]. Nevertheless, the Carter administration had established the foundation for a proxy war against the Soviets, complete with a logistics pipeline that allowed arms and money to flow into the hands of actual Afghan rebel fighters, a feat that had eluded the agency in earlier conflicts. In addition, the United States had co-opted two very important allies into its Cold War. Pakistan, under Zia, would be the conduit. Saudi Arabia, essential in its own right, would provide an influx of money and resources. Through this arrangement, however, the US became entangled with an ideological force that it did not fully understand.

## *The Boiling Pot*

Between 1980 and 1983, money, weapons, supplies, and fighters began to flow into Afghanistan, slowly at first, then with increasing intensity. CIA Director William Casey, given a cabinet level position, instructed his Islamabad station chief to “grow the war”[100], though funds allocated to the program remained relatively stable between 1981 and 1984, amounting to about \$60 million[101]. Zia, concerned about provoking Soviet retribution, wanted “to keep the pot boiling, but not boil over”[102]. Thus, additional funds from the US were not needed, at least initially. The aim of the Operation Cyclone was not to quickly push the Soviets out of Afghanistan. The CIA preferred to bleed the Soviet Union: “The aim of the program was to cause pain. It was revenge after the series of U.S. defeats in Vietnam, Angola, the Horn of Africa, etc. It was payback time,” according to a U.S. intelligence official[103]. Though the United States and Pakistan were indeed partners in the conflict, their objectives certainly differed, as did their responsibilities. Brigadier General Mohammad Yousef, the Pakistani general charged with the equipping and training of the Afghan mujahideen, described responsibilities as such:

To sum up: the CIA’s tasks in Afghanistan were to purchase arms and equipment and arrange their transportation to Pakistan; provide funds for the purchase of vehicles and transportation inside Pakistan and Afghanistan; train Pakistani instructors on new weapons or equipment; provide satellite photographs and maps for our operational planning; provide radio equipment and training, and advise on technical matters when so requested. The entire planning of the war, all types of training of the Mujahideen and the allocation and distribution of arms and supplies were the sole responsibility of the ISI, and my office in particular[104].

Thus, it was both Zia and the ISI’s task to decide how, in practice, to grow the war. Decisions made during this time, especially in regards to the mobilization of forces and the allocation of funds to specific rebel groups, would prove important near the end of Soviet occupation in determining the political situation in Afghanistan.

From the beginning of the conflict, the ISI saw itself as the puppet masters of the unconventional war against the Soviets. Afghanistan itself provided new strategic depth for Pakistan and the ISI did not want to squander this resource[105]. Marshaling funds and resources from a variety of sources, namely the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China, the ISI sought to control military operations of a collective mujahideen campaign. The fragmentation in Afghanistan along tribal, ethnic, and sectarian lines, however, did not allow for a unified military force. Much like the United States Congress uses the lever of fund appropriation to influence foreign policy, Pakistan and the ISI used distribution of funds to exert a measure of control over the direction of the war. By 1980, ISI had recognized seven “parties” of the Afghan resistance movement[106]. Each party had a leader, generally located in Peshawar or Quetta, who gave military direction, arranged logistics, and provided organizational direction to their respective parties[107]. Thus, the ISI was able to set up a central hub for the resistance movement in Peshawar, enabling it to exert a measure of command over the collective effort across the border. For its part, Peshawar became much more than just a logistics hub- it was the heart of the Afghan support effort. Not only did intelligence officers and Afghan resistance leaders setup shop in Peshawar, but so did Arab support to the Afghan cause. Abdallah Azzam, and others from Saudi Arabia, set up the Services Bureau there, which provided paramilitary and humanitarian support services to both Arab and Afghan fighters[108]. Peshawar became a lighthouse, attracting all kinds of ideologies

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and motivations from across the world to the cause of the Afghans.

At a joint press conference, three major mujahedeen groups, Hezb-I Islami, Jamat Islami, and National Front indicated a unity of goals, but stopped short of declaring direct cooperation[109]. Before 1983, the various factions fighting in Afghanistan did not make any further attempt to create an Afghan-led coalition- and it served Pakistani purposes that they were not. Indeed, the ISI wanted a unified war effort- but with Pakistan calling the shots. If a unified Afghan Jirga were able to agree to terms and coordinate action internally, the ISI would lose control over the direction of military operations. The Palestine Liberation Organization represented a recent manifestation of such fears, creating its own unified identity and wresting control of the guerilla organization from its international sponsors[110].

Supplies and funds moved through two hubs- Peshawar and Quetta. The initial system put in place to run supplies directly to fighters, however, left much room for bribery and corruption, further degrading the ISI's ability to manage the resistance effort. In 1983, General Akhtar Abdul Rahman, director of the ISI, discovered that the logistics pipeline in Quetta had been hijacked by criminals[111]. The Quetta incident prompted General Yousaf to organize a party alliance, running funds and materials through party heads rather than direct to the field[112]. In Afghan tradition, such an agreement seemed almost impossible to make, even if cooperation only extended to a signature on paper[113]. The ISI, however, had its hand on the spigot and used it as leverage to form something that resembled an alliance. As Yousaf recounted,

It was then a firm principle that every Commander must belong to one of the seven parties, otherwise he got nothing from us at ISI—no arms, no ammunition and no training. Without these he could not exist, so he joined a Party, provided he could find one to accept him[114].

Funds were allocated quarterly based on formal meetings between ISI and party leaders[115]. It was in this way that the ISI was able to pick and choose who would get the most support and who would emerge as the most powerful leaders in the conflict. Justifying allocation based on objective military assessment, the ISI allocated over two-thirds of its funding to the Islamists. Specifically, the ISI favored Gulbiddin Hekmatyar, an outspoken fundamentalist who frequently criticized US and other external involvement in the press[116]. Patronage by the ISI of Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e Islami*, Maulawi Khalis's *Hizb-e Islami* and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf's *Ittehad-e Islami* (all radical Islamist parties), in effect, allowed the political popularity of these groups to grow in relation to the moderate factions[117]. All of these groups would closely align with Pakistan during the conflict and play a significant role in the future of Afghanistan[118]. Interestingly, many would eventually be labeled terrorist organizations by the United States[119]. The allocation of funds to these groups became of primary concern in the U.S. Congress near the end of the Afghan-Soviet conflict, prompting legislation to cut off support to anti-American groups[120].

Zia's ongoing Islamization campaign in Pakistan continued to affect the Afghan-Soviet conflict as well. The Iranian Revolution had aggravated the Sunni-Shia divide in the region and had gotten Saudi Arabia worried about waning influence in the region[121]. Plagued with an ongoing legitimacy crisis, Zia sided with his Sunni allies in Saudi Arabia, which in turn supported the growth of *madrassas* in Western Pakistan. The ISI, with the help of the CIA, was able to channel religious fervor and influence over traditional education to create an ample pool of anti-Soviet recruits for the conflict in Afghanistan. As has been discussed, the ideological conflict had already caused polarization amongst Afghans in opposition to the 'godless communists'. The United States, with their Pakistani partners, used this atmosphere to promote *jihad*, or holy war[122]. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) used over \$51 million to design and develop textbooks providing religious endorsement for the ideological fight against the Soviet Union[123]. Further challenged by the spread of Iranian Shi'a ideology and increase of Shi'a *madrassas* in Pakistan, funding ballooned from Saudi Arabia during the mid 1980s[124]. As the *madrassa* network expanded in the FATA and NWFP regions, thousands of Arabs and Afghans educated in both Sunni and Shi'a fundamentalism crossed the border to join the bloody *jihad* in the name of Islam[125].

The Soviet Invasion in Afghanistan, while breathing new life into the Zia regime had highlighted an increasingly "dangerous and puzzling world", as noted in an assessment by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. The report would go on to describe Pakistan's goals in regards to Afghanistan:

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Promote the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan as quickly as possible; minimize the Soviet incentive to apply pressure on Pakistan and; seek to prevent Soviet and Indian interests from coalescing against Pakistan. At the same time, the Pakistanis seek to 1) satisfy their own domestic pressures by providing assistance to the Afghan rebels and 2) keep their links to traditionally friendly outside powers [...] in order to prevent becoming isolated[126].

This assessment, in hindsight, seems to accurately portray the precarious position of Zia. While it would appear that the United States understood these objectives, its understanding of how the Islamic resistance would be used to address these objectives (and the eventual side effects) left much to be desired. Nevertheless, decisions made and partnerships forged between 1979 and 1981 would prove vital in understanding both the outcome of the Afghan-Soviet conflict, the Civil War in Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban as well as Al-Qaeda, and later regional instability. It would be easy to ascribe US troubles and regional turmoil after the conflict to myopia and undue haste. We must recognize, however, that the chessboard was three dimensional, with many actors playing even more angles. One could appropriately make an analogy to a forest, with hundreds or thousands of individuals lighting trees ablaze, dating back decades and longer. The Saudi government, America's second major partner in the war, and its citizens would be vital to spreading the flame.

## Saudi Arabia and Pan-Islamism

### *The Forgotten Rebellion*

Packed with nearly 50,000 worshippers, the sprawling campus of the Grand Mosque was buzzing with activity[127]. Many had come from around the globe to fulfill the fifth pillar of Islam- *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca. A group of roughly 50 men, dressed in desert white and carrying eight coffins[128], entered the place considered to be the most holy in the Muslim World[129]. As was customary, the men proceeded to the imam, requesting that the coffins be blessed and traditional prayers be made for the dead. Before the imam could speak, however, the men proceeded to open the coffins, revealing a cache of automatic rifles, shotguns, ammunition, and other supplies. The date was November 20, 1979. Between 400 and 500 Saudi Islamic fundamentalists, led by Juhayman al Uteybi, had seized the mosque, denouncing the legitimacy of the Saudi regime, and demanding ideological changes that reversed the Saudi path toward liberalization and modernization. Strongly influenced by the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood from the Islamic University in Medina[130], Uteybi and his followers declared the existence of a new *Mahdi* – a savior figure in Islam, translating to ‘the one who guides’.

The Saudi government downplayed the revolt in the media, claiming it was part of an isolated incident and not evidence of wider discontent[131]. Iran, in the midst of its own revolutionary tensions, declared an American-Israeli conspiracy, setting off a wave of anti-American demonstrations[132]. The attackers managed to hold off the first offensive from the Saudi military forces[133], fleeing to the basement floors and eventually holding the mosque for nearly two weeks. Prince Turki soon consulted Count Claude Alexandre de Marenches, a French military officer and legendary member of their intelligence services. Soon after, a team of three commandos from the Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie (GIGN), the respected French counter-terrorism group, arrived in Mecca to advise the Saudi forces[134]. Accounts conflict on who actually conducted the final raid, but the Mosque incident ended with a barrage of artillery, tear gas, and an assault to capture the remaining gunmen[135].

Opinion on the degree to which the Grand Mosque incident affected wider Saudi Arabia is far from unanimous. Scholars and historians fall within a wide spectrum- some describe the event in terms of its failure to mobilize more than a few hundred followers and the quick death of its organization while others mark it as a major turning point in Saudi policies. The Saudi government, for its part, would rather the incident be forgotten entirely[136]. Regardless of where opinion stands on the drama, the Grand Mosque incident is worth examination for a number of reasons. The event was the first aberration in Saudi Arabia's historically successful track record of channeling Islamic fervor. In seizing the mosque, Uteybi and his followers directly challenged the legitimacy of the political establishment. The immediate mission failed, resulting in the beheading of 63 involved[137] and the ultimate death of Uteybi's movement. The challenge, described as “an attempt to overthrow the Government”, inspired “real fear” according to Prince Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (future King of Saudi Arabia)[138]. The event prompted significant reforms to the political establishment, yielding much power to the Wahhabi establishment and exacting a high cost on the ruling

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elite. A group of Saudi princes described the paradox later: “the *ulema* essentially asked al Saud to adopt Juhayman’s agenda in exchange for their help in getting rid of Juhayman himself[139]”.

Second, the response to the mosque attack almost perfectly represented the dichotomy between an outward looking political establishment seeking influence on the world stage (driven by oil revenues) and the inward-looking Wahhabi religious establishment that provided legitimacy to the government system. The raid itself was advised by the French GIGN and conducted by US-trained forces using advanced tactics, technology, and weaponry. This, coupled with the international response in condemnation of the event seemed a manifestation of the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia in an increasingly globalized environment. King Khaled, surely aware that his legitimacy was at stake, called together a religious council (the *ulema*) to issue a religious ruling in regards to the use of military force inside the mosque[140]. This, in itself, highlights the unique role of the religious establishment in powers that typically reside in the office of the executive. It took the *ulema* three days to agree on the text of the fatwa[141], which was heavily debated, reflecting the tension and anger felt by even moderates within the Wahhabi establishment.

Lastly, the timing of the mosque attack, coinciding with the Iranian revolution and rising Shi’a influence, served to aggravate fears in the Saudi government concerning its role in the Muslim world. The psychological effect of these two separate events certainly sent the Sa’ud political establishment searching for affirmation. Occurring mere weeks later, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan represented a golden opportunity for Saudi Arabia to restore its position as champion of Islam and defender of Muslim territory. To understand how Saudi Arabia’s domestic desires to quell dissent drove its official support for the Afghan resistance, we must first examine the unique history of the kingdom as a merger between faith and force.

## *Forging a Kingdom*

When Muhammed bin Sa’ud made a pact with Muhammad bin Adb al-Wahhab in 1744[142], he hardly could have known they were sitting atop massive oil reserves (current estimates attribute nearly a quarter of world oil reserve to Saudi Arabia)[143]. This first Saudi state, set in the heart of Najd in central Arabia, paved the way for a unique monarchy built on a joint foundation. Presiding over the political and military spheres was the Sa’ud family and its descendants. A separate religious sphere, led by the al-Wahhab family, taught a brand of orthodox conservative Islam based on the writings in *The Book of Oneness of God and Removal of Doubts*[144]. The agreement between the two houses allowed for a state structure that based its legitimacy on the religious establishment. This close interconnection between state and religion continued to provide a unique separation of powers throughout its history. Heavy on theology but short on legal rulings, Wahhabism evolved into an Islamic tradition and was interpreted in different ways across generations. In this way, Wahhabism became both a reflection of the zeitgeist and the lens through which social issues were debated[145]. Saudi Arabia implemented a form of Political Islam, with a political/religious divide unique to typical national power structures.

The Wahhabi school primarily follows the Hanbali school of Sunni jurisprudence- contrasting with the Shi’a jurisprudence dominant within Iran. Shi’a Islam also has a significant following in Pakistan, India, Syria, Bahrain, Lebanon, and within Saudi Arabia itself. Because Islam is not only considered creed, but also law, the Wahhabi ideology became inextricably linked to politics. Despite this national identity, the Saudi state sought alternative forms of legitimacy beginning in the 1960s- following suit with Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Seeking to become an influential nation in the eyes of the West and the modern international system, development of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia through vast oil profits provided a modernizing rationale and furthered a divergence between the two spheres of power. The “desert-inspired, inward looking Wahhabi puritanical ethos” was constantly at odds with “the consumerism, indulgence, and materialism that resulted from the incorporation of the Saudi Arabian ‘rentier’ economy in the world system of capitalist relations of exchange[146].” In creating Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy during this period, King Faisal used a concept called *pan-Islamism* as an alliance-building tool in the Saudi cold war with Egypt[147]. *Pan-Islamism* was “based on the view that all Muslims were one people who had a responsibility to help each other in times of crisis[148]”. This concept also served a second purpose of boosting the religious credentials of the Saudi political regime, a constant worry in the co-dependent monarchy. *Pan-Islamism* can be contrasted with *Pan-Arabism*, used by Gamel Abdel Nasser and Egypt’s Free Officers as a framework for political decision-making and foreign policy. Just as pan-Islamism used religion to unite, *Pan-Arabism* used the common

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thread of the Arabic identity, language, and culture[149].

## *Harnessing Pan-Islamism*

In an effort to channel religious fervor and promote the Pan-Islamism ideology, King Feisal established a number of semi-governmental institutions including the Muslim World League (in May 1962) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (in 1969). Set-up and operated as a social organization, the MWL had a strong representation from the Muslim Brotherhood members who had fled from Egypt and Syria[150]. The MWL would become involved in many activities with core functions in education and charitable activities. The OIC operated closer to the Saudi political regime, with the power to set up financial institutions and charities[151]. The ability to control and disperse funds for pan-Islamic causes became important as Saudi coffers were filled with oil revenues in the early 1970s.

The rise of Pan-Islamism can be directly linked to two concepts. First, the movement was a manifestation of a massive propaganda campaign directed at the state level and proliferated through social and religious organizations. In contrast to Wahhabism, Pan-Islamism should be seen as a political tool used to garner legitimacy and harness the power of revolutionary Islamic movements. Instead of fighting against these movements, the government chose to support them, directing participation to a number of Pan-Islamic causes including the Palestinian and Bosnian conflicts. Due to the lack of precedent in Wahhabi scripture, some elements of the religious establishment tentatively objected to participation in these causes. It is important to note, however, that opposition became rare as performing this duty became increasingly popular in the kingdom- highlighting the co-dependency and subservience of the religious establishment in foreign affairs. Second, the increase in the number of violent conflicts throughout the world Arab world increased the mobilizing power of the movements. Wider conflict garnered wider support for the Pan-Islamic narrative that called for defense and liberation of oppressed Muslims.

Similarly, a more active Pan-Islam policy throughout the 1970s and 80s can be linked to two factors. First, the rise of revolutionary sentiment in Iran challenged Saudi Arabia leadership in the Muslim World. This put additional pressure on the regime to solidify its role as the center of Islam. The Grand Mosque incident in 1979 only exacerbated these pressures. Second, the decline in oil revenues through the 1980s caused a serious economic crisis. Promises of full employment by the state and the foundation of rentier culture was threatened, challenging the second pillar on which Saudi Arabia was based: economic welfare[152]. The Soviet invasion in Afghanistan provided an orienting objective for Pan-Islam, manifesting itself in an unprecedented level of support to the Afghan cause.

## *The Cause*

Financial and material support to the Afghan resistance movement from Saudi Arabia proceeded through three separate channels: Official Government, Semi-Governmental Organizations such as the MWL and OIC, and Non-Governmental such as Abdul Azzam's Services Bureau. Government support further broke into three types. First, Saudi Arabia provided support directly linked to the United States. This included funds matching, secured by National Security Advisor Brzezinski and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher on their initial trip to both Islamabad and Saudi Arabia[153]. Other agreements allowed the US to use Saudi Arabia as a logistics transit hub for arms and supplies that flowed to Pakistan. Second, the Saudi government directly supported the Pakistani government. As early as December 27, 1979, General Zia flew to Saudi Arabia to meet with the leadership in Jeddah[154]. The Saudis played a key role at the Islamic conference in Pakistan in January 1980, mobilizing Muslim support against the Soviet invasion[155]. Throughout the course of the war, Saudi Arabia would also provide direct military and logistics support to the Pakistani government[156]. Third, Saudi intelligence, apart from working with their American and Pakistani counterparts, played their own game inside Afghanistan. Co-operating with Azzam's Services Bureau, the Saudi Red Crescent and other infrastructure set up in Pakistan, Saudi intelligence actively supported the "politically marginal", ethnically Pashtun Abdul Rasul Sayyaf[157], due to his close ties with the Wahhabi religious establishment. Saudi intelligence was able to convince the Pakistani ISI to recognize Sayyaf's *Ittihad-i-Islami* as the seventh resistance group. Conversely, the religious establishment preferred to back conservative resistance groups, such as Jamil al-Rahman[158] and Gulbiddin Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e-Islami*[159].

Semi-governmental organizations also operated in direct support of the Afghan cause, many with offices in



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Peshawar, Quetta, and along the Afghan Border. The Saudi Red Crescent, beginning as a humanitarian and medical support organization, eventually became part of the weapons pipeline due to support it could provide through its border offices[160]. Other examples of semi-governmental involvement included the Muslim World Organization, which provided funding to madrassas and schools in Pakistan[161]. These madrassas would prove vital to mobilization of the Taliban movement in 1993. Integration of these organizations into logistics and transportation roles served to blur the lines of support between humanitarian and military action. This further decreased state control over how and where funds were spent.

The Saudi government also seemed to encourage non-governmental involvement in the cause. First, organizations such as Azzam's Services Bureau worked closely with other elements of the support pipeline, coordinating military and logistics support in Pakistan, often on behalf the Saudi political and religious establishments[162]. In addition, Azzam actively recruited, trained, and equipped Saudi Arabs who actively participated in the resistance movement inside Afghanistan. Azzam also coordinated humanitarian efforts and built medical facilities that cared for wounded mujahedeen in Pakistan[163].

In essence, the Saudi government, through promotion of the Pan-Islamic agenda and empowerment of the Wahhabi religious establishment after the Grand Mosque incident, set up an entire ecosystem of support for the Afghan cause. The Saudis built the machine, turned it on, and watched it go. Like the United States, however, several unintended consequences followed from the Saudi policy. The militarization of Saudi society throughout the Afghan jihad, coupled with questions of religious legitimacy following the Kuwait-Iraq invasion and subsequent defense by US troops, eventually created ample ideological and material resources for a Saudi opposition group. Through his alignment with Abdallah Azzam and the Afghan mission, the financier Osama Bin-Laden would soon attempt to hijack the Pan-Islamist 'classic' jihad and attempt to channel a global jihad against the United States, the West, and even the Saudi government. The seeds of future discontent were growing in both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan during the late 1970s and early 1980s. True, too, the bipolar world of the US and the USSR created the context for these events to occur, fertilizing these seeds that would bear fruit decades later, culminating during the late 1990s and early 2000s in the growth of multinational terror groups and attacks inside the borders of Saudi Arabia, the United States, Pakistan, and elsewhere.

If we are willing to accept that confronting the Soviet Union, on some level, in Afghanistan was a political necessity given the context of the Cold War, we must then turn attention towards how this confrontation was built. At this juncture, is it possible to assess foreign policy failures that specifically created conditions for a long, tumultuous intervention in the region? It is important to recognize the practical elements of US action. Regarding the geography of Afghanistan, it was then bordered by Iran, the Soviet Union, China, and Pakistan. Iran, due to its revolution and stiff opposition to an American alliance, would no longer support US interests in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union, of course, was the enemy that the US wanted to hurt through its action. Disregarding foreign policy, the small border Afghanistan shares with China is mountainous and formidable. Thus, in order to have real impact in Afghanistan without American ground forces, the United States had to choose Pakistan as its regional partner. Moving supplies, funds, and weapons into hostile territory requires an over-land transportation method. Thus, the relationship between the US and Pakistan can be seen as a marriage of convenience from the perspective of both countries. America's other partner, Saudi Arabia, was the logical extension of the policy towards Pakistan. Because of their interconnection both religiously and economically, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were already closely aligned. Even without US prompting, it is likely that Saudi Arabia would have been involved in the conflict. The Services Bureau and other NGOs were already establishing themselves in Pakistan even before the conflict ramped up. In addition, direct aid to the Pakistani government from Saudi Arabia further demonstrated that the US was no middleman in this relationship. The US overtures to Saudi Arabia allowed the CIA to benefit from the existing Saudi interest in Afghanistan by implementing a funds matching agreement. We can conclude, through our recent look at different aspects of building the Afghan jihad machine, that despite unified efforts, national interests only vaguely overlapped. In terms of US policy, it may be useful, then, to see this alliance in Afghanistan as an outgrowth of necessity.

We must next examine the specific elements that US foreign policy and agencies could influence. The primary issue is the question of US 'control' of the effort. Thanks to the initial agreement with the Pakistani ISI, the US and its intelligence agencies essentially had none. While diplomats and intelligence officers could pay lip service in directing

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the ISI to allocate funds, very little real influence was exerted. In a broader sense, this was due to the fact that it was *the policy* of the CIA and the United States not to tell Zia and Pakistan how to run the war. Viewing the conflict as another confrontation with the Soviet Union in the third world, the U.S. did not want to escalate the conflict to a direct war with the Soviets. Much like the Chinese in Vietnam, the U.S. wanted to maintain deniability as it supported its subversive clients. This point was made even clearer by the debate within Congress over initial support to the mujahedeen. While several members of Congress prompted for a more vigorous backing of the resistance, the CIA had cautioned against an over-zealous military campaign that might cause retaliation from the Soviet Union[164]. The arrangement made ultimately put the ISI in the driver's seat and allowed them, with little oversight, to determine the course of the war and the outcomes within it. We must also examine how state level sponsorship by Saudi Arabia diminished control further in regards to the pursuit of different agendas. Without any central planning by Saudi intelligence or its political apparatus, semi and non-governmental organizations were free to pour assets of the rich Saudi economy into ideologically oriented pursuits. Still, though, the United States encouraged this participation and used the concept of jihad itself in promoting its own agenda against the Soviets. Little attention was paid to post-war planning, probably because few intelligence operatives overseeing the war effort from Washington believed pushing the Soviets out was possible. As the Soviet mission crept wider, so did the US involvement, eventually garnering support in Congress, Executive Office, and with the American people.

First, the US wanted to both halt and rollback the spread of Soviet power that now extended to Afghanistan. While the prospect of defeating the Soviets with a ragtag army was daunting, the US believed it was possible to drain the Soviet Union, both militarily and economically in Afghanistan- akin to American in Vietnam. With regards to regional power balance and future stability of the region, the idea of 'self-determination' in Afghanistan was principle to the US vision. In the view of both the United States and Pakistan, it was vital to return Afghanistan to its non-aligned status, which allowed for stable power balance in the region. Policy was decided based on these three objectives. However, crucial to understanding US policy decisions is the focus of US interest on the Cold War context, rather than any issues related specifically to Afghanistan. This focus produced a myopic outlook that focused largely on Cold War objectives with little regard to nuances in the means applied. While the US maintained its policy of self-determination throughout the conflict and after the Geneva Accords, it was clear that external influences from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States undermined this secondary objective. Further, the approach of using a fragmented resistance, with each fragment pursuing individual objectives, stood in clear opposition to the stability of a post-Soviet Afghanistan. Because this was no popular resistance, the majority of Afghans ultimately had little representation as multiple layers of conflict tore apart their once-stable society. In turn, this produced economic hardships and a humanitarian disaster on a grand scale, which no amount of aid could repair. The only solution possible was through a political unity that would, at its best seem fleeting, and at its worst become impossible given the nature and current disposition of Afghan society. Despite Zia's desire to keep the resistance at manageable levels ("to keep the pot boiling, but not boil over[165]"), the fuel from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States would eventually cause events to spin out of control. As a senior Pakistani official, in reference to fundamentalist militant groups it supported, once declared, "All we have are the crazies. So the crazies it is[166]." What, then, happens to the crazies when the pot boils over? The conflict's bloody and turbulent aftermath would eventually provide an answer.

## III – Boiling Over

### *Civil War and Global Jihad*

#### 3. CRACKS IN THE RESISTANCE

*Despite internal fractures, external pressures, and a massive influx of men and materiel from the Soviet Union, the Mujahedeen resistance- and all its disparate parts, achieved collective success throughout the mid-1980s. Much like Vietcong, the mujahedeen did not defeat the Soviets on the battlefield[167]. True, the outnumbered and outgunned resistance had some great tactical successes and extracted a large toll from their enemy[168]- aided later in the conflict by advanced weapons (including ground-to-air Stinger missiles) provided by the United States[169]. High military and political costs, both domestically and through the international community, coupled with a seemingly intractable insurgency and the futile nature of the conflict eventually brought the Soviet Union to*

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*the bartering table under the facade of international cooperation[170]. The Geneva Accords of April 15, 1988, with parts signed by the United States, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union, marked the beginning of the end of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan[171]. Success for the United States, in terms its limited strategic objective, was at hand.*

*In the background, however, several other storylines were in motion. First, and most pressing, was the growing civil war between Mujahedeen factions. Two commanders had emerged from the conflict as the most powerful—Massoud and Hekmatyar. Representing a strong undercurrent of ethnic division, these two very different men had been at odds for the entirety of the war. A third commander, Jallaladin Haqqani, who had grown close to both Saudi and Pakistani intelligence during the conflict[172], would begin a steady rise as Massoud and Hekmatyar fought against each other and the Soviet-backed government. Things were not going as planned in Kabul either. Despite withdrawing its forces, the Soviet Union had stockpiled a year's supply of ammunition at government-controlled facilities[173] and refused to cut off the flow of money to Najibullah—who remained in power[174]. One proxy war had ended and another had begun, with the usual players competing for control over the fragmented nation of Afghanistan.*

## The Lion of Panjshir

The Hotel Plaza Athénée is a historic symbol of luxury positioned near the Champs-Élysées and Eiffel Tower on avenue Montaigne in Paris, France. Luminous warmth washes over the building's façade while a highly ornate interior, decorated in the style of the Louis XVI period, overwhelms with elegance. When Ahmed Shah Massoud, dressed in his customary safari jacket and *pakul* cap[175], walked through Athénée's glass double doors, he had been at war for 23 years. The tanned, bearded, battle-hardened commander, accustomed to living in mud huts and caves, now stood amongst velvet and chandeliers almost perfectly highlighting the paradox between his tumultuous nation and on-lookers in the developed world. Landing in the outskirts of Paris only months before his assassination in September 2001, Massoud was on a political mission. He did not want money, men, or advice— but something far more important: recognition. In reality his objectives were three-fold: 1) recognition of the Northern Alliance as the legitimate and representative government of Afghanistan, 2) international ostracizing of Pakistan, who was actively supporting the Taliban government, and 3) humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees displaced by the civil war[176]. Little in Afghanistan had changed, with exception of the enemy: first the Soviets, then Hekmatyar, and eventually the fundamentalist movement called 'the Taliban'— now locked in battle with Massoud's forces.

The rise of the Taliban had been swift. In the wake of the Afghan civil war throughout the early 1990s, inability of political factions to negotiate settlement and form a representative government created a power vacuum in Kabul. Led by Mullah Mohammed Omar and backed by the ISI, young Pashtun students of the Pakistani madrassas and fundamentalist mujahedeen factions formed a new Islamic organization that promoted a combination of pre-Islamic tribal law and elements of the Wahhabi doctrine taught in the Pakistani madrassas. The Taliban swept through Kandahar in November 1994 and continued on to take Kabul in September 1996. Rejecting the oppressive nature of the Taliban regime, Massoud and his forces fled towards Tajikistan, destroying the Salang Tunnel on his way north. His forces consolidated and rebranded with a new mission and a new name: the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (known also as the 'Northern Alliance'). As his forces battled to save their country from a fundamentalist regime, Massoud traveled to Europe to secure the 'self-determination' that the United States once sought. Lack of political compromise had destroyed his country and any hope for a unified Afghanistan. Reflecting over these events, Massoud— part diplomat, part strategist, part governor, and part warrior— worked tirelessly to gain international support for his cause.

When Massoud returned to Afghanistan in 1978 after his first failed guerilla campaign in 1973, he set up shop in the Panjshir Valley in the north of Afghanistan. Far away from Pakistan and thus ISI control, Massoud's war stood in sharp contrast to his other mujahedeen factions scattered across the country. First, rather than postponing political activities until after the war, Massoud followed a strategy with both political and military components that integrated the local population rather than push them out[177]. This strategy later manifested itself in the creation of an autonomous Islamic state and governing coalition that included social services, collected taxes, and provided welfare to families affected by the campaign[178]. Second, Massoud's *Jamiat* operated largely outside of both support and

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control of the ISI- and by proxy the United States. Apart from minor assistance from Rabbani and a friendly relationship with France and the UK, Massoud was on his own. This created two major issues. Since Massoud had to equip his own fighters, he relied on collecting equipment by attacks on Soviet convoys running through the Salang highway, the only reliable over-land route to Kabul from the north[179]. In turn, the Panjshir Valley attracted great attention from the Soviet Union, who made crushing Massoud and his forces an integral part of its counter-insurgency effort[180]. Despite this focus, the mainly Tajik and Uzbek forces of the north were very successful in engagements with the Soviets. In June 1982, Massoud's forces destroyed 23 helicopters and MIGs that were part of a massive invasion on the valley[181]. In July of 1985, his guerillas launched a major offensive, killing hundreds and capturing a Soviet Military base in Peshghar[182]. The attention Massoud provoked, however, produced great hardship on the region. In May of 1983, Massoud made a truce with the Soviets, allowing them passage on the Salang highway and construction of a nearby garrison in exchange for a halt in aerial bombardment[183]. This caused both the ISI and the CIA to further discount the non-Pashtun Massoud as a reliable commander in the field[184].

The Panjshiris used the 16-month truce to "rebuild their villages, cultivated their fields, set aside food supplies, restocked ammunition, and trained guerillas"[185]. With the Soviets out of his way for now, Massoud was able to conduct retaliatory operations against Hekmatyar's forces, which were using an adjacent valley to stage assaults on Jamiat's flanks[186]. This war within the war forced a new tactical organization amongst Massoud's forces before he could expand his resistance effort outside of the valley. Attracting great leaders and warriors through fame garnered from military successes, he formed two types of resistance groups. The first were local forces in each village, manned and controlled by the villages themselves. These were designed to protect against attacks by Hekmatyar and other outside forces, which might seek to take control of areas under the influence of Massoud- in essence, civilian defense forces. Second, Massoud used his more elite forces to form a mobile division that could conduct guerrilla style attacks on Soviet and Soviet-backed Afghan military[187].

After the truce was lifted in 1984, Massoud began to expand his influence and his resistance model. Between 1984 and 1987, he successfully formed a coalition of Jamiat commanders from five of the northeastern provinces allowing for coordination of activities and mutual support[188]. This coalition formed the Shura-e Nazar (the Supervisory Council of the North or SCN), with Massoud as its leader. This was the beginning of a political-military framework outside of the parties based in Peshawar. From 1986 to 1988, the SCN conducted a series of carefully planned operations to push the Soviet garrisons out of the region and demonstrate the potential of Afghan cooperation[189]. Massoud's coalition was highly successful militarily, prompting Robert Kaplan, a journalist with the *Wall Street Journal* who covered the war, to label him 'the Afghan Who Won the Cold War'[190]. The coalition also expanded further into civilian governance, viewing such activities as inseparable from the military aspects of the resistance[191]. Due in no small part to the attrition caused by the SCN, the Soviet Union was pushed into talks at Geneva in spring of 1988.

## Geneva

The Soviet position on Afghanistan actually started to change with the transition of power in the USSR to Mikhail Gorbachev. In his famous 1986 speech, he referred to Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound" and relayed his preference for troop withdrawals to begin "in the nearest future" [192]. In the United States, Congress remained steadfast in their intention for an Afghanistan based on "self-determination"- meaning the right for Afghans to decide their government[193]. In a resolution passed February 29, 1988, the Senate urged the President to continue support to the Afghan resistance and to push for a political solution[194]. It was in this context that the latest round of UN-sponsored talks began in April 1988. The agreed upon accords, however, ended up being more symbolic than substantial. The first of four bilateral agreements, between Pakistan and the Soviet-backed Afghan government, was a "Non-Interference and Non-Intervention" pact that prohibited either country from meddling in the internal affairs of the other. On the surface, an observer might suspect this provision would be a successful attempt by the Soviets to cut off support from the ISI and Pakistan to the resistance movement. Not so. Pakistan had maintained a policy of denying any involvement in the conflict and admitted only to hosting refugee camps. Thus, no binding legal agreement was established against support for the Afghan rebels- the sole purpose of which was to oust the Soviets and the Soviet-backed regime.

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The second bilateral agreement, between the Soviet Union and the United States, agreed to respect the “independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-alignment of Afghanistan and Pakistan[195].” This ostensibly reflected a ban on both US and Soviet aid to the Afghan government and the resistance movement. Again, both sides refuted this. US Secretary of State George Shultz issued a statement that the US would not suspend aid to the rebellion and only a cessation of support by the Soviet Union would prompt such consideration[196]. This idea, known as negative symmetry, would weigh heavily in the debate on US policy towards Afghanistan. Indeed Congress expressed desires to increase aid and military support to the rebellion[197]. While the third bilateral agreement dealt with refugees, only the fourth instrument, mentioned Soviet withdrawal[198]. This section only referred to the phased withdrawal of uniformed Soviet forces, not to include advisors or KGB operatives in the country. Dr. Najibullah, head of the Soviet-backed PDPA government, announced in a press conference on April 28 that even Soviet military advisors would be permitted to stay under the agreement[199]. The accords made no mention of a transitional government either, ensuring that the Soviet-backed Najibullah would continue to fight for survival in Kabul.

The accords sparked debate in both the US Congress and State Department. Legally, what did the accords mean to the United States, the USSR, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Afghan Government, and the Afghan Resistance movement? How could the United States trust the accords to be followed without any enforcement mechanisms? Would the US be better off without the accords, forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw on their own? Did the accords simply give political legitimacy to Soviet influence without the requirement of Soviet military forces? Many of these questions remained unanswered, until increasing fragmentation between 1989 and 1991 forced the US government to reconsider its policies. The Soviets, for their part, would indeed begin a withdrawal, but would not end its monetary and military aid to the Najibullah regime.

## Outside Help

The accords did not signify the end of the Afghan conflict but simply marked the beginning of its next phase. Resistance factions, while moving towards the ultimate objective of taking Kabul, would fight each other as well for future leadership in Afghanistan. Behind the scenes, the ISI was solidifying its support for Hekmatyar while Massoud's coalition fought for unity amongst the Afghan people. With strained relations with his sole representative in Pakistan, fellow Tajik Burhanuddin Rabbani, Massoud realized early on that he would need additional help. Apart from gaining some support from the British and French, Massoud sent representatives to Washington to reach out for help. By early 1989, the CIA had begun secret, monthly transfers of \$200,000 directly to Massoud's forces. Because this violated the CIA's agreement with Pakistan, they attempted to keep this support secret[200]. This action by the CIA seemed to be consistent with recommendations by State Department Special Envoy Peter Tomsen that were approved by an inter-agency council in Washington. As will be seen, cooperation by the CIA station in Islamabad would prove fleeting.

The United States and Saudi Arabia, however, were still funding the ISI through normal channels. A massive new injection of cash from the Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal left the ISI poised to influence a new interim Afghan government[201]. Thus, money was flowing at a growing rate to all sides of the conflict, increasing the intensity of the civil war, and exacerbating tensions between the various mujahedeen factions. Two conflicting goals were at play for the larger powers: 1) The ousting of the Najibullah regime in Kabul and 2) controlling who filled the power vacuum once he was out. Thus, two wars were layered together: the fight to oust the Soviet-backed regime and the fight between resistance groups and political parties for future rule of the country. Rather than confronting both these issues with a unified policy, the United States chose to avoid aggravating tensions with its fundamentalist partners and attempted to play both sides, often choosing to ignore the infighting. Over the next year, factional fighting escalated in both the north, between the forces of Massoud and Hekmatyar, and in the south, between groups vying for control over key transportation routes[202]. Najibullah and the Soviet-backed Afghan Army would hold off the fragmented resistance movement for almost three more years.

During this period, the ISI began to see the opportunity to expand its mission to India. The internal dynamics of the Pakistani government-ISI relations, however, had significantly changed with the mysterious death of General Zia and his replacement by Benazir Bhutto[203]. On August 17, 1988, a plane carrying General Zia, US ambassador Arnold

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Raphel, and 10 top military officers nose-dived shortly after takeoff and crashed, killing all on board. After the incident, reporters pointed to the unraveling of Zia's alliances in wake of the Geneva Accords, prompting a number of conspiracy theories regarding his death[204]. Common wisdom held that without Zia, support for the Afghan insurgency would wane. But this notion ignored the equally powerful political agenda of the ISI and Pakistan's support for the mujahedeen never wavered. While Benazir Bhutto would eventually be hailed as the 'embodiment of democracy[205]', many of Pakistan's security-related policies remained consistent. When the ISI brought forth a plan to conduct a covert war inside the disputed India Kashmir using militants trained for the Afghan cause- Bhutto accepted it (though ISI would soon reach out to Osama Bin-Laden to finance a coup to displace her). Jallaladin Haqqani, a fearless and effective battlefield commander, was a favorite of the ISI, Saudi Intelligence, and the CIA[206]. Relied on heavily to test and experiment new weapons systems, as well as an equipment broker to Arabs fighting in the war, Haqqani's influence grew with his favored status. For the ISI, Haqqani would prove vital to expanding the jihad to India[207] as well as a critical link in the future to fundamental offshoots of the jihad movement- founding the so-called 'Haqqani Network'. Hekmatyar, too, would soon begin to launch cross-border attacks into the Kashmir region- further solidifying his reputation as an ISI pawn. Using Afghan militants as an offensive force against India represented an alternative approach to dealing with changes in the regional power balance.

It must be noted that the withdrawal of Soviet forces did not achieve Pakistan's political goals in Afghanistan. First, the invasion of the Soviets into Afghanistan had tipped the power balance in the precarious region. Pakistani involvement derived from the necessity to correct this balance, working towards an end game of installing a friendly government in Kabul. Afghanistan provided Pakistan with strategic depth against its neighboring competitor, India- for defense against India was the major policy concern for the Pakistani government. After the Soviet withdrawal, the Najibullah regime increasingly warmed to the Indian government. The fact that Pakistan was leading the support effort to depose the Soviet-backed regime forced this foreign policy approach. Thus, Pakistan still faced the same power balance problem even as Soviet tanks rolled back across the border. The ISI, for its part, sought to exploit its alliances and powerful role in the Afghan jihad to both push Indian influence out of Afghanistan and guarantee a Pakistan-oriented leadership after Najibullah. The pursuit of these objectives caused Pakistan to increasingly support radical fundamentalist, ethnically-Pashtun political parties and leaders. Meanwhile in Peshawar, another, far more ideological battle was brewing that would have repercussions for all three state powers in the US alliance.

## 4. THE FAR ENEMY

*Arab jihadists were also drawn into the civil war between Massoud and Hekmatyar. A unified effort against the 'God-less' Soviets had allowed for differences in ideology and intent for a future Afghanistan to be brushed over. With the Soviets leaving, rifts amongst former allies widened and new ideological lines were drawn between moderate and radical elements. Radical fundamentalist Arabs, including many disgruntled members of the Services Bureau, joined with recently arrived Muslim Brotherhood members from Egypt forming a new alliance oriented towards a far enemy. The foundations for a new, global jihad movement began to form in the ashes of the anti-Soviet struggle.*

### Loyalties and Conspiracies

With the Soviets on their way out of Afghanistan[208], tensions began to rise between the increasingly fragmented Arab volunteers in Peshawar. The civil war between Massoud and Hekmatyar had exacerbated allegiances that had little significance when a unified objective glossed over ideological disputes. Tensions began to rise between Osama Bin Laden and his mentor Abdul Azzam over which side to take. Being based in Peshawar, Hekmatyar had personal access to the growing Muslim Brotherhood networks and Arab volunteers in the region. Still, Massoud's effectiveness as both a military leader and effective governor attracted support from many Arabs, including Abdul Azzam (who also had a son-in-law working for Massoud[209]).

Due to his close ties with Saudi Intelligence, the charismatic Osama Bin Laden grew close to Sayyaf, the Saudi-backed resistance leader. Sayyaf and OBL had common academic and ideological ties, while Sayyaf relied greatly on the Arab jihadist network built by Azzam and Bin Laden due to his lack of indigenous Afghan support[210]. Both

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Sayyaf and Hekmatyar received generous support from the ISI, becoming natural allies towards the end of the 1980s due to connections in Peshawar, and shared ideological orientation towards Qutbism[211]. Osama Bin Laden also came under the influence of the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, the founder of a group called Islamic Jihad, which had carried out strikes against the government of Egypt throughout the 1970s[212].

Al-Zawahiri and hundreds of other militants were arrested following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. The torture and treatment Al-Zawahiri received over three years in prison further embittered and radicalized him[213]. Al-Zawahiri's involvement in the Afghan jihad came when he volunteered medical services (he was a surgeon) to the cause in Pakistan. Once there, he identified Afghanistan as a potential safe-haven and secure base to conduct jihad activity in Egypt[214]. Al-Zawahiri's influence further separated OBL and Azzam from an ideological perspective, as Zawahiri's radical mindset departed from defensive toward offensive jihad. In contrast to Azzam and the Pan-Islamic narrative, Zawahiri increasingly looked at both Western (non-Islamic) governments *and* Islamic governments he saw to be illegitimate:

The Islamic movements must answer the questions: are the governments in the Muslim countries true Muslims or are they *kufr* [infidels]? These rulers are obviously *kufr* and *murtaddeen* [apostates] because they rule with a law other than that of Allah. Therefore, it is a *farid ayn* [compulsory] to wage jihad against them and remove them from their positions. It is not allowed to rule with a law other than that of Allah, as these rulers do. By imposing their own rules instead of God's they are in fact ridiculing *sharia* laws[215].

## Local Jihad, Global Jihad

True to his belief in the Pan-Islamic narrative, Azzam spent his time in the late 1980s trying to forge a truce between Massoud, Hekmatyar, and the unraveling jihad movement. He tried to organize a religious group to mediate between the various mujahedeen factions, while he himself travelled over land to Takhar to meet with Massoud[216]. Al-Zawahiri, with the help of Bin Laden, began to use Azzam's Services Bureau and its connections to recruit Arabs for a global mission against 'enemies of Islam'. Azzam's opposition to this re-orientation of the Services Bureau ignited a conflict between the two, likely aggravated by the contest over Bin Laden's deep pockets[217]. On November 23, 1989, Azzam was assassinated in Peshawar. According to eyewitness accounts, unknown laborers had placed an improvised explosive device in a drainage culvert on Azzam's route to the local mosque, detonating under the vehicle as it drove past[218]. Many had a motive to kill Azzam including Hekmatyar and Al-Zawahiri (because of his alignment with Massoud), Israeli Mossad (because he had helped found Hamas), and the KGB (because he was a powerful leader in the jihad). The event was never fully investigated and no culprit was ever identified. It is certain, however, that Osama Bin-Laden's last moderating influence died that day.

The death of Azzam had two very important consequences. Azzam, before his death, had increasingly sided with Massoud and Rabbani. Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, too, increasingly mistrusted Hekmatyar and his ability to deliver a unified Afghanistan[219]. These influences put pressure on the ISI, limiting the flow of money and support to Hekmatyar's forces in favor of other mujahedeen elements[220]. With Azzam's death, Massoud now lacked a powerful ally in Pakistan, the support of which would be crucial in creating a successful unity government in Kabul. Second, Azzam left behind an expansive and powerful infrastructure in the Services Bureau. Osama Bin Laden seized on the opportunity to inherit this important recruiting and support network. In August 1988, Osama, along with Arab members of the Services Bureau and Al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad, had formalized the creation of a new, elite fighting force that looked to harness the local jihad movement for a global agenda[221]. Bin Laden was able to fold the Services Bureau into this new organization, rapidly accelerating the reach of the group known as *Al-Qaeda*. This organization, through the guidance of Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri[222], would orient its fight towards the far enemy: "the armies of the American crusaders and their allies[223]". Interestingly, the rationale behind this new orientation came in the form of a classic security dilemma. After US intervention in the Gulf War, Osama became increasingly disillusioned with the Saudi government. He, and others within his organization, feared the growth of US influence in the Arabian Peninsula and determined it to be Islam's greatest enemy[224]. This growth of influence was seen as an infiltration into the Islamic World, which would grow to corrupt an ideologically centered region. Paraphrasing Thucydides: What made war inevitable was the growth of American power in the Persian Gulf and the fear this caused *Al-Qaeda*.

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The storylines that converged during the period between 1987 and 1989 indeed had a great impact on Afghanistan and what came after. Even while Najibullah remained in the king chair in Kabul, the brewing civil war between Massoud and Hekmatyar seemed to have had a clear favorite. In the eyes of an international community set on the future stability of a historically tumultuous region, the radical and contentious Hekmatyar would never be able to mend the fragmented society. Massoud, the wise and moderate warrior, skilled at coalition building and governing was the obvious choice for forging a unified Afghan government in the vacuum of Soviet power. Hekmatyar, the radical, indiscriminate killer[225], sought to wreak havoc on his native lands in the name of fundamentalist Islam if he could not get his way. The differences between the two men would be further exposed as forces converged on the capital. In the eyes of the state-level players involved, however, such a simple 'good versus evil' narrative did not define the struggle. Beneath the surface, our story reveals three uneasy partners that were handcuffed together, with competing interests restricting freedom of action on all sides.

In the United States, Congressional declaration of a policy of 'self-determination' restricted action to the specific objective of ousting the Najibullah regime through support of the collective resistance movement. This narrow objective stemmed partly from the fact that few in the United States believed that the mujahedeen resistance would be successful from the outset of the conflict. Thus, post-conflict planning was an afterthought limited to the humanitarian situation rather than wider political stability. By the mid 1980s, the Central Intelligence Agency had already become aware that the ISI was funneling the majority of money and supplies to fundamentalist factions. It became clear to many in the US Congress that Massoud, not Hekmatyar should be America's choice to lead Afghanistan. This choice was less clear for the CIA, who retained faith in the decision-making of their Pakistani counterparts. Nevertheless, any support for Massoud was handcuffed by the relationship with both Saudi Arabia and the ISI. The CIA had agreed early on to let ISI handle the distribution of funds and conduct of the war. Because of this, the CIA did little in the way of building up their own connections and networks in the country that would have allowed them to exert influence on the relative power balance of the mujahedeen leadership. Further, Saudi Arabia had backed Sayyaf while the ISI had favored Hekmatyar- the two of which were becoming increasingly close through shared ideology and objectives. Thus, those two intelligence services had made substantial investment that could not easily be reversed.

For Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait provided an unexpected catalyst for highlighting the growing disparity between the Saudi regime and the Pan-Islamic agenda it had created. The falling-out created by choosing US defense in the region over Osama Bin Laden's Arab Army became the final nail for extremist discontent with the modernization of the Saudi state[226]. In reality, as Prince Turki well knew, Osama's Arab Army was not a realistic defense option. Despite US success, Saddam's forces boasted advanced battlefield technology as well as chemical and biological weapons. An underequipped and largely untrained army of holy warriors stood little chance in the open desert terrain of Kuwait. Still Bin Laden seized on this perceived slight to harshly criticize the illegitimacy of the Saudi political establishment. Bin Laden was viewed by many as the embodiment of the Saudi establishment, thus his turn away from the government carried great weight in religious circle. Not only did OBL reject the US-Saudi Alliance, but so also did Hekmatyar and Sayyaf, further exasperating the growing divide between religious and political elements in Saudi Arabia and abroad. Despite vowing to cut off Hekmatyar, Saudi intelligence eventually increased direct aid to his forces[227], highlighting the desperation of the Saudi government to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the jihad movement. Meanwhile, the Saudi political establishment became increasingly dependent on US oil expertise, US consumption of its oil, and US forces for national defense. However, the strategic objective of political legitimacy based on religion, more than anything, defined Saudi policy making towards the Afghan War during this period.

In Pakistan, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of executed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and successor of the deceased General Zia[228], had it worse. The ISI, made powerful through the Soviet-Afghan conflict, exerted increasing influence over the Afghan jihad, as well as the Pakistani army and politics. Bhutto, although deeply suspicious of the agency[229], could not afford to make enemies out of it and thus was in a sense handcuffed to the organization that was made possible by bags of American and Saudi cash. Communications between the ISI and Bin Laden regarding a possible coup attempt in 1989 and her eventual ouster in 1996 further validate this point[230]. Thus, while Bhutto became increasingly weary of the ISI's golden boy (Hekmatyar) and his inability to create a unified Afghan government, she could do little to change the strategy. In a televised interview[231], Massoud



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acknowledged this disparity between the nation of Pakistan and the intelligence service. He identified the “special agenda” of the ISI that was not “in the benefit of Islam, the nation of Afghanistan, nor the nation of Pakistan”. In the words of the interviewer, “ISI was like a state within a state running loose in other words?”- Massoud replied: “No doubt.” Further, the ISI stood firmly against Massoud due to his Tajik ethnicity and the perception of his allegiances-based on past negotiations with the Soviet Union. Thus, any coalition with Massoud at its head (both the SCN and the National Commanders’ Shura yet to be established) would find outright opposition in Pakistan.

Thus, we can see that the handling of these micro-level issues with regard to post-Soviet Afghanistan, were a manifestation of larger strategic and competing interests between the three major players. The United States would not begin to rectify its mistakes until September 1996, when the Afghanistan had all but been forgotten as a policy issue. Gary Schroen, CIA station chief in Islamabad, would make the initial overtures to Massoud that would eventually lead to a US-Northern Alliance partnership against the Taliban in 2001[232]. Both Saudi Arabia and the United States would fall victim to Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda, through terrorist attacks throughout the mid-1990s[233], culminating in the events on 9/11[234]. Pakistan and the ISI would enjoy the use of its militant networks to pursue strategic goals in the region (in both Afghanistan and India) but would eventually reap the same fate as Saudi Arabia, losing control over the monster it had helped to create. A series of terrorist attacks inside Pakistan and the growth of fundamentalist factions in the FATA region[235] would prompt the Pakistani military (working with the United States) to launch a counter-insurgency campaign against Islamic militants in 2007 and 2008[236]. Our story, however, does not end here with a fading into darkness. Subsequent choices by the United States and the outcome of the civil war were still not determined. More opportunities for the US to rectify its previous errors were yet to be had and a unified Afghanistan was well within reach during the early 1990s. Despite the civil war and the resilient Najibullah regime in Kabul, Massoud was making great military progress without the support of Pakistan or the US. Meanwhile, the various political parties in the mujahedeen resistance, with the help of American and Pakistani moderators, were making progress towards a political solution in the form of an interim government. Amid concerns regarding the handling of the resistance by Pakistan and new attention to the end game, U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was heavily debated. The policy, according to the President, was clear. It was defined by a simple phrase: self-determination. What was far from clear, however, was what ‘self-determination’ actually meant.

## IV – Missed Opportunities

### *US Policy Decisions in the Wake of Soviet Withdrawal*

#### 5. Self-determination

*Even before the Geneva Accords and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, policy experts in the United States began to examine the decline of the bipolar system and its two superpowers- The United States and the Soviet Union. As the first Soviet tanks rolled back across the border, the executive branch[237], and indeed the American public as a whole[238], cautiously began to look forward- past Afghanistan, past the threat of nuclear holocaust[239], and past the Cold War. The United States would need a new, more flexible strategy to face a complex world of emerging threats. The Soviet Union was in decline, and many of its satellites- Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia- were in political unrest. Policymakers foresaw a new world order, an international system where peace, security, and the rule of law prevailed. The United States would redefine its role as leader, seizing upon its rising primacy to defeat “tyranny and savage aggression[240]”.*

*Even as Afghanistan faded out of the conversation, a second phase of the war had begun. Just as the world was transitioning away from bipolarity, so too was Afghanistan. No longer was there a jihad between two diametrically opposed sides. What remained was a complicated struggle amongst self-interested individuals, backed by foreign powers, for control over an increasingly fragmented country. Seemingly trapped in its Cold War frame of mind, American policy in Afghanistan continued to reflect bipolarity, even as the struggle transformed into layered complexity. Millions of dollars and advanced military technology continued to pour into Afghanistan at an increasing rate, enabling rival factions and further enflaming a multi-sided civil war. How could ‘self-determination’ be achieved in such an environment? While the Afghan conflict continued to drop off the Presidential agenda, many passionate parties advocated in Congress and in the public arena on its behalf to prevent a continuation of the*

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*increasingly bloody competition. Was a unifying political solution still possible in Afghanistan?*

## **Mission Accomplished**

### *Watershed Moment*

Ronald Wilson Reagan, dressed in a traditional black suit, white shirt, and red tie, stood behind a podium emblazoned with the seal of the President of the United States. Behind him was a backdrop of red and gold, draped behind four massive marble pillars. At the center of the pillars was a giant bust of V.I. Lenin and the gold Hammer and Sickle of the Soviet Union[241]. He gazed out into the auditorium at Moscow State University, packed with students and faculty eagerly awaiting his words. On this day, May 31, 1988, Reagan chose to speak about freedom[242]— an ideal he hoped the Soviet Union could work towards through a future of cooperation with the United States. The Geneva Accords had just been signed, Soviet troops were beginning withdrawal, and hopes for improved relations with the USSR were at hand. In answering a question from the audience regarding the fate of 310 Soviet soldiers missing in Afghanistan, the President responded earnestly that he would indeed aid in their return. The question seemed to reflect the sentiment that the conflict in Afghanistan was now history; all that was left to do was pick up the pieces.

In the United States, too, the Afghanistan issue seemed to be fading away— reflected in the 1988 Presidential debates. Then Vice President (and soon to be President) George H.W. Bush mentioned Afghanistan only once in his September 25 and October 13 debates, referring to it as a policy success of the administration[243]. Indeed, the United States had achieved its primary goal of pushing the Soviets out of Afghanistan without the use of its own military forces. Interest in Afghanistan shifted to resolving the humanitarian refugee crisis and rebuilding the country[244]. Further, the future relationship between the United States, Pakistan, and India was brought into question now that the conflict was winding down[245]. Big policy questions concerning major powers gradually eclipsed smaller ones as the U.S. shifted focus away from its ostensibly successful venture in Cold War rollback. Samuel Huntington, writing for *Foreign Affairs* in winter of 1987/1988, spoke of the “Lippmann Gap”— a reference to the gap between commitments and capabilities. Huntington applauded the use of insurgency support in Afghanistan to ameliorate this gap[246]. The implicit notion was that the Afghan framework could be used as a cost effective method for reducing threats in the future— a model that inspired similar interventions in Angola and Nicaragua. George McGovern, former Senator, future ambassador, and current president of the Middle East Policy Council, hailed the 1988 elections as a “watershed” moment in U.S. foreign policy, writing that the United States must now develop realistic and economically viable strategies to accommodate a new power balance and new threats. According to McGovern, the U.S. must steer clear of military entanglements in the third world, but make every effort to promote “democratic centrist forces” and “train, advise, and organize those developing countries that seek democracy and justice[247]”. The world was changing and the U.S. would have to change its approach to towards integration of all nations (including the USSR) into the international community, ensuring economic prosperity, and global stability.

### *Hollow Accords*

On May 8, 1989, House of Representatives member Bill McCollum, writing in the *Washington Post*, painted a much starker picture of Afghanistan. According to McCollum, the Soviets had not fully withdrawn and they continued to send massive amounts of military and economic aid to the PDPA regime[248]. The Soviets had rejected the idea of negative symmetry during the Geneva Accords[249]. The U.S. Congress had rejected the same idea as unrepresentative of the asymmetrical backing to the PDPA and backing to the mujahedeen resistance. Pakistan had rejected the proposal to dismantle its training camps and logistics pipelines[250]. The world had predicted a quick fall of the Soviet-backed regime after the signing of the accords, but it now appeared that little had changed.

Inside the Soviet Union, the Politburo refused to abandon its Afghan client. Soviet influence in Afghanistan had endured for over two decades and the same interests remained. Leaders could not let the future political path of Afghanistan threaten borders of the Soviet republics to the north. While Soviet ambassadors worked feverishly to provide a political solution, either directly from the Najibullah regime in Kabul[251] or in the form of negotiations and

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compromise with the resistance groups in Pakistan[252], Moscow remained content to continue backing of the PDPA regime. On January 1, 1989, the USSR Council of ministers authorized an additional 6 million rubles (internal prices) of military equipment and ammunition to Kabul[253]. On January 31, 1989, Moscow authorized a 3-month supply of goods and materials to the Afghan Armed Forces[254]. Shipments of advanced weapons, including the R-17 Elbrus tactical ballistic missile systems, increased as well[255]– while efforts to rebuild the Afghan Air Force were ongoing. Not only did the Soviets continue to increase material support, but it also continued to offer its air force and pilots to the PDPA government in defense of large urban centers[256]. By July 27, 1989, the United States would estimate that the Soviets were providing the equivalent of \$ 2-3 Billion per year in economic and military aid. The politburo, it seemed, hoped that its one-year supply would provide enough time and exert enough pressure to force a political settlement that was tenable to the Soviet position[257].

Meanwhile, Pakistan and the United States had taken an increasingly hard line against the PDPA. President Bush was not willing to accept any political settlement that involved the Soviet-backed regime- nor was Prime Minister Bhutto[258]. The United States had already increased its commitment from \$600 million to \$630 million by the time the Geneva Accords were signed[259]. Throughout the first months of 1989, a chorus of support for the rebel cause was heard in the U.S. Congress, led by Charles Wilson and Gordon Humphreys[260]. While focus had shifted towards humanitarian support[261] and economic rehabilitation[262] in the executive branch, critics argued that these issues could not be resolved without the formation of a new government- through either a military or political solution. Before a political solution could be reached, though, the PDPA regime had to go. In order to face the well-supplied Afghan Army and the defiant Najibullah, the United States and its partners would, again, have to grow the war. Richard Nixon, writing in support for a quantitative and qualitative increase of military support of the resistance, reflected perfectly the mood in Washington: “In Afghanistan, as Moscow’s tanks retreat, one round of the great game closes, but yet another begins. Our goal has been twofold, to force the Soviet Union to withdraw and to restore the Afghan people’s right to self-determination. Achieving the former does not automatically accomplish the latter[263].” The second phase of the war had arrived, and with it an added layer of complexity. Apart from the military goal of toppling the PDPA regime in Kabul, Afghan military commanders and political leaders now vied for power amongst a sweeping field of self-interested parties backed by influential state actors.

## Political Problem, Political Solution

Differences in opinions regarding U.S. Afghan policy had already begun to show not only in Congress, but also between the State Department and at the CIA. While addressing concerns in Congress regarding the need for a special envoy to Afghanistan, then President Reagan had appointed Ed McWilliams to the role. McWilliams was an expert in Afghan affairs, having contacts both within the Najibullah government and with many of the mujahedeen factions. He was assigned to work under Ambassador Robert Oakley in the Islamabad embassy, but given independent reporting authority. His perspective was heavily influenced by his Afghan-centric view- diverging from the party line in Islamabad that often sided with the Pakistani perspective. Tensions began to emerge between CIA Station Chief Milton Bearden who, working closely with Ambassador Oakley, had managed operations with the ISI in Afghanistan[264]. In October 1988, McWilliams wrote a policy memo that was read by the White House, State and Defense Departments, as well as the CIA. He spoke of “a growing frustration, bordering on hostility among Afghans across the ideological spectrum and from a broad range of backgrounds toward the government of Pakistan and toward the U.S.[265]” In McWilliams view, the backing of Hekmatyar by the ISI and Arab fundamentalists represented a deep policy flaw which would create problems in finding a unified political solution for a post-Soviet regime. Barnett Rubin, an Afghan expert who would testify before Congress in the coming months, laid out the political reality: “the people of Afghanistan today face the unhappy alternatives of a government they reject and a resistance they fear. [...] A disaster for the Afghan people, a permanent danger for Pakistan, a serious irritant in U.S. Soviet relations, the conflict in Afghanistan continues[266].” Rubin’s analysis would prove to be prophetic as Pakistan continues in 2015 to deal with spillover and blowback from Afghanistan’s instability[267].

The State Department and the CIA quickly closed ranks against McWilliams, describing his independent actions as counterproductive and his policy recommendations as potentially damaging to the cause. The CIA Station Chief branded him “that little shit[268]”. It did not appear, though, that Oakley and Bearden disagreed with everything McWilliams was saying. The reaction by State and the CIA seemed to have had more to do with rivalries, personality

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conflicts, and resentment derived from McWilliams operating outside of the chain of command than his actual reporting. Indeed, Station Chief Bearden's memoirs recounting the conflict present a far more nuanced representation of the agency's strategy. Through a particularly revealing account of a face to face meeting with Hekmatyar, the CIA Station Chief described Hekmatyar as an "enemy and a dangerous one"- the only leader of the seven political parties that he described as such. Indeed the CIA policy was at least nuanced if not cohesive by 1986; they provided secret support for Massoud[269] and other field commanders and made efforts to limit ISI's support for Hekmatyar in favor of a more even dispersion of funds[270]. In his memoir, Brigadier Mohammed Youssef recalled that the CIA in 1986 had begun lobbying for direct dispersion of support to the field commanders, bypassing the political parties in Peshawar[271].

Regardless of the reason, the isolation of McWilliams created the requirement for a capable replacement with additional authority to override inter and intra agency disagreements. Gordon Humphrey (R-NH), Robert Byrd (D-WV), and Robert Dole (R-KS) in the Senate along with counterparts Charlie Wilson (D-TX), Don Ritter (R-PA) and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) in the House lobbied urgently for an new ambassador-level, special envoy position with "interagency authority to manage U.S. Afghan policy inside the administration[272]." In January 1989, newly elected President George H.W. Bush selected experienced Ambassador Peter Tomsen who was currently stationed in China working to ameliorate U.S.-Sino relations in the wake of decreasing hostility with the Soviet Union[273]. Tomsen would be the man who would work directly with the resistance factions, the PDPA, and the Afghan people to ensure a stable political future in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, representatives from all these groups plus Pakistan, the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, India, and Iran complicated matters greatly as the political process converged in Peshawar.

### *From Peshawar*

With interest in the Afghan cause diminishing in Washington, the proponents of Afghanistan in the United States continued to push for a decisive end to the war so that a political solution could be found. Both the State Department in Washington and its counter-part in Pakistan began to encourage planning for a post-Soviet government based on a unification of the political parties based in Peshawar. The ISI, for its part, were opposed to the formation of an interim government before military victory was secured[274]. In their minds, negotiations for a political settlement between groups would cause more infighting that would ultimately lower the effectiveness of the collective resistance movement. In reality, a unified Afghan resistance would impede on the ISI's ability to install a Pakistan-friendly head of government after Najibullah fell. By 1986, General Akhtar began to believe that the US, now looking past Soviet occupation, was becoming worried at the prospects of an Islamic Fundamentalist government in Kabul. The Americans believed, according to Akhtar, that the PDPA regime could not survive without the Soviets any more than the South Vietnamese regime could survive without the United States. Seeing leaders like Sayyaf, Rabbani, and Hekmatyar, they feared for an "Iranian-type of religious dictatorship" that would be as hostile to the U.S. as Tehran was currently[275]. Thus, the US would attempt to exploit the differences between parties and break apart the mujahedeen alliance. There is little documentation from the American perspective to support the idea of a divisive strategy from the onset. Between 1986 and 1990, however, it appeared that the CIA attempted to slowly shift focus away from the radical elements in Pakistan, while still trying to work with and appease the ISI. In Washington, opposition to Hekmatyar and the uneven distribution of aid to the fundamentalist factions was indeed rising[276]. Inside the State Department, too, Peter Tomsen began to see warning signs of a potentially anti-American fundamentalist regime in Kabul. America's current reliance on Pakistan would ultimately give the latter control over Afghanistan's political future.

In terms of a way forward, Tomsen and other experts and commentators in Washington did foresee major problems. First, the Alliance of the Seven Parties represented only a small portion of the people of Afghanistan. It was by no means a popular resistance. It did, however, represent the only available mechanism for creating a political framework in the short-term. Second, the Alliance of Seven only represented a small portion of the actual resistance movement in Afghanistan. The requirement by the ISI to have every field commander connected to a political party in order to receive aid ostensibly connected the entire resistance to the political parties in Peshawar. These ties, however, were often only arrangements of convenience, put in place to secure military aid. Further, the eight parties of the Shia resistance, receiving support from Iran, were not represented by the Sunni-dominated Seven. Third, the Alliance of Seven was internally fractured along both ideological and ethnic lines[277]. The seven were split between

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the Fundamentalist parties- led by Hekmatyar, Rabbani, Khalis, and Sayyaf- and the Traditionalist Parties- led by Gailani, Muhammadi, and Mojaddidi. The fundamentalists were further split into moderate and extremist factions. The traditionalists, who had long-established ties to the political establishment of Afghanistan in the 70s, favored the return of exiled King Zahir Shah, currently in Rome. Lastly, both the general population in Afghanistan and the massive refugee population in Pakistan gave no clear indication of their collective preference for Afghanistan's future. Thus, the formation of an interim government faced three major issues: (1) unification of the Alliance of Seven, (2) integration of the Shia Eight, and (3) representation of the greater population of Afghanistan.

In February 1989, the alliance of seven announced the formation of the Afghan Interim Government (AIG), determined by a secret ballot vote of 400 delegates that chose the top 2 positions from the seven parties[278]. The vote results, transmitted by Ambassador Oakley on February 24, 1989, follow: Mojadeddi- 174 votes, Sayyaf- 173 votes, Nabi Mohammadi- 139 votes, Hekmatyar -126 votes, Khalis- 102 votes, Rabbani- 99 votes, and Gailani- 86 votes[279]. Based on the established guidelines, Sibgatullah Mojeadedi, a moderate, would serve as acting president and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a fundamentalist, would serve as prime minister[280]. The other five political parties were given various positions in government to split amongst their individual parties. Hekmatyar, for example, was given control over the Ministries of Defense, Science, and Agriculture.

Despite its flaws, the formation of the AIG represented a major victory in itself for the United States, Pakistan, and the fractured resistance. It transcended lines of ethnicity, mixing Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, into one political framework. The AIG hoped to quell accusations of being non-representative by ensuring its 'interim' status- it would only be a placeholder in Kabul after the PDPA was gone. Despite its paper success, however, infighting continued. Field commanders, including Massoud, objected to a government formed without popular consent. The field commanders had both the confidence of the urban populations and the ability to take and hold cities. Much of the population, according to reports, had become afraid of the increasingly fundamentalist nature of the AIG, which was under the influence of Arab Wahhabism in Peshawar[281]. Hekmatyar, too, was displeased with his marginal position in the AIG and sought increasing influence in Afghanistan's political future. In short, he was seeking to determine the direction of a future Islamic government, not content to play a small role in a larger effort. Accusations that Hekmatyar was responsible for the assassination of Professor Sayyid Majrooh, former dean of Kabul University and head of an independent Afghan news source in Peshawar[282], further isolated him from both the AIG and the international community. Seeking influence outside of AIG control, Hekmatyar began to pursue alternate plans with help from his ISI backers. Further, many ideological issues remained over the type of government that would rule Afghanistan as well as the inclusion of the Shia Eight. Despite these issues, much of the international community began to rally support around what was seen as Afghanistan's best hope. Machinery inside the World Bank began to churn at the prospects of rebuilding Afghanistan[283]. The United States received the AIG in New York to promote its cause at the United Nations[284]. The pieces of a political solution were falling into place- all that remained was the ousting of the PDPA in Kabul.

The formation of the AIG, however, had a very important psychological effect. It allowed the continued illusion that the Afghan competition be viewed within a bipolar framework: the communist government, supported by the USSR, on one side, with the Islamic resistance, supported by the U.S. and its allies, on the other side. As Barnett Rubin described it in his Congressional testimony, this was "true to the realities of neither Afghanistan nor the contemporary international system [...] The country has indeed undergone a certain ideological polarization, but even more fundamental, and becoming stronger since the Soviet troop withdrawal, is that it has undergone a process of tribal, ethnic, sectarian, political, geographical, economic, urban/rural, cultural, and generational fragmentation[285]". The Soviet Union, having cleverly sent an Ambassador to Pakistan earlier in February[286], understood this fragmentation and the divisions within the resistance all too well. Across the border, Najibullah, not content to abdicate, had his own unification scheme running in Kabul. Tomsen, observing the hopelessly fragmented nature of the AIG[287], began exploring a third option with support from the State Department in Washington- one that addressed concerns regarding Islamic Fundamentalism while securing military and political victory at the same time.

*From Kabul*

Hamish McDonald reported from Kabul in July of 1989 that Najibullah's government seemed to be "reinforcing its

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political grip by giving power away[288].” The PDPA controlled the major urban centers while the rural areas fell under the control of local governors. Rather than attempt to force these areas into his orbit, Najibullah began to make deals with local governors, granting complete local autonomy in exchange for a cessation of violence against the Afghan Army. This strategy, as McDonald described it, had begun to look like the feudalism, or ‘warlordism’, that had dominated Afghanistan prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The PDPA also began to focus on integrating the Loya Jurga (Great Tribal Council) into the political system in Kabul. This stood in contrast to the “imported Shura” in Pakistan[289]– a perceived difference intended to stoke the nationalistic flame inside regular Afghans. Further, Najibullah had begun to make economic ties at the international level. Apart from increased trade with the Soviet Union, Najibullah garnered the support of India, Iran, and China. India, who had maintained extensive contacts within the PDPA and the resistance, supported a broadly based coalition government that included the PDPA[290]. At Soviet prompting, India had also begun to explore potential economic ties with Afghanistan. Further, India worried that a Pakistani-backed government might redeploy its guerilla army to contest the Kashmir region and threaten their borders. Iran had opposed the formation of the AIG from the start, as it did not include the Shia mujahedeen. Further, Iran also felt that the PDPA should be accommodated in a future broad government[291]. China too, having ended its support for the resistance, believed the PDPA must have a role in the future Afghan government[292]. For his part, Najibullah had expressed willingness to resign to ease tensions and pave the way for PDPA integration into a coalition government formed with the AIG and field commanders[293]. When Najibullah was finally ousted three years later, Ahmad Shah Massoud would, somewhat ironically, seek the integration of some PDPA members into the structure of government.

Thus, with the Soviet withdrawal, Najibullah began to work feverishly to restore his credibility. Indeed, many had discounted him as a ‘Soviet-stooge’ who committed atrocities on his own people. Nevertheless, through his efforts to increase cooperation with local leaders and restore his reputation abroad, the PDPA’s position began to stabilize. Two other factors helped to bring this about. First, the AIG began to shift its military strategy away from guerilla war towards conventional war. Their plan was to take a major city (Jalalabad) and establish the AIG there. Badly coordinated and badly supplied efforts[294] from the AIG to take the city faced a “stalwart and ruthless” opposition-backed by modern conventional weapons like MiG-21s and MiG27s[295]. Second, the hardening of the AIG against the PDPA further served to “stiffen the backs” of the Afghan Army. In a highly publicized incident, a group of Wahhabi Arabs, fighting with the mujahedeen, executed a large group of Afghan troops outside of Jalalabad[296]. This served to exacerbate the Afghan population’s fears of a fundamentalist government after the PDPA. By the end of 1989, Najibullah was still in power and his PDPA troops continued to have success against the conventional AIG campaign. The AIG and the PDPA were not the only players in town, however. Several resistance field commanders, including Shah Massoud (a Tajik), Abdul Haq (a Pashtun), and Abdul Rashid Dostum (an Uzbek), worked autonomously to make life miserable for the PDPA[297]. These three commanders of different ethnicities and backgrounds would eventually align in a military offensive that concluded with the ousting of Najibullah in April 1992. Shortly after arriving to Islamabad, which would serve as his transit point over the next three years, Peter Tomsen began reaching out to these and other field commanders across Afghanistan. Tomsen would eventually meet face to face with nearly every major player in the conflict, both inside Afghanistan and abroad in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Back in the United States, even as public interest waned, debate over support to the AIG raged. What role would America play in the political future of Afghanistan?

## Stalemate in Kabul, Stalemate in Congress

Until 1974, Congress had essentially left covert action decisions and funding to the Office of the President. A Supreme Court case, ‘United States v. Nixon’, 418 U.S. 683, reopened the debate over division of powers between the legislative and executive concerning actions of the Central Intelligence Agency. The question at hand was the “balance...between the [presidential confidentiality interest and congressional demand for information][298].” The Hughes-Ryan Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, enacted in 1974, gave Congress influence over funds appropriation for CIA covert action[299]. Thus, when it came to covert support for the resistance movement in Afghanistan, Congress played an important role. While the executive branch set policy objectives, appropriations determined (to a degree), the extent to which these objectives could be carried out. Since the early 1980s, Congress had strongly supported aid to the mujahedeen[300]. This support was broad based and crossed party lines, hailed throughout the decade as a “rare example of bipartisan support for the president’s activist foreign policy[301].” In

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February 1988, Congress reaffirmed its commitment that was formalized in PL 100-204. Senate Resolution 386, which was passed on February 29, 1988 with a vote of 77-0, reiterated support for Afghan self-determination, a political solution that did not involve the PDPA, and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan[302]. The resolution was a unanimous call from the Senate to continue support to the mujahedeen past the Soviet withdrawal and through the formation of a transitional government[303]. This policy would be known as “positive symmetry”- pressure on the Soviets to decrease aid to the PDPA coupled with an increase in aid to the resistance. Following the Geneva Accords later in 1988, divides began to emerge on the Afghan policy both between Congress and the Executive as well as within Congress. Now that the Soviet withdrawal was underway and the PDPA collapse was imminent, issues began to shift towards the internal make-up of a post-Soviet regime, the status of mujahedeen factions, and relations between the political parties in Pakistan and the field commanders operating in Afghanistan[304]. Debate centered on a number of key issues that endured from 1988 through 1993.

## *Issues*

- The meaning of “self-determination” and “non-alignment”- In 1988, there was near unanimous sentiment that these terms referred only to the Soviet Union (as well as India and China). Other external influences, including the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia did not factor into successful achievement of these core objectives. Some in Congress, including Anthony Beilenson (D-CA), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, however, began to see the inherent contradiction in these objectives and recommended a cut in all aid to the resistance[305]. S. money, they argued, was empowering civil war between the factions and disincentivizing unity.
- Status of the mujahedeen- A CRS Report, published in October 1989, indicated that the battle between the PDPA and the resistance had turned into a stalemate- with resistance elements controlling much of the countryside and the PDPA holding major cities. It questioned the credibility of the AIG government, which lacked key support from field commanders, educated Afghans, and refugees. Further, the massive influx of support from the Soviet Union and the transition of the resistance to a conventional strategy allowed the PDPA to successfully concentrate military force in major cities[306]. Some of the most ardent supporters of the resistance, including Gordon Humphrey (R-NH), refuted this report as “misunderstandings of fact”[307]. Humphreys had looked at satellite imagery and determined that bad weather had inhibited resistance forces from taking major cities. As the battle between the AIG and the PDPA dragged on through 1992, this argument seemed to evaporate.
- Continuation of overt aid to Pakistan- the next issue centered on the continuation of aid to Pakistan. Questions on how taxpayer dollars were being spent and allocated by the ISI and the Army further highlighted this issue. Some influential individuals, including former NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski and former President Richard Nixon, warned against turning away from Pakistan now that the conflict was winding down[308]. Others had serious concerns over the Kashmir conflict[309] and U.S. relations with India. Further, concerns regarding Pakistan’s nuclear program began to reemerge, which ultimately caused President Bush to cut off aid under the Pressler Amendment in October 1990. Recommendations ran the gamut- (a) remove military aid but shift towards economic aid[310], (b) remove all aid, (c) increase both military and economic aid along with humanitarian support for the refugee crisis.
- Negative Symmetry- The idea of negative symmetry was linked to the idea that both the United States and Soviet Union would ramp down support for their respective sides and push for a negotiated political settlement. The United States originally offered negative symmetry during the Geneva Accords- an offer rejected by the Soviets. As the stalemate continued, Soviet receptiveness to this policy increased due to economic hardships at home and the implementation of perestroika reforms. Many in Congress argued that negative symmetry did not reflect that asymmetric nature of the Soviet support to the PDPA. They wanted the Soviets to withdraw aid and destroy stockpiles left behind- a concept known as ‘negative symmetry plus’[311]. Vocal opposition against reducing aid to the resistance, however, continued through the fall of the PDPA in 1992.
- Inclusion of the PDPA in a broad-based coalition government- the inclusion of PDPA members in the post-Soviet government seemed to be the one issue that Congress remained unified on throughout the campaign. After testimony from Special Envoy Peter Tomsen, however, some began to see the logic behind softening on this issue- blunting the defeat of the Soviets (thus promoting negative symmetry) and easing

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the transition towards representative government. Softening occurred, as it often does, through wordplay. Members of the PDPA who were candidates for integration in the new government were referred to as “good Muslims[312]”. When Massoud’s forces eventually took Kabul in 1992, he had made substantial alliances with PDPA members-at the prompting of Tomsen-which allowed for a more fluid transition of power.

- Increasing support base for the Afghan Interim Government- Tomsen’s testimony in July 1989, intelligence assessments, and a report by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in October 1989[313], confirmed fears that the AIG would not be a viable government alternative. It failed to integrate many political parties (including the Shia 8), as well as the field commanders. Further, it lacked popular support in Afghanistan and in the refugee camps in Pakistan. Congress recognized the need for broader AIG support in a hearing on March 7, 1990 concerning U.S. policy toward Afghanistan[314]. It also stressed the importance of the AIG’s transitional status and encouraged a short transition period marked by either elections or a Loya Jirga.
- Support of radical fundamentalist parties/commanders over more moderate, U.S. friendly commanders- this debate centered on two commanders- Massoud and Hekmatyar- though this was representative of the larger moderate vs. radical issue. Don Ritter (R-PA) accused the ISI of manipulating supply allocation. Massoud, General Abdul Rahim Wardak (a revered commander in Ahmed Gailani’s moderate National Islamic Front of Afghanistan), and other commanders who were doing the “hard fighting” were not getting the supplies they needed[315]. Conversely, the ISI was favoring radical fundamentalist, anti-Western commanders such as Gulbiddin Hekmatyar at the expense of other pro-Western commanders[316].
- Strangulation (Guerilla) vs. Conventional Strategy and Requirements- After the formation of the AIG, the ISI began to direct military strategy towards a conventional campaign. The failed campaign at Jalalabad made many realize that this was a bad idea. Zalmay Khalilzad, who would eventually become U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan under George W. Bush, testified in July 1989 that a “strangulation strategy- increasing pressure on cities by blocking roads, keeping airports under attack, conducting special operations against government facilities inside cities and mounting discriminating attacks from outside- can serve the mujahedin’s purposes well[317].” General Wardak testified in August 1989 that the resistance lacked the logistics system, advanced weapon systems, transportation, and communications systems to successfully fight the PDPA in a conventional war[318].

## *Options and Policy*

During the period of 1989 to 1992, Congress successfully shed light on many nuanced issues that had been overlooked in the period prior. Despite the wide range of recommendations from a host of experts, Congress had little power to do anything outside of the appropriations mechanism. The Bush Administration maintained its desire for self-determination and non-alignment as well as a desire to see Najibullah ousted, but neglected to make any real decisions on the details regarding a unified U.S. approach to Afghanistan. The larger strategic importance of both Afghanistan and Pakistan had begun to dwindle, leaving the mujahedeen far off the President’s priorities list. Attitudes toward Pakistan began to shift too, as special concessions regarding its nuclear program and governance style were no longer seen as vital national security interests. Throughout the 1990s, another cooling period would occur due to the nuclear issue, the Kashmir issue, and Pakistan’s opaque support for terrorist organizations. The Bush administration did, however, engage on both the humanitarian refugee issue, reconstruction support and counter-narcotics cooperation[319]. The first two were seen as moral responsibilities and allowed Washington to feel good about the end of the conflict. They had, for better or worse, used Afghanistan as its front line for the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The third issue was part of Bush’s new initiative to counter narcotics both in the United States and abroad[320]. For the most part, agencies were left to their own devices to coordinate and implement a comprehensive Afghan policy, which was still seen as covert action despite its increasingly public nature. Some inter-agency decisions were indeed made in Washington, based on policy recommendations from semi-autonomous envoy Peter Tomsen, and approved by the CIA. Initially, the CIA cooperated with Tomsen’s approach. However, the CIA Station Chief (also with the support of the CIA in Washington) also hedged with a separate agenda in close coordination with the ISI’s policy. Two decisions by the executive branch further affected U.S. influence over a political settlement in Afghanistan: (1) On October 1, 1990, George H.W. Bush cut all overt aid to Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment and (2) On September 13, 1991, Secretary of State Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Boris



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Pankin pledged to a mutual cut-off of arms to both sides of the conflict to begin on January 1, 1992. In November 1991, the Congressional Research Service put together an accurate assessment of remaining U.S. Policy Options:

To bring about a peaceful settlement and protect U.S. interests in Afghanistan, options for the Bush Administration and Congress include (1) efforts to promote a multilateral aid cutoff to all combatants, preferably in conjunction with political settlement, (2) an activist approach in which the United States plays a direct role in fostering an intra-Afghan dialogue, and (3) an effort to persuade U.S. allies to temporarily increase military aid to the resistance, designed to force additional concessions from Najibullah and pave the way for peace talks[321].

Noting that Option 1 was already underway at the higher levels of government, the State Department, led by Peter Tomsen, chose to pursue option 2. The CIA, led by Station Chief Bearden in cooperation with ISI Chief Asad Durrani[322], pursued option 3. Two primary problems can be readily observed. First, policy option one and three are contradictory and worked against U.S. interests when taken together. Stopping the flow of financial support would further reduce what little influence the CIA had over decision-making and appropriations of aid to the resistance. The cut-off of all economic and military aid at the overt level assured this, as the U.S. no longer had any leverage over their Pakistani counterparts. Further, policy options two and three directly contradicted each other, not abstractly but rather concretely. While Tomsen tried to foster a unified and representative approach to post-Soviet governance, ISI and CIA-backed factions would attempt to use force to break apart any agreement put in place. The United States had, against all reason, managed to find a way to fight a war against itself.

## The Third Option

### *Shortcut*

On March 6, 1990, Lieutenant General Shahnawaz Tanai, a particularly ruthless member of the Khalq faction of the PDPA, launched a coup attempt against Najibullah (a Parcham member)[323]. Though the coup eventually failed, it did serve to bring Pakistan's ulterior motives to the foreground. The ISI, through Hekmatyar, had struck a deal with General Tanai to launch a simultaneous assault on Kabul during the coup attempt. This final attack, in theory, would allow the ISI to install Hekmatyar in Kabul and end the long battle against the Soviet-backed regime. It is unclear whether the CIA actively supported the coup attempt. It is known that the CIA paid Massoud \$500,000 to hit the Salang Highway and Soviet supply lines to the north just 5 weeks earlier[324]. Massoud worried that attacks on the highway would bring retribution for the local villages and threaten a vital route for commerce. Though a few minor attacks took place, Massoud never allocated his main forces to closing the highway. Later, Massoud would claim that weather and other problems had stalled the attack[325]. The CIA, however, viewed this as further confirmation that Massoud could not be trusted. In regards to CIA support to the Hekmatyar-Tanai assault, it is clear that once the attack was initiated, both the United States and Pakistan tried to press the other guerilla factions into action[326]. Six out of the seven in the alliance denied the urgent request. The 'quick fix' eventually failed, causing deeper mistrust and suspicion amongst the resistance factions.

After the failed plot, Tanai and 23 other generals immediately defected to Hekmatyar's camp. Tanai reappeared at a base of Hekmatyar's forces inside Afghanistan and announced his cooperation with the resistance he had so bitterly fought against for over a decade. Steve Coll reported in *The Washington Post*: "the mujahaddin's refusal to launch an offensive in support of Tanai and Hekmatyar is the clearest sign yet of incompatibility between Afghan guerilla and Pakistani goals in the latest phase of Afghanistan's 12-year-old civil war"- quoting an anonymous U.S. official. The Hekmatyar-Tanai alliance caused further resentment towards Hezb-e Islami amongst Afghans due to its willingness to negotiate with hard line PDPA communist generals. The AIG was falling apart. "In a practical sense, its all over," a senior Pakistani official declared, referring to increasing bitterness and disintegration within the alliance[327]. But the coup attempt had an unexpected benefit for the United States- the ISI would soften on Peter Tomsen's pet project- The National Commanders' Shura (NCS)- an alliance of prominent field commanders and political parties now planning a military campaign to defeat the PDPA across the country.

### *Commanders' Shura*

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Abdul Haq was a legendary guerilla commander. One night in 1986, he led three other men through a Soviet minefield in the middle of the night, blowing up an underground Soviet weapons dump with three 103-millimeter rockets[328]. He was one of the few contacts the CIA maintained from the beginning of the war, a favorite of former Islamabad Station Chief Howard Hart[329]-famously arriving on motorcycle wearing a leather jacket and sunglasses at their first meet. Visiting the White House in 1984, he left a strong impression on National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, President Reagan, and later Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher[330]. Writing after Haq's capture and execution by the Taliban in October 2001, *Telegraph* reporter Christina Lamb recalled that the battle-hardened commander loved pink ice cream.[331] "So you want to go with me to Kabul," she remembered him saying with a giggle. "But you're a girl. It's hard going to Kabul. You have to travel across many mountains, walking through minefields while planes try and bomb you. How can I risk my commanders taking you? Either you will be killed or they may be killed protecting you[332]." The 21-year-old Lamb and the mujahedeen leader became unlikely friends over the next two years in Pakistan, watching Rocky films together as Haq recounted stories of the long war against the Soviets[333]. The charismatic leader, well known for his morbid sense of humor (he often joked about watching his boot fly into the air when his foot was blown off), was a brilliant leader and tactician- a moderate nationalist and a rare find in a movement packed with blood-thirsty radicals. More important than any tactical successes, however, was Haq's political mission unite the resistance and end the violence in Afghanistan. Years later, in 1999, the Pashtun Haq would work with the Tajik Shah Massoud to unite all ethnicities against the Taliban regime.

With the AIG failing and resentment growing against the ISI-backed Hekmatyar, Abdul Haq began to develop a third option- a *National Commanders' Shura (NCS)*. The concept would unite field commanders from every region of Afghanistan, across ethnic and ideological lines, to create an Afghan-built, Afghan-led unified force against the PDPA. In order to kick start the development of the new organization that would contest the AIG for power, Haq recruited a number of influential commanders: Amin Wardak (Pashtun, Wardak), Mullah Malang (Pashtun, Badghis), Taj Mohammad, known as Qari Baba (Pashtun, Ghazni), and Mullah Sayed Hasan Jaglan (Hazara, Ghazni)[334]. Special Envoy Peter Tomsen from the State Department became an early ally of the movement and helped to foster its growth. Tomsen saw the Commanders' Shura as a way to isolate the Islamist factions and dampen ISI influence over the future Kabul regime. He successfully sold this idea to Washington, getting interagency approval, including the support of the CIA in late 1989, according to Tomsen's account. Working closely with the core of the Commanders' Shura, Tomsen recommended that they stay out of politics; bringing together only those resistance forces inside Afghanistan that would do the fighting. After the failed coup attempt by Tanai, the ISI first tolerated and later supported the movement as it became more popular. The first meeting of the NCS took place in May 1990 with 40 commanders. By the second meeting in late June, the movement had grown to over 300[335]. Abdul Haq had figured out the ideological integration problem as well- the 2<sup>nd</sup> NCS meeting included roughly 15% Shia representatives, compared to the all-Sunni AIG. The missing piece to the Commanders' Shura, Ahmed Shah Massoud, was finally added at the third Shura in early October. Tomsen had written letters to Massoud encouraging his participation and Abdul Haq had sent several envoys to his camp in order to convince him[336].

Meanwhile, the ISI and the Pakistani Army were taken by surprise at the rapidly expanding popularity of the NCS. Indeed the ISI was important to its development, providing essential supplies, money, and weapons to fulfill its planning requirements. The policy of support was the decision of Shumsur Rehman Kallue, a retired army general, and director of the ISI. His NCS policy and close association to recently ousted Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto led to his firing in August of 1990[337]. His replacement, a former aid of General Zia, Major General Mahmoud Durrani, was tasked with promoting the Hekmatyar-Tanai alliance[338]. Many of the second tier commanders inside the intelligence agency had not supported Kallue's stance on the NCS. The appointment of Durrani pulled the ISI back closer to their original strategy of backing the fundamentalist leader. Throughout the rise of the Commanders' Shura, the ISI would continue to develop plans to install Hekmatyar as the ruler of Afghanistan. Still, participation by some of the ISI's favorites in the NCS, including Jalalludin Haqqani, kept the line of support from being cutoff until after they took Khost in April 1991[339].

## *Two Strategies*

October 1990 would prove to be a pivotal month for both the resistance movement and the United States' role in it. On October 1, President Bush declined to certify that Pakistan was not pursuing a nuclear weapon- a requirement

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under the Pressler Amendment for continued economic support. The result was a freeze on all aid to Pakistan[340]. On October 3, Tomsen met with CIA Station Chief Bearden in his home in Islamabad. As the two sat to discuss new developments within the resistance movement, Bearden broke news to Tomsen that the CIA had decided to implement a different strategy with its Pakistani partners. At the insistence of Durrani, the CIA had endorsed a plan for the Hekmatyar-Tanai alliance to make an assault on Kabul. This plan went against two fundamental points of the policy approved by the interagency policy review board in 1989: 1) to support Massoud and the Commanders' Shura and 2) to cut funding and support to radical fundamentalists, including Hekmatyar. Tomsen recalled that his meeting with Bearden represented the low point of his three-year appointment as envoy, though he was unsure whether the decision had been made at the local level or with support from Langley[341]. His carefully devised plan to break US policy away from the Islamists and ISI influence was in jeopardy. When he met with Shah Massoud the next day in Chitral, Tomsen told Massoud that the United States was strongly opposed to the Hekmatyar-Tanai offensive. Tomsen falsely reassured Massoud that he spoke for all U.S. agencies. Massoud, worried about the massive collateral damage that Hekmatyar would inflict on Kabul, told Tomsen that he was prepared to forcefully stop the offensive if it came down to it. As rumors of an ISI-CIA backed Hekmatyar assault spread through the commanders' Shura and back to Peshawar, a rare example of Afghan unity was seen as both field commanders and political leaders rejected the plan[342]. This outcry would be enough for the ISI to reconsider its plans.

Between October 9 and 14, the third Commanders' Shura convened, with the participation and strategic mind of Massoud, at Shah Selim. The deadlock that had existed between the various mujahedeen factions was broken, and plans were established that would lay the groundwork for success against the PDPA[343]. The plan called for the division of Afghanistan into 9 administrative zones. The field commanders in each zone would coordinate, plan, and execute strikes on key PDPA targets with the goal of controlling their areas. The attacks would occur simultaneously in order to spread PDPA air support thin and detract from the government's ability to resupply forces[344]. Once the resistance had gained military momentum, leaders of the Shura would meet and decide how to depose Najibullah in Kabul. Realizing the potential of a unified resistance of field commanders, the ISI planned to thwart its influence by rolling it into their own strategy. General Durrani invited the leaders of the NCS to Pakistan in order to gain support for a Rabbani-Hekmatyar 'High Command' that would jointly take Kabul[345]. It was a false truce from the beginning, but represented a way for the NCS to continue benefitting from ISI funding and material support. Despite the agreement, Hekmatyar was left out of the NCS plan to defeat the PDPA and take back Kabul. The forces of Hekmatyar, along with Haqqani (a member of the NCS), did play a vital role in the fall of Khost. That operation, however, was primarily ISI-initiated and directed, standing in contrast to the strategic plans of the NCS- it did, however give the collective resistance its first major victory against the Najibullah regime. Massoud and his fellow commanders hunkered down for the cold winter. The plan from Shah Selim did not initiate until June 20, 1991. Unsurprisingly, the campaign, which lasted a little more than a month, was both well planned and decisive. The resistance movement had major victories at 8 government strongholds, adding to the success in Khost earlier in the year. Momentum of the NCS commanders continued over the next months and by late March 1992, resistance factions were poised to strike outside of Kabul.

In Washington, the political struggle to rectify the increasingly public divide between CIA and State policy continued[346]. Tomsen again cabled from London in June 1991 to relay the importance of a unified Afghan policy that moved away from the radicals[347]. Along with Undersecretary for Political Affairs Robert Kimmet, Tomsen met with the deputy director of the CIA Richard Kerr to convince him that a unified policy would increase US leverage in the Afghanistan outcome[348]. The CIA, however, remained persistent in their support for the ISI's plans to install Hekmatyar[349]. Working closely with the ISI commanders in Islamabad and Peshawar, the CIA viewed the Pakistani agency as a vital link to the resistance and necessary for the success of any post-Soviet government. This thinking seemed to drive both the decisions and alignment of the CIA. Fortunately for Tomsen and the NCS, unified opposition to Hekmatyar compelled the mujahedeen into action. Unfortunately, a well-armed and equipped Hekmatyar would continue to lurk in the background, as the NCS rushed to save Kabul from the destruction they were sure Hekmatyar would bring. Stephen Ambrose unwittingly augured what was to come in *Foreign Affairs* Winter 1991 Issue: "The great successes in U.S. foreign policy tend to come in those areas in which there is a consensus and thus a continuity in policy. [...] Failures tend to come in those areas in which there is not a consensus and thus confusion and inconsistency in policy[350]." Despite the optimism of the day, failure would indeed come.

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## New World Order

From a global perspective, the world in 1991 was changing. By the end of 1990, signs had appeared that the Soviet Union was calling off the Cold War[351]. Beginning with a failed coup against President Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991[352], the Soviet Union looked to be in a slow motion train wreck. On December 31, 1991, the red hammer and sickle flag of the Soviet Union was lowered from above the Kremlin, symbolizing the end of an era that had lasted some 69 years[353]. It appeared that the United States had found its position of primacy in the “New World Order” President Bush had referenced on January 29, 1991[354]. Indeed, leadership in the Persian Gulf conflict against Sadaam Hussein had demonstrated America’s role as keeper of an “uneasy peace” in the world[355]. Cold warrior Zbigniew Brzezinski discussed the importance of new strategic objectives towards Russia and the former Soviet Republics that would allow an important socioeconomic transformation to occur towards democracy and capitalism[356].

In Southern Asia, discussions shifted away from Afghanistan and towards the balance of power between India and Pakistan. By early 1992, Pakistan had publically agreed to cease supplying weapons to the Afghan resistance and backed a U.N. peace plan for the country[357]. Some of the elements of Afghanistan’s resistance had spilled over into the disputed Kashmir region, requiring a rethinking of policy in regards to the complicated American, Indian, Pakistani relationship[358]. Robert Gates, in his memoirs, summed up the world attitude towards Afghanistan after the Cold War: “It was a great victory. Afghanistan was finally free of the foreign invader. Now Afghans could resume fighting among themselves- and hardly anyone cared[359].” By the middle of 1991, the Bush administration had begun to formalize its “hands-off” policy by ending all funding to the Afghan rebels[360]. Domestic concerns with the economy and the increasing budget deficit forced prioritization of national security objectives- and Afghanistan no longer made the cut. Congressional budgeting ended appropriations to the resistance, allocating no money to the rebels for FY1992. The CIA’s legal mandate from Congress to conduct covert action in Afghanistan officially ended January 1, 1992[361]. Despite a memo written in September 1991 by Tomsen relaying the importance of Afghanistan to U.S. interests[362], the American government had essentially abdicated responsibility to the United Nations[363] and its representative Benon Sevan. Tomsen would continue to make pleas for the importance of Afghanistan and its integration into the broader regional policy through 1993[364]- but his audience had already left the room. Disagreements between CIA and State were never settled and ceased to truly matter after the stoppage of all covert aid. The CIA no longer had any means to influence the ISI. U.S.-supplied money and weapons had expanded the means and reach of the ISI substantially over the past decade. In effect, the damage had already been done. End of U.S. support to the ISI would have been good news to Tomsen, a minor victory by default. Tomsen’s role, however, diminished substantially as diplomatic efforts were handed over to the United Nations.

## 6. Hope is Fleeting

### Ouster

“If fundamentalism comes to Afghanistan, war will continue for many more years.” Najibullah proclaimed speaking rapidly through his overwhelmed translator. “Afghanistan will be turned into a center for terrorism[365].” These words, spoken on March 10, 1992, a month before the ouster of Najibullah, seemed to be the final pleas of a desperate man. In his last days as leader of Afghanistan, however, Najibullah worried about the fracturing of a country he appeared to care for deeply. Since 1990, Najibullah had sought political settlement, more than willing to abdicate his power to prevent further bloodshed[366]. No country would deal with him: not the United States, not Pakistan, and not the Soviet Union-which had now ceased to exist. He was a man adrift, surrounded by an ocean of chaos, facing an uncertain fate as the resistance closed in on Kabul. In recent weeks, Najibullah had been in talks with the UN envoy Benon Sevan. By the end of March, Najibullah had agreed to transfer all authority to the transitional government, calling for peace and national elections[367]. The surging resistance rejected his offer and pledged to keep fighting- capturing positions just 35 miles from the city. On April 17, 1992, a palace coup pre-empted any formal transition of power and the former Afghan President was quietly shuffled to the UN compound in the city[368]. His war was over, his fate delayed under the protection of the United Nations. When the Taliban eventually swept through the city in 1996, Najibullah would be tortured, castrated, dragged through the streets, and hung from a traffic light[369].

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## Unity

As UN Envoy Benon Sevan shuffled between the PDPA government and the various factions of the mujahedeen resistance, he realized he was running out of time. Abdul Rahim Hatif, the PDPA's temporary replacement for Najibullah, had relayed his desire for a peaceful transition[370]. The collective resistance was tightening the noose on Kabul. To the south, Gulbiddin Hekmatyar was poised with artillery and a host of ISI advisors who had flown in by helicopter from Pakistan. True to his nature, Hekmatyar had issued an ultimatum for the regime to abdicate power to him or face destruction[371]. To the north, Ahmad Shah Massoud had positioned his forces, ready to seize the city. He had allied with the capricious General Rashid Dostum, whose Uzbeki militia had fought for both the PDPA and the resistance in the past years[372]. Through Sevan, Massoud had begun negotiations with the acting-President, calling on political parties in Peshawar to form an interim council before things got out of hand[373]. Hekmatyar's ultimatum had put a clock on the stalemate. The PDPA wouldn't abdicate until a coalition government took its place- and Hekmatyar would attack if the PDPA wouldn't abdicate. Massoud had also reached out to Hekmatyar, who was in no mood to compromise. As the clock expired, Massoud launched an unexpected attack on the city, along with the Uzbek forces, seizing control of government buildings and strategic positions throughout Kabul[374]. The stunned Hekmatyar rushed to counter the assault but ended up fighting not PDPA forces, but the forces of Massoud and Dostum. By the morning of April 29, Hekmatyar's last remaining stronghold had fallen to Massoud. Meanwhile in Peshawar, a new transitional administration had emerged, consisting of 30 field commanders, 10 clergy, and 10 party representatives[375]. Two days later, Sibghatiullah Mojadidi and the rest of the interim governing council arrived in Kabul and officially declared a new government in Afghanistan[376].

## Destruction

Victory was not as the resistance had envisioned. The rule of law had broken down amid the power transition, and reports indicated that Dostum's forces were raping and looting across Kabul[377]. On May 5<sup>th</sup>, Hekmatyar began indiscriminately shelling the city[378]. In an effort to head off the confrontation between Massoud and Hekmatyar, the interim government offered a power sharing agreement that would see Hekmatyar as prime minister and Massoud as defense minister[379]. Hekmatyar rejected the offer. Abdul Haq attempted to mediate between the two commanders: "We should talk, we should negotiate, because the people of Kabul are in a desperate situation. We are sick and tired of bloodshed, somehow we have to stop it.[380]" Some 700 civilians had already been killed inside the city, and the continued violence augured an exponential growth of the death toll-which would rise to 20,000 over the next three years. Another phase of the war had begun; with Afghans killing Afghans, and nobody seemed to care.

Between 1992 and 1995, the battle for Kabul continued between the Afghan interim Government, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, and the ISI-backed Hezb-I Islami, led by Hekmatyar. Indiscriminate shelling of densely populated civilian areas in Kabul continued, perpetrated on both sides by Hekmatyar and the mercenary Dostum. Relying so heavily on Dostum to maintain hold of Kabul proved to be a myopic decision. In January 1994, Dostum switched sides again, working with Hekmatyar against Massoud and the Afghan interim government. The high level of poverty, civilian atrocities, breakdown in the rule of law, and overall hopelessness of the Afghan situation created a vacuum for justice throughout Afghanistan. This vacuum, combined with growing favorability of fundamentalist Islam in Afghanistan, created the conditions for the rise of the Taliban from Kandahar. Comprised mainly of devout fundamentalists fresh from madrassas in Pakistan and led by former mujahedeen commander Mullah Mohammed Omar Mujahid, the Taliban sought to create a Wahhabi-inspired Islamic state based on sharia principles. Any system of governance, it seemed, was favorable to the anarchic and predatory system that had overcome Afghanistan.

Pakistan's interest in Hekmatyar began to wane during the period between 1992 and 1995, as the ISI began to shift focus away from Kabul and back towards the Kashmir region. Hekmatyar's camps provided training and mobilization capacity to launch attacks into neighboring India. Though the origins of the Taliban are shrouded in mystery, it is clear that the ISI made a "tactical shift" in favor of Mullah Omar, fueling the growth of the movement through an injection of money, supplies, and weapons[381]. By 1996, the Taliban pushed Massoud and the interim government out of Kabul, forcing a retreat north. Taliban victory ensured the first Pakistan-friendly government in

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Kabul, and forwarded broader policy objectives. It helped resolve historical land disputes over the Durrani line and provided both strategic depth and a powerful ally against India. More importantly to U.S. interests, however, was the relationship forged between Mullah Omar and Osama Bin Laden. After the bombing of the Khobar Towers in June 1996, which killed 19 American airmen, Western intelligence had begun to look more closely at Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda[382]. This relationship, between the one-eyed Afghan mullah and the wealthy Saud, would be responsible for the returning gaze of the world's lone superpower.

In hindsight, the abandonment of the Afghan Interim Government by the United States undoubtedly represents a mistake and a missed opportunity. Solutions, however, are not readily identifiable. First, the civil war needed to be resolved. Without peace, there was little chance to implement an effective government system. As the interim government represented the only viable system that aligned with the policy of self-determination, worldwide recognition and direct international support would have been warranted. The United Nations position attempted to pursue a middle course, which required the integration of factions with insurmountable differences- making perfect the enemy of good. Pakistan's policy of support to Hekmatyar represented a significant obstacle, but one that might have been resolved through diplomatic pressures and cooperative agreements- as would be made with Pakistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The reliance of Hekmatyar on ISI support represented a powerful mechanism for Pakistan to control the end game in Afghanistan, but the United States was not willing to waste any additional resources on a favorable outcome. With hindsight, we can easily say that this investment would have yielded great result in the coming fight against global terrorist organizations. We must note, however, that this threat, and Afghanistan's role in it, was not clear in 1992.

Further, the breakdown in rule of law and overall lack of governing ability defined the period between 1992 and 1995. This problem is not unique to the history of Afghanistan, nor is it unique to other American interventions. Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, rampant crime and looting forced the U.S. military to take on a policing role in place of government authority. Still today, a strong central government has not been implemented in Afghanistan; with the President often referred to as 'the Mayor of Kabul' while corruption erodes trust in government and law enforcement. The Soviet conflict and its aftermath had indeed exacerbated both ideological and ethnic divides within the country. Thus, a strong central, representative government was a tall order for the deeply fragmented state. Calls for a 'broad-based coalition government' continued through this period, but the feasibility of such a system must be questioned. The most readily identifiable solution existed in the NCS' proposed partition of nine districts across Afghanistan. Under this system, relative autonomy would be given to regional political leaders, while a representative Shura in Kabul made decisions that affected the entire country. The strong Islamic influences of the period indeed put restrictions on the nature of government and caused further disagreement over the political future of Afghanistan. However, the largely secular model followed by Massoud and the Supervisory Council of the North, provided a blueprint that integrated ideological preferences into a relatively prosperous system.

The critical moment during this period for Afghanistan seemed to come and go as the collective resistance forces staged outside Kabul. The competing factions and growing competition for Kabul forced a rushed solution that was unable to appease all sides. Though political and economic stability in Afghanistan faced long odds from the outset, the civil war made any favorable outcome impossible. It is difficult to say what level of U.S. involvement during this critical phase would have been necessary to produce a more favorable outcome. Many powerful forces had already been set in motion during the preceding decade that seemed to drive events in the aftermath of PDPA defeat. Still, there is something to be said about abandoning commitments too soon, especially in regards to sponsored regime change. New governments are inherently fragile and require continued and cooperative commitment from international backers in order to succeed. This is a hard lesson that must be learned and applied to security issues facing America today in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

V – Accounting

## *Weighing Conclusions*

The history of U.S. Foreign Policy in Afghanistan is both long and complicated. Many layers of policy, motivations, decisions, and actions mix to create a comprehensive narrative, defining the plot and outcomes. In order to derive

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lessons learned and identify fallacies in actions taken throughout the period, the categories used below will take on a hierarchic format, with 'policy-level' at the top, followed by strategic, operational, and tactical level assessments. This organization is not meant to align precisely with strict definitions of these terms, but serves only to place observations in a practical format.

**Policy Level**– 'Policy' level decision-making coincides with both political objectives and considerations in the executive and legislative branches.

*(1) Policy Objectives*- The United States identified two objectives that endured from the start of the conflict to its end. The first objective, viewed within the Cold War bipolar conflict, was to meet and rollback expanding Soviet influence. As discussed, U.S. perception of Soviet interest in Afghanistan revolved around expansion outward toward the Persian Gulf in order to access and control vast quantities of oil, trade routes, and sea lanes. Though CIA estimates did indeed point to an impending oil crisis in the Soviet Union, such an overreaching objective by the Soviet Union does not hold water when viewed through a historical lens. The Soviet Union, prior to 1979, already had great influence inside Afghanistan. The economy of Afghanistan and its military power relied heavily on Soviet aid and cooperation. Throughout the 1970s, the Islamic threat from Pakistan along with the intra-party political fighting in Kabul combined to create an unstable situation. A historical analysis suggests that the invasion of Afghanistan, decided by a small group of high-level officials working against the advice of military advisors, was meant to restore political stability and contain the Islamic threat coming from both Pakistan and Iran- first to support and later to replace its Afghan client in Kabul. Afghanistan gave the Soviet Union both strategic depth and a friendly regional partner for economic and military purposes. In this, we can conclude that Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was the logical extension of a policy already in place and thus did not directly threaten U.S. interests in the Gulf.

The second objective involved the idea of political 'self-determination' for Afghanistan. At Geneva in 1988, this objective was embodied in the concepts of 'non-alignment', 'non-intervention', and 'non-alignment'. Inherently, such an objective represented a contradiction of sorts. Because the world was seen as bipolar (at least in the eyes of the US and USSR), and all states must lie on some plane within that system, it would be impossible for the Afghan government to be non-aligned and free from external influence. Presumably, then, any Afghan government would have to be oriented to one side or the other- else they wall of the entire country and become a self-contained land-island. Further, what defined self-determination? Even inside the U.S. Congress, no agreement could be reached on what this actually meant. Such disagreements eventually amounted to a great degree of fluctuations in policy implementation, which inherently hamstrung the overall effort. 'Self-determination' appeared to be more of a talking point than a real political objective. Would it mean 'hands-off' by all nations, including the U.S., Pakistan, and the Soviet Union? Following this logic, both the PDPA, supported by the Soviet Union, and all political parties in Peshawar, supported by the trilateral alliance, would be eliminated from contention in a new government system. Thus, any government set up by the resistance groups would have to be a short-term placeholder for a different kind of government. What would this government look like and how would it both govern and repel bids to forcefully take power (especially by members of the resistance who had just fought a decade to take power from the PDPA)? This question yields few answers. Without a long-term commitment to political stability and representative government by the United States and the international community, stated objectives could not be met.

*(2) Policy Objectives of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan*– The U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, already acknowledged as marriages of convenience, had numerous unforeseen effects on the effort inside Afghanistan. Two readily available problems can be observed. The first has to do with consideration for contradicting objectives within the alliance. In reality, Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan were comparable, though opposite, to the Soviet Union. They did not wish for a 'non-aligned' state, but rather a state aligned with Pakistan. Noting the looming threat from India, Afghanistan provided strategic depth for Pakistan and a potentially powerful ally that could shift the power balance in the region. Thus, Pakistan and the United States were working at cross-purposes through the entire campaign. The United States did have leverage over Pakistan and the ISI, at least at the beginning of the war, as the struggling nation needed U.S. funding to support both domestic and foreign policy. By allocating control over the resistance campaign to the ISI, the U.S. accepted that Pakistan's interests would always come first. Further, the steady, unrestricted flow of financial and material support to Pakistan allowed the ISI and the military to grow in both reach and influence throughout the period. This, as has been seen, created many problems for the United States at

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the end of the campaign. Many of the same tensions and disagreements still exist with Pakistan as the U.S. war effort winds down in Afghanistan today.

Further, Pan-Islamism and Wahhabism exported from Saudi Arabia into the Af-Pak region should have been cause for concern in the United States. Noting the rising threat of fundamentalist Islam from Iran (an ideology that rejected the international system in general), it should not have been difficult to foresee the effects of U.S. and Saudi money pouring into the pockets of radical, Wahhabi-influenced, militant Islamists. True, this is an easy indictment to make in hindsight, but all of the warning signs were present in 1979. Besides the revolution in Iran, Saudi Arabia was already dealing with domestic issues related to dissent within the religious establishment, as demonstrated by the Grand Mosque incident. In addition, governments in Egypt, Afghanistan, and Palestine were all dealing with political instability related to varying brands of militant Islam. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that radical Islam was considered a serious threat to the United States. By then, the damage had already been done.

**Strategic Level**– Assessments at the ‘strategic level’ are concerned mainly with the means employed to achieve political objectives.

*(1) Strategic Coordination*– U.S. involvement in Afghanistan was, above all, a covert intelligence operation coordinated with multiple state actors in support of a non-state actor. It was true that the U.S. was not in control of many aspects of the campaign. However, this does not change the fact that the United States as a whole, integrating its various departments of action, should have viewed the protracted conflict in terms of the traditional policy-strategy relationship. In the words of Liddell Hart, this relationship is defined by “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy.” Based on the evidence seen in regards to the U.S. policy towards Afghanistan and the mujahedeen resistance during this period, an argument can be made that the United States, from the top, did not plan this conflict in strategic terms. Instead, unilateral decision-making was given to one department within a broader Afghan policy that inherently affected the pursuit of objectives from other branches of government. One can easily place blame on the CIA for pursuing a faulty strategy through their Pakistani hosts, albeit one that did not align with the stated policy objectives of the United States. Conversely, one can place blame on the State Department for fostering action that stood in direct contradiction to the CIA’s policy (although it was more closely aligned with the policy objectives). However, the major strategic failure that we can identify is failure at the top. Call it coordination or policy implementation, but no concerted effort existed to ensure that distribution and implementation of means worked in concert towards political objectives. During the later phases of the conflict, when Envoy Peter Tomsen made several recommendations that were accepted by an inter-agency council, it appeared that this error would be rectified. The fateful meeting between Tomsen and Bearden on October 3, 1990 proved inter-agency cooperation and policy alignment to be fleeting. A line can easily be drawn between this covert action campaign and previous action in South America, where the CIA conducted unilateral efforts in which success did not depend on cooperation from other entities (either within its own government or inside other governments). While the United States had little (or less) control over the policies of other state and non-state actors involved, it did have full control over its own strategic implementation. Thus, coordinated planning, along the lines of other conventional war efforts, might have been implemented for better results.

*(2) Post-conflict Planning*– The question of ‘what comes after?’ continues to be the most perplexing problem in U.S. interventions. In the case of Afghanistan, the coalition against the Soviet-backed PDPA was trying to completely replace the existing governing system-essentially starting from scratch. Government, in any form (especially democracy), takes many competent people to run smoothly, even in the most modern societies. In Afghanistan, regime change became even more difficult with the high degree of societal fragmentation within the country. New governments rely on popular support to work. The longer it takes to re-establish government functions such as the rule of law, social services, and various utilities, the faster a new government will lose support. The interim government faced the harsh reality of these challenges, compounded by unrelenting attacks from its opposition. Direct U.S. support, in the form of arbitration, expertise, and material, was sorely missed during this critical stage. Abdication of this post-conflict responsibility surely accelerated the disintegration of Afghan society into an anarchic state. There is no blueprint for stabilization and reconstruction on this level because every country is different. An in-depth understanding of regional intricacies, provided by a robust intelligence effort with focus on ‘atmospheric conditions’, is a pre-requisite for support during this phase. Despite its complexities, solutions for ‘what comes after’



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must be a primary focus in considering future interventions.

**Operational Level-** The 'Operational Level' is concerned primarily with decisions or actions that negatively affected the outcome or decreased the ability of the U.S. to pursue its objectives in Afghanistan.

(1) *The CIA-ISI Agreement-* From the beginning of the campaign to its unsatisfying conclusion, the CIA-ISI agreement put in place during the Carter administration consistently limited U.S. ability to control the endgame in Afghanistan. The primary reason for this agreement was deniability. Neither side wished to provoke a larger war with the Soviet Union. In hindsight, an agreement based on this idea seems absurd on many levels. First, U.S. support for the mujahedeen was well known in the public arena and was debated in Congress beginning in the mid-1980s, thus the idea of deniability ceased to be relevant midway through the campaign. It is also likely that the Soviet Union expected some form of counter-balancing by the United States or regional powers aligned with the United States. Such an agreement allowed U.S. agencies to turn a blind eye to Pakistani machinations and abdicate responsibility for any unforeseen fallout. Through careful study of Operation Cyclone, it becomes obvious that this agreement was a fatal error in the pursuit of U.S. policy objectives throughout the conflict. Despite recognition of contradictions in U.S. and Pakistani policies, the CIA chose to stick by the ISI. The Pakistani monopoly and CIA preference towards siding with the ISI restricted the United States from developing its own robust intelligence networks and contacts in Afghanistan, limiting its ability to break from unfavorable policies. The success of Peter Tomsen during his short time in Afghanistan demonstrates the potential for a U.S. directed campaign that could have been.

(2) *Harnessing Fundamentalist Ideology and Supporting Radical Elements-* The CIA (sometimes through the ISI and Saudi Intelligence) seized on fundamentalist ideology to promote its anti-Soviet agenda. In doing so, however, it helped to fund the radical education of an entire generation-which directly contributed to the rise of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other extremist elements in the region. Further, the CIA supported (either directly or indirectly through acquiescence) fundamentalist political party leaders including Sayyaf and Hekmatyar who were outspokenly Anti-American. While this ostensibly seems to be an outgrowth of the CIA-ISI agreement, this problem could have been addressed and mitigated early on. Pressures by Congress and the State Department on the ISI ultimately led to the bypassing of mujahedeen political parties and resulted in direct aid to field commanders after 1988. By this time, however, the allocation of funds and support had already tilted the power balance towards the radical Islamists, further denigrating state-sponsored control over the result in Afghanistan.

**Tactical Level-** Because the U.S. had little control over the conduct of the campaign and actions of individual military leaders, we must be less critical of the "tactical level" decision-making. The most obvious tactical level decision that negatively affected the overall resistance effort was the conversion from guerilla and strangulation tactics to a conventional military effort. This shift played to the PDPA's strengths, extending the life of the regime for over three years and creating new political and military problems for the resistance in the process. In order for transitions of this nature to be successful, patrons must pay attention to the needs associated with a conventional effort- air power, communications, advanced weapons, and sophisticated logistics capabilities among them.

Check-in at Kabul International is housed in a cramped space that lacks many of the familiar comforts of more modern airports, including air conditioning. The security area provides ample opportunities to 'fast track' your wait, while locals attempt to carry the luggage of foreigners to a plastic wrapping scheme tucked in the corner. Intelligence agents of the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan equivalent of the CIA, openly search for suspicious individuals looking to board flights out of the country. On any given day, the international terminal bustles with activity. On this day, however, the tiny waiting area was crammed to capacity. Flights had been delayed due to a rocket attack, the munitions of which had landed on the runway. "Typical", I thought, as I sat, dripping with sweat, with my headphones drowning out the chaotic sounds of impatient and angry passengers. In that moment, I was less concerned with my immediate circumstances, though, as my thoughts drifted to a conversation from a few days earlier.

"My green card application has been put on hold." The man that sat across from me was a Foreign Service National (FSN)- a local Afghan who worked with U.S. State Department and other government personnel as a translator and

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investigator. To him, and others like him, the writing was on the wall- the United States and NATO were beginning a phased withdrawal that would inevitably lead to a chaotic security environment. “The money has dried up, and no one wants to be left here holding the bag,” he proclaimed in crisp, colloquial English, lacking any discernable accent. Many had visions of Taliban hoards over-running military and law enforcement compounds in the wake of American withdrawal. These thoughts, of course, were irrational, though the impending security vacuum had inspired real fear among many Afghans. Efforts to leave the country became more desperate, as Afghans who had sided with the ‘American infidels’ would surely be targeted by radical elements inside the capital. Shrinking influence of the central government was already visible, and several villages on the outskirts of Kabul were now under the control of local criminals and warlords. Despite media reports and military assessments that Afghan forces were prepared to take the lead on the country’s security, many of those working inside the coalition had doubts. Several Afghan-led military operations near Jalalabad had ended in disaster and suicide attacks within Kabul itself continued at a steady pace. As I waited for my flight that day, I pondered the question, “What would happen to this place when we leave?”

I had always found it somewhat ironic that Al-Qaeda had held its first meeting a few days before I was born. My entire adult life had been spent fighting against these elements, in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Many close to me had made great sacrifices for this remote country, an aberration in an increasingly modern and interconnected world. Now, it seemed, America’s long, costly commitment in Afghanistan was winding down, threatening to become a repeat of 1992. At the same time, it was unclear what level of long-term commitment the United States would provide to the fragile, developing nation. Still, sitting in that airport, a feeling of strange melancholy had overtaken me. It is likely that many veterans felt the same when the United States finally left Vietnam. What would come of all the sweat, tears, blood, and treasure poured into this country? Thinking about the precarious political, economic, and military situation the inexperienced Afghan government faced over the coming years, my sadness was replaced by another, pervasive thought: America would probably never be done with Afghanistan. The fates of our two countries were inextricably intertwined, not soon to be unwound, dating back many decades. We would be back. The decisions made in the coming months and years, however, would be vital in determining why.

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