A Bitter Harvest: The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan and its Effects on Afghan Political Movements

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The year 1989 was a momentous one in world events. It marked the end of the Cold War, which had divided the globe into two armed camps ready to annihilate each other in an instantaneous, blinding thermonuclear flash. The Berlin Wall that had severed East from West came crashing down, along with the Soviet puppet regimes that had viciously enforced their will on Eastern Europe. The underfunded and crumbling Soviet military began to withdraw from its neighbor states across the continent. However, in one of those nations, Afghanistan, Russian armies were fleeing not only because of a political or ideological defeat, but rather, because of a intensely embarrassing military one that cost the lives of 13,310 Russian soldiers and wounded 35,478 (Eliot; 3). Even worse than the humiliating personnel casualties was the effect of the "bleeding wound" of Afghanistan on both foreign and domestic support for the Soviet Union. "National Democratic" and "Revolutionary Democratic" states, which the Soviets had perceived to be among their staunchest allies against the U.S., vigorously condemned the engineered occupation of Afghanistan and often worked to aid the indigenous resistance, collectively known as the *mujahideen* ("holy warriors"), in their struggle for freedom. But the most catastrophic effects of the Afghan war were not dealt to the Soviet government or its shattered armies; rather, the real victims of the Afghan war were the Afghan people. In human terms alone, by 1989, there were over 1 million killed and 5 million refugees (Rais; 1). According to UN officials, about four percent of the Afghan population (800,000 people) are currently handicapped or disabled due to war, landmines, disease, and a total interruption of basic health services. Worse still, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and subsequent events related to the continued Soviet presence dangerously inflamed preexisting regional socioeconomic and political tensions.

Combined with military Islamic doctrines borrowed from across the Middle East, this resulted in the explosive ideological polarization of Afghan opposition and resistance movements. This polarization inevitably spurned civil war after the Soviet withdrawal, the training of a fanatically anti-Western Islamic army, and the creation of the ultraradical Taliban movement.

The divisions that plague Afghanistan long predate the disastrous conflict that began in 1979. The unification of the state itself occurred only in the late 19th century when Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, a tribal leader, received cash and weapons subsidies to protect India's northern border from Russian transgression. Khan used the gifts to "ruthlessly crush internal dissent and consolidate the state" from what had previously been a weakly organized tribal confederacy (Johnson; 18). Abdul Rahman was not the last Afghan leader who resorted to tactics of iron severity to bring rebellious tribesmen under the control of the central government. Afghanistan was perennially plagued with ethnic division, tribal conflict, and religious schisms. The state is comprised of ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, Persians, and Pushtuns, who all have varying forms of language, culture, and religious belief. Most of the Persians, centered around the area of Herat, are Shi'ite Muslims, dominated by and at fundamental sectarian conflict with the majority Sunni population. Moreover, Afghan society traditionally shuns urban life and remains principally tribally based, spread across remote and rough terrain. This inhospitable climate encourages "the survival of only the most rugged individualists" (Stewart; 20). Especially among the Pushtun tribes that inhabit the mountainous regions of southeastern Afghanistan, independence and honor are fiercely guarded principles. In this area, a rifle is not a luxury, but an absolute requirement for survival. These tribesmen are also strict,

dogmatic believers in Islam, and their religious ideas incorporate many principles from the Pashtunwali[1] (Johnson; 29). During the 20th century, they declared *jihad* (armed "holy struggle") against the central government on a number of occasions when local mullahs[2] convinced them that the authorities in Kabul were undertaking measures contrary to the message of Islam.

Likewise, there was also a disturbing tradition of foreign interference in domestic Afghan affairs. During the 19th and early 20th century, Great Britain and Russia were the primary players in the "Great Game" for control of the region. The reality was that "Russia coveted India and England had it… Afghanistan stood in the way and therefore was important" (Stewart; 4). After World War II, the game belonged almost entirely to the Soviets. Although the U.S. had shown an interest in aiding many of the USSR's neighbors by advocating containment, this policy did not apply to Afghanistan. At the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, according to most U.S. observers, Afghanistan was "of little or no strategic importance to the United States," and moreover, "overt Western-sponsored opposition to Communism [in Afghanistan] might precipitate Soviet moves to take control of the country" (Amstutz; 21). Instead, the Soviets became the dominating force in economic and military affairs in the Central Asian state. Fearful of Soviet power and needing its economic and military aid, the Afghan government quietly submitted to the imperious domination of Moscow. For the Soviets, their motivations for control of Afghanistan had visibly changed. The descent of the Iron Curtain in Europe heralded a new Soviet policy with respect to its neighbors. These nations now constituted an important buffer between the communist motherland and what the Russians perceived to

[1] The Pashtun tribal code
[2] Afghan Muslim clerics

be the voracious appetite of American global imperialism. Moreover, a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan was vital for the Soviets to maintain internal stability and tight control over the historically rebellious Central Asian regions such as Uzbekistan, Tajikstan, and Turkmenistan. Finally, the Soviets were pleased to see the emergence of an Afghan communist party in 1967, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). While the prospect of a communist takeover was not a priority for Moscow, it was undoubtedly an attractive possibility to Moscow, who subsequently aided the growth of the party (Amstutz; 29).

The PDPA symbolized how radical and polarized Afghan politics were quickly becoming. The founding meeting of the party was allegedly attended by only 30 people. Up until it seized power in 1978, it remained an elite vanguard party that, in contrast with traditional Marxist or Leninist party politics, drew its support from teachers, students, bureaucrats, and military officers, but not from workers or peasants. In fact, until 1984, the PDPA did not explicitly define itself as communist, but rather as a "national democratic" party. However, its true ideology was based on ardent Marxist-Leninist propaganda and its unwavering support for the Soviet Union. Only two years after its birth, the party had already split into two bitterly opposed factions, *Khalq* and *Parcham*. The Khalqis, constituting the greater of the two groups, were mostly from the disenfranchised lower classes, whereas the Parchamis tended to be urban, powerful, and educated. The 1967 split, however, did not occur because of these chafing socioeconomic divides. Rather, typical of traditional Afghan politics, the division was the result of ethnic conflict and bitter competition for leadership. This struggle continued unabated between 1965 and 1979 among the three most powerful PDPA leaders, the

Khalqis Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, and the Parchami head Babrak Karmal (Amstutz; 31-34).

But Communism was not the only ideology to grow in importance during this chaotic period. As previously mentioned, conservative Islamic thought had always occupied an important place among the Afghan people, especially amongthe rural Pushtu tribesmen. Given the deep divides across Afghan society, throughout its history, Islam and especially the concept of pan-Islamism have been crucial in uniting the population against both domestic and foreign enemies. Moreover, in Afghanistan, "the rulers have always been able to evoke a favourable response from the people by referring to Muslim solidarity… but harping on the pan-Islamic theme has never been anything more than a means of strengthening the power of the state" (Roy; 62). For a people with such a firm ancestral identity in the global *ummah* and a historical commitment to *jihad*, it is no surprise that many Afghanis were a very receptive to the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, despite its many discrepancies with Afghan culture. The founders of the Brotherhood movement in Afghanistan were theology professors who had studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and were exposed to the radical fundamentalist ideology of Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and others. The movement, known as *Jam`iyyat-i-islami*, operated in secret and sought supporters among a receptive body of Muslim students in Kabul. The growth of the group bitterly opposed the Marxist influence of the USSR, and protested the official founding of the PDPA in 1965 by publishing a leaflet entitled "Tract of the Holy War." They conducted zealous protests against Israel, the U.S., the Afghan monarchy, and most of all, communism. To the dismay of the PDPA, the Islamists were growing much faster than they were in both size and popularity (Roy; 69-71).

Nevertheless, the PDPA during the 1970s quickly began to gain an influential position during the regime of President Mohammed Daoud (1973-1978). This occurred largely because Daoud rigorously suppressed virtually all political opposition to his rule, with the exception of the PDPA. While under intense Soviet pressure to permit the activity of the Marxist party, Daoud was unknowingly masterminding his own demise by allowing it to openly operate and recruit disciples. Worse still, Daoud's campaign against other political parties like those of the Islamists left no significant opposition to the growing power of the left. In fact, "where in the 1960s rightist Moslem student organizations regularly reacted to leftist demonstrations with counter-demonstrations, by 1978 no rightist or centrist party or organization effectively existed in the country" (Amstutz; 34). The dangerous conditions Daoud had created now left Afghanistan without conditions for democratic development, and rather instead with a dominating, minority political organization that, though divided, seemed wholly fixated on the idea of totalitarian rule. By the time that Daoud realized his mistake, the PDPA were already arranging to overthrow him. On April 27, 1978, armed with 50 tanks, 2 warplanes, and Soviet approval, approximately 600 rebel soldiers seized Kabul and the control of a nation of approximately 15 million people in the name of the Marxist party (Amstutz; 36-37).

The next 20 months of Afghan history were utter chaos in every sense of the word. Immediately following the coup, majority Khalqi leaders Taraki and Amin sought to remove their Parchami rivals. Soon Babrak Kamal and his allies were hiding in Eastern European capitals from death sentences awaiting them in Afghanistan. By March 1979, even the two Khalqis were now competing between each other for totalitarian

control. Amin eventually won this desperate and murderous battle, despite at least two Taraki-inspired assassination attempts. Meanwhile, a campaign of extermination against political enemies of the regime by the ruthless secret police, KHAD, had left many Afghans embittered. Sweeping attempts at agrarian reform and Sovietization were angrily received by rural Afghans, who resented the centralizing and modernizing policies of this new regime, as well as its inherently anti-Islamic nature. Amin explained in 1978 that "we are struggling to uproot feudalism in order to pass directly from a feudal society to a society where the exploitation of man by his fellow man will be unknown" (Roy; 85). By feudalism, Amin was essentially referring to traditional Afghan tribal society. While the party's agrarian reform program was an ambitious Marxist masterpiece, it not only threatened to destroy the economic structure of the hinterlands, but moreover, "the whole social framework of production and, indeed, of the very life of the peasant" (Roy; 89). The PDPA literacy campaign, which quickly turned into a campaign of ideological brainwashing, ended with similar results. In the eyes of the peasants, the Qur'an was now being substituted with secular textbooks, a clear violation of Islam. Worse still, brutal repression by government security forces resulted in the unpublicized genocide of between 50,000 and 100,000 people (Roy; 95). The Soviets became extremely nervous about the utter instability of the Khalqi policies that were destroying Afghanistan from within, rather than reforming it.

The final straw for the Soviets came with the success of a growing underground resistance movement that directly threatened the survival of the regime. Characteristic of Afghan history, the rebellion began with the tribes in July 1978. The Nuristani tribe, angry at the execution of a number of its community officials, took up arms against the

government and succeeded in capturing two government outposts. An attempt by the Khalqi government to pay other neighboring tribes to eliminate the Nuristani threat completely backfired by February 1979, and instead the tribes allied with each other against the government. In this backdrop, a number of Afghan Islamist intellectuals arrived in the region to fight alongside the tribes, including Ahmed Shah Massoud, the future "Lion of the Panjsher." The rebellion spread like wildfire across the country, and by the fall of 1979, vast regions of Afghanistan had slipped from PDPA control. Remarkably, these insurgencies were mostly uncoordinated and crossed ethnic and religious lines. While a number of them were spontaneous uprisings such as that of the Nuristanis, there was a growing trend of revolts, carefully designed and organized by Muslim student and youth organizations who were mostly disciples of *Jam`iyyat-i-islami* (Roy; 98-108).

The Soviets were becoming increasingly concerned about the apparent total sociopolitical disintegration in Afghanistan. By December 1979, irregular armed rebellion had spread to 18 of the country's 29 provinces. Beyond simply losing a loyal communist neighbor, Moscow worried that there was a serious prospect of an Islamic fundamentalist government taking power that would subsequently threaten Soviet hegemony over Central Asia. Moreover, the Soviets were guided heavily by the Brezhnev Doctrine, instituted following the "Prague Spring" in Czechoslovakia. Following those events, Brezhnev publicly explained that "when a threat arises to the cause of socialism in any country—a threat to the security of the socialist commonwealth as a whole—this is no longer merely a problem for that country's people, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist parties" (Bradsher; 137). The Soviets not only

reserved the right to preserve communism in their satellites, but they were fully prepared to do so in Afghanistan. In late 1979, they unsuccessfully attempted three times to plot the assassination of Amin to replace him with Taraki. Amin, now suspicious of the Soviets, was slowly drifting away from Moscow. Unfortunately, while recognizing the danger to his survival, he had no choice but to allow an increase in the number of Soviet troops operating in Afghanistan in order to save his beleaguered troops from utter destruction. On December 24, 1979, large numbers of Soviet troops began landing unannounced at Kabul airport, within two days numbering over 5,000. Within hours, Hafizullah Amin was dead at the hands of Soviet commandos and the nation was under Russian military occupation.

While the Soviets set about reorganizing the Afghan communist regime with reconstituted Parchami elements led by Babrak Karmal, Afghan Islamic leaders began to develop a massive political, financial, and military support apparatus across the border in Peshawar, Pakistan. Peshawar quickly became a haven for various refugee camps and a variety of would-be political leaders. Within one year, these factions had coalesced into seven recognized Afghan political parties in exile in Pakistan. Based in Quetta and Peshawar, these groups soon were tasked with the responsibility of helping to organize the training and coordination of an army of *mujahideen* ("holy warriors") to fight the Soviet invasion. Three of the major parties were actually offshoots of the original Muslim Youth movement formed in the early 1970s: *Hizb-i-Islami* (led by Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), *Hizbi-i-Islami* (a separate group led by Younes Khalis), and *Jamiat-i-Islami* (led by Burhaneddin Rabbani) (Cooley; 63). While only loosely associated with the actual indigenous military commanders of the Afghan rebellion, these

groups provided a vital liaison for money, weapons, and recruits as they began to pour in from across the world. Added to the thousands of Afghans already fighting the tyranny of the Soviet-PDPA occupation, thousands of foreigners from the Middle East were eager to take part in a *jihad* against infidel forces that threatened Islam. Despite dire prospects offered by foreign observers, such as one former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan who estimated in 1979 that "the Russians would wipe out the resistance in months," the rebellion only grew in size and intensity (Eliot, 1).

Worse still for the Soviets, the mujahideen were truly a vicious and fearsome enemy. Afghan culture promotes radical courage in the face of paramount adversity. A Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officer once commented on a scene that he witnessed exemplifying this attitude: "A small group of Afghans clustered around a wood fire [were] arguing. Two of them were disputing as to who was the bravest. To prove his point, one of them leaned forward and thrust his hand in the fire… For a few moments he kept it roasting in front of his audience. When he pulled back his hand it was bright red, dripping fluid" (Yousaf; 32). Weapons, especially the rifle, have become a mainstay of Afghan society, even in peacetime. They represent symbols of virility and power, and consequently, "Afghans buy and sell weapons as Americans do cars" (Yousaf; 35). Moreover, these Afghans, true believers in Islam, had little fear of death. They believed that by fighting in a holy war for Islam, death in combat would translate into an infinite afterlife in paradise. As one Arab mujahideen coordinator in Peshawar remarked afterwards, "Afghanis are a very crazy people. They are brave. I have never seen [anything] like this… Machine guns, bombs, nothing stops them. Wallahi! Nothing. When they want to die in Shahada [martyrdom] then they want Shahada [martyrdom]"

(Emerson). Given this attitude, Afghan rebels were lax to conduct sabotage or other low-profile operations; they preferred to attack in thunderous, frightening, and chaotic ambushes, throwing themselves at the enemy and rallying to loud cries of "*Allahu Akhbar*!" ("God is the greatest!"). Moreover, this army of holy warriors had permeated every corner of Afghan society, and the rugged terrain was to its advantage. The invading Soviets discovered to their despair that, in the words of Younes Khalis, "in Afghanistan, everything and everybody is the mujahaddin. The rocks are mujahaddin; the trees and the birds are mujahaddin. Every man, woman, and child of Afghanistan will not rest until these infidels are driven out" (Lohbeck; 81-82).

By 1980, more than 80,000 Soviet troops were occupying Afghanistan. The Soviets hoped that by stabilizing the regime, slowing the unpopular reforms, and releasing political prisoners, the rebellion would wither and a majority of Afghans would stand behind the Karmal. Quite to the contrary, by 1981, despite the best efforts of the Red Army, all 29 provinces of Afghanistan were experiencing rebellion while vast regions of the country were wholly beyond the control of either Karmal or the Soviets (Amstutz; 132). Even more serious for the Soviets was the sudden influx of financial and military aid to the mujahideen. There were a large and diverse number of enemies now pitted against the Soviets. These included Arab and Islamic states of the Middle East and North Africa, Western Europe, China, and America. U.S. officials, still resentful at the Soviet role in their defeat in Vietnam, were very interested in "hitting and hurting as much as possible the Soviet forces in Afghanistan" (Emerson). Eager to even the score with the Russians, the United States quietly encouraged a number of Arab states to help the Afghan rebels. Egypt began a massive supply operation in January 1980 after

President Anwar Sadat met with U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. Sadat's version of the meeting ended with Brzezinski pleading to him, "Please open your stores for us so that we can give the Afghanis the armaments they need to fight" (Cooley; 35). The U.S. was keen on giving Soviet bloc weaponry to the Afghanis in order to maintain the veneer of noninvolvement. Egypt was an ideal source in this case, possessing large numbers of surplus (and often obsolete) Soviet-made guns, ammunition, mortar and artillery, and even some anti-aircraft weapons. Egypt allegedly even provided some rebels with guerilla training at domestic military bases. Added to Egyptian contributions were large amounts of firearms and munitions from China, whose strategic and political interests were in realizing a Soviet defeat. A U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) air-bridge was formed, transporting these weapons from central collection points and bringing them to distribution camps in Peshawar. Once there, the Pakistani ISI took responsibility for processing and distributing the weapons to the various Afghan parties (Amstutz; 206-207). The ISI justified their grants of the weapons to the parties instead of directly to the mujahideen commanders by explaining that a reliance on the latter tactic "would have resulted in corruption, chaos and confusion inside Afghanistan" (Yousaf; 208).

Another U.S. ally was also deeply involved in the conflict: Saudi Arabia. The Saudi elite was extremely interested in funding a *jihad* in Afghanistan. The monarchy had come under greater pressure from religious dissidents, and funding the mujahideen was an easy way to demonstrate its commitment to the Islamic cause. Additionally, they were fearful of the effects of Soviet hegemony over the region and hoped that by supporting the Afghan resistance, they would create a strong and viable Sunni

counterweight to the menacing Iranian Shiite threat. Rather than contributing arms, Saudi leaders agreed to split the costs of buying weapons for the mujahideen with the United States, a figure that totaled between $30-$50 million dollars per year between 1980 and 1983 (Amstutz; 209). The Saudis contributed even more money through private channels, and provided extensive facilities for organizing Arab mujahideen recruits, who became known as the "Arab Afghans." This practice in particular was encouraged by the Americans because "Arab zealots who flocked to aid the Afghans were easier to 'read' than the rivalry-ridden natives" (Moran). The Saudis never really considered that they would be funding a dangerous cadre of militant Islamists. As far as they were concerned, "when the war was won… everyone would go home and forget about jihad" (Masoud; 18).

From the beginning, however, there were three serious concerns about the parties in Peshawar. First, their legitimacy among the Afghan people was greatly questionable. Secondly, the parties fought as much against each other as with the Soviets. Thirdly, the ideology and goals of several of the parties became disquieting to their foreign sponsors. The links between the parties in Peshawar and actual mujahideen field commanders were extremely tenuous, and thus made them suspicious in the eyes of many Afghans. As Edward Girardet, an American correspondent noted, "For the outside observer, the gulf between Afghans inside the country and those in Peshawar is striking… most resistance groups in the field are obliged to remain affiliated with the political organizations… [for] limited assistance… and a headquarters" (Amstutz; 91-92). Despite the vast allegiances that each of the parties claimed, a mujahideen commander estimated that in 1981, a mere 1% of the Afghan population belonged to one of the Peshawar parties. Another rebel

leader told foreign news correspondents in August 1983 that, "I don't like any of the Afghan leaders in Peshawar. We are not fighting for them. We are fighting for Islam and Afghanistan" (Amstutz; 92). A significant number of Afghanis viewed the party heads as waiting conveniently and safely across the border, while their countrymen bore the backbreaking burden of the Soviet occupation.

More shocking was the high degree of infighting among the various parties, especially amongst the most powerful fundamentalist groups. This infighting was not restricted to words, nor merely to the scene in Peshawar. Inside Afghanistan, mujahideen partisans of the Peshawar parties fought desperate and high-pitched battles against each other instead of against the Soviets. Embodied in the Afghan tribal customs of vengeance and more modern aspirations to political power, rebel bands forgot their common Russian enemy and would set upon each other. The internecine clashes occurred mostly between the powerful radical fundamentalist parties, especially those of Hekmatyar, Rabbani, and Khales (Amstutz; 101). Brigadier Mohammad Yousaf, head of the ISI Afghan Bureau, commented that, over the course of the war, "hundreds of mujahideen… died at the hands of their comrades-in-arms in different Parties, or under rival Commanders" (Yousaf; 129). Frantic attempts by the ISI, CIA, and Arab governments to unify the parties ended mostly in total failure due to personal and ideological divides. Saudi and other donors attempted to cement the groups together by offering millions of dollars in aid in exchange for unity. The first such attempt following the Soviet invasion, in January 1980, resulted in "the Islamic Alliance for the Liberation of Afghanistan." With Gulbuddin Hekmatyar immediately backing out of the organization and the infighting continuing, the alliance fell apart less than eleven months

later. In 1981, recognizing their irreconcilable differences, the fundamentalist and moderate parties set up rival coalitions, both titled "the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahideen." Though the coalitions had been established to create unity, there was more division than ever among the parties. The hardliner Hekmatyar declared in late 1982 that, "We know of only one alliance, ours… Those who are outside it will either perish or be compelled to join it." (Amstutz; 97). Ironically, despite all the pretenses of unity, armed clashes continued at virtually the same intensity even between fellow coalition members. Hekmatyar's forces were still attacking and being attacked by those of Rabbani and Khales. In the minds of the parties, the IUAM was perpetuated as little more than a convenient myth to placate their foreign sponsors.

Finally, there were a number of serious concerns among the foreign sponsors of the Peshawar parties. Though the CIA was deeply involved in the campaign to aid the mujahideen, they had little control over who received the weapons. Rather, ISI officials largely made this decision. Likewise, they controlled the training of the mujahideen in Pakistani camps. ISI chiefs insisted this had to be the case because "the CIA staff showed little understanding of military logistics or battlefield time and space problems" (Yousaf; 89). This led to often-strained relations between the two agencies. The CIA also had objections to the main recipients of the money and weapons. The ISI had decided to fund the most radical of the fundamentalist parties, particularly Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami. The decision was made because the ISI believed these parties to be the most dedicated and most capable of the various Afghan opposition factions. However, "US officials started becoming more and more concerned that the next government in Kabul might be an Islamic Fundamentalist one, possibly with Hekmatyar becoming

another Khomeini" (Yousaf; 103). Though Hekmatyar accepted American aid, he made it quite clear that he regarded the White House and the Kremlin equally as his hated enemy. The parties in general were suspicious of American involvement and resented that they were being used as a proxy tool to hurt the Soviets. In an interview conducted after the war, Charles Cogan, a former CIA official, defended the decisions made by his agency and the ISI: "We sought to maintain a balance and never allow it to get too far in favor of the fundamentalists… our focus was on hitting and hurting as much as possible the Soviet forces in Afghanistan… These were the fighting assets and we had to aid them" (Emerson).

Meanwhile, the Soviets' "carrot and stick" policy in Afghanistan was quickly leaving the proverbial "carrot" by the wayside. No amount of Soviet cajoling and assurances could placate an antagonized and angry Afghan population. The Afghan army was near total collapse, deserting or defecting in mass numbers. Despite attempted conciliatory measures adopted by the Soviets to restore confidence in the PDPA government, the country was nevertheless quickly disintegrating into chaos. By the end of 1980, the mujahideen were in firm control of 75% of Afghanistan (Amstutz; 132). Moreover, urban resistance turned cities like Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat into violent guerilla battlefields. As one frustrated Russian Colonel explained, "They [the mujahideen] are well prepared and well trained for combat in mountainous terrain… You never see them in the field face to face. They always shoot [from] behind the corner" (Yousaf; 214). Suffering from a war "of a thousand cuts" and facing an amorphous and seemingly invincible enemy, the Soviet forces implemented a new "scorched earth" policy based in three primary strategies: intimidation, genocide, and reprisals. After

realizing that the Afghanis would not willingly submit to Soviet domination, the Red Army sought to brutally repress them and cow them into submission. In April 1983, Soviet aircraft carpet-bombed the city of Herat in a vain attempt to end the rebellion there. This indiscriminate attack killed over 3,000 innocent civilians (Amstutz; 145). In the rebellious hinterlands, the Soviets removed the rural base of support and operations of the mujahideen. This translated to "the systematic, planned destruction of the rural economy and the deliberate creation of millions of refugees by the most violent means" (McMichael; 53). Russian and PDPA troops forced rural Afghanis to leave their ancestral homeland to either camps in Pakistan or cities like Kabul and Kandahar, where they could be more closely controlled. Entire villages were wiped cleanly off the map. When Soviet troops encountered villages suspected of aiding or sheltering the mujahideen, their response was shockingly inhuman. Soviet bombers and helicopters would begin the attack, razing most of the village to the ground. Following the air assault, a barrage of Soviet and Afghan tanks and armored vehicles would sweep across the village, devastating the entire area. One foreign observer who was witness to such a campaign noted that "Russian soldiers shot at anything alive in six villages—people, hens, donkeys—and then they plundered what remained of value" (Amstutz; 145). While the Soviets did make a raw effort at bleeding the hinterlands dry, as evidenced by their multiple campaigns against Massoud in the Panjshir, they were not successful in undermining the mujahideen. The most lasting effects of their policies was the partial destruction of Afghan rural society and the subsequent massive flood of refugees that inundated Kabul and refugee camps in Pakistan. The PDPA and the Soviets were indifferent to the massive loss of life that their policies had caused. One PDPA official

explained in rather callous terms that "if only one million people were left in the country [of 15 million], they would be more than enough to start a new society" (Amstutz; 145). Simply put, Afghanis were being given a straightforward choice: either submit to PDPA rule or die at the hands of Russian troops.

The Soviets also decided that cruel reprisals would be an effective policy to discourage the mujahideen. The Afghan rebels were an elusive target, and in frustration at their ceaseless raids, the Soviet response was directed against nearby civilians. According to David Isby, a military analyst and expert on Afghanistan, "Civilian massacres [perpetrated by Soviet and PDPA troops] like the one at My Lai were the norm rather than the abberation" (Kaplan; 120). On one occasion, the Soviets murdered six hundred villagers at once by lining them up and crushing them to death with tanks (Kaplan; 39). In another incident in September 1982, Soviet troops brutally massacred 105 innocent villagers in a tunnel. In October 1983, another Soviet contingent murdered 360 villagers in cold blood near Kandahar, after heavy casualties were taken fighting local mujahideen (Amstutz; 146). The means by which such butchery was carried out was gruesome. Later on in the war, in January 1988, a combination of Soviet and PDPA units bound and gagged twelve Afghan civilians (including seven children) and dragged them inside the local mosque, which was subsequently set on fire and burned to the ground (Kaplan; 120). Soviet aircraft dropped millions of plastic mines in and around villages, disguised as pens, watches, and even toys. These devices were not meant to kill, but to maim, leaving victims in extreme agony (Kaplan; 5).

Additionally, the Soviets stepped up the operations of KHAD (*Keda-mati-i-Etal'at-i-Dolati*, or "State Information Service")--one of the key pillars of power of the

PDPA regime. This agency alone employed over 30,000 bureaucrats and field agents. According to one exiled Afghan analyst, "KHAD has its own police, prisons, and torture chambers. It is a state within a state" (Amstutz; 266). It became famous for its campaigns against "imperialist agents," during which many Afghans disappeared overnight. Most of them, often completely innocent of any crime, were either directly murdered or else ritually tortured in various KHAD-run prisons, like the infamous Pol-i-Charki. The agency also engaged in an active war of subversion against all political dissident groups. This subversion included assassination of mujahideen leaders, infiltration of Pakistani refugee camps, and sabotage against Pakistan. KHAD, in essence, acted as a proxy for the Soviet KGB and was an efficient cover for Soviet activities that constituted wartime atrocities (Rais; 145-146). Most importantly, KHAD utilized a "divide and rule strategy." Instead of fighting the rebel groups directly, it instead successfully managed to agitate the various religious, ethnic, and tribal divisions in a vague effort to disrupt the resistance. In 1981, KHAD successfully instigated bitter conflicts between the very Pushtu tribes that had been responsible for initiating the resistance to the PDPA regime. Moreover, it is believed that the agency was also behind the intermittent flare-up of religious tensions between Shiites and Sunnis along the Durand Line with Pakistan (Amstutz; 264-267).

Meanwhile, by 1985, even with over 100,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan, the war had become an utter stalemate. Russian troops were unable to dislodge the mujahideen, and conversely, the rebels were not able to topple the PDPA regime nor force the infidel armies out. The Soviet forces had managed to hold their ground primarily through the exacting use of air power, especially with their feared Mi-24 Hind

helicopter gunship. For years, the Peshawar factions had been appealing to the West for adequate anti-aircraft weapons. The aging Soviet weapons that had been offered were ineffective and usually too bulky for transport through the Hindu Kush. It was very important for Pakistan that only these weapons be allowed to reach the mujahideen. Pakistani leaders were afraid that should the mujahideen be given Western weapons, the veil of plausible deniability would be shattered, and Pakistan would be considered a combatant by the U.S.S.R. (Yousaf; 181). The need for such advanced anti-aircraft weapons, however, soon superseded the fears of the Pakistanis. The first such device to be brought in was the British Blowpipe missile in 1985. Unfortunately, the Blowpipe turned out to be a debacle. The weapon was user-guided, awkward and heavy to carry, and it required constant and extensive training for proper use. Moreover, the weapon suffered from an unacceptable number of misfires and other malfunctions. According to Brig. Yousaf, “I do not recall a single confirmed kill by a Blowpipe in Afghanistan” (Yousaf; 88-89).

Yousaf and others within ISI began to vocally call for the U.S. and Pakistan to allow the mujahideen a number of new high technology Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. The Stinger was “America’s top-of-the-line, shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft missile” and, in contrast to the Blowpipes, it was deadly accurate (Begleiter). However, Pakistani government officials were not the only ones afraid of the consequences of giving such a weapon to the mujahideen; so were the Americans. The U.S. were reluctant for a number of reasons: the prospect of such a weapon falling into the hands of terrorists for use against civilian airliners; the possibility that Iran would capture a Stinger; and the likelihood that the Soviets would obtain the Stinger and study its technology. However, a

number of developments that occurred in late 1985 and 1986 convinced President Reagan that the weapon was vital to the continued survival of the mujahideen. The Soviets had been successful in dealing the rebels a number of serious blows. One of the few permanent bases of the mujahideen in Afghanistan, Zhawar, was temporarily captured by the Soviets. Zhawar, rumored impenetrable, was a significant loss and came on the heels of several other Soviet and Afghan army successes. Moreover, U.S. experts were warning of high rates of attrition among the mujahideen, shortages of available soldiers, and greatly lowered recruitment appeal. Fearing that the balance could quickly be tipped by the Russians, in mid-1986 the Stinger arrived at mujahideen training camps. According to ISI estimates, the success rate of the mujahideen using the Stinger was between 70 and 75 percent, ten percent higher than the average hit rate achieved by American soldiers training with the weapon in a non-hostile environment (Yousaf; 183). By late 1986, the Afghan guerillas were shooting down one Soviet aircraft per day with the Stinger, effectively neutralizing the Soviet's air superiority (Begleiter). The effect on Soviet air power was devastating. Due to rebel control of most of the countryside, even flights landing at Kabul airport were not safe. One Western journalist commented in October 1987 that "Helicopters have disappeared from the Afghan sky except to escort convoys and attack [Ahmad Shah Massoud], who doesn't have Stingers" (McMichael; 91). Unfortunately, as expected and feared by American officials, these weapons quickly fell into the hands of the Soviets, the Iranians, and a variety of ultra-radical mujahideen groups, including those of the "Arab Afghans."

No longer possessing any strategic advantage, the Soviet Union began to desperately seek ways to extract itself from the mess it had caused in Afghanistan. In

1986, President Mikhail Gorbachev declared to the 27th International Communist Party Conference that "counter-revolution and imperialism have transformed Afghanistan into a bleeding wound" (Yousaf; 207). It was no longer possible for the Soviets to conceal the horrible losses that they had incurred over the previous six years. The Soviets offered a scheduled withdrawal on the condition that Peshawar parties would agree to a shared-power interim government with Ahmedzai Najibullah, the PDPA leader that replaced Babrak Karmal after his repeated incompetence. However, the hatred of and virulent opposition to the PDPA was insurmountable, and thus this was not even considered a possible negotiating position by the parties. Aggravating the situation further was that Najibullah, prior to his stint as President, had controlled the despised KHAD secret police agency. One relatively famous mujahideen commander, Abdul Haq, wrote an open letter to the New York Times in 1989 decrying what he saw as American hypocrisy: "It is said we should make a broad-based government with President Najibullah and his cronies. Yet America won't give a visa to Kurt Waldheim because he was alleged to have a role in war crimes more than 45 years ago. But you want us to compromise with the Hitler of our country" (Yousaf; 212-213). Nor were the Parties interested in discussing a phased Soviet withdrawal. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was completely unyielding in this respect; he flatly declared, "the Soviets should be given as much time for withdrawal as they took when moving into Afghanistan, i.e. not more than three days" (Yousaf; 210). While the talks dragged on, the Soviets began grasping at any possible option that would allow them to withdraw as quickly as possible without leaving Afghanistan in total chaos. They even floated an old idea championed earlier by American and other Western governments of creating a national reconciliation government under the rule of the exiled

King, Zahir Shah. With negotiations stalled, on January 6, 1988, Soviet deputy foreign minister Anatoly Adamishin stated in several Indian newspapers that "the USSR wants the next scheduled round of talks on Afghanistan to be the last and to end in agreement." Moreover, according to Adamishin, Soviet leaders had "taken a strong decision to withdraw troops in 12 months—it could be even earlier" (Lohbeck; 228-229). True to their word, the Soviets agreed to the terms of a negotiated withdrawal of the 115,000 Russian troops in Afghanistan by February 1989. On April 14, 1988, Pakistani, PDPA Afghani, Soviet, and American representatives signed the Geneva Accords, ensconced in a vague understanding between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. that military assistance to their respective clients would mutually end. However, all of the Peshawar parties rejected the Geneva Accords outright because they had not been included in negotiations, nor had a role been afforded to them in the post-Soviet Afghani government. In response, the White House maintained that American military assistance would continue so long as the Soviets continued their support for Najibullah and the PDPA. Furthermore, according to spokesman Marlin Fitzwater, "President Reagan has encouraged the rebels to fight on if the opposition remains, if the fight is there to maintain" (Lohbeck; 237).

But while the U.S. was still officially in support of the mujahideen, the willingness of the Soviets to withdraw took many in the American government aback. Many U.S. officials were reflecting on the implications of the Soviet decision, and were very reluctant to support continued military aid to the mujahideen. The earlier fears of an Afghani Islamic fundamentalist government coming to power now seemed a distinct possibility. Communist representatives in Kabul realized and delighted in the predicament faced by the U.S. In 1988, they tauntingly commented to more than one

Western journalist that “If you liked Khomeini in Iran, you’ll love Hekmatyar” (Lohbeck; 259). But the threat of Islamic fundamentalism also came from a more disturbing and dangerous quarter of the mujahideen. The apparent victory in Afghanistan had emboldened many of the foreign guerillas among the Arab Afghans. These radical revivalists who had risked their lives for the Islamic cause in Afghanistan now turned their sights on their own governments, who they believed should be overthrown in the context of a larger struggle. Shaykh Abdullah Azzam, a militant Palestinian cleric deeply involved in supporting the Afghan mujahideen, proclaimed to his followers in 1988, “Oh brothers, after Afghanistan, nothing in the world is impossible for us anymore. There are no super powers or mini-powers—what matters is the will power that springs from our religious belief.” Tamim Al-Adnani, a top aide to Shaykh Azzam, declared to a rapt audience later that year that “the best thing is [to] continue Jihad. Nothing but Jihad… Even after liberation of Afghanistan, even after the Islamic government, [the mujahideen] will not stop. They will go up to the Muslim countries of Russia, Islamic republics. They will go down to Palestine, to [Jerusalem].” Moreover, according to Al-Adnani, “[if] Anybody stops in their way, Oh my God! Smash them! Any ruler, [if] he will not let us go, we will go by force! Jihad!” (Emerson).

The Peshawar parties and the mujahideen likewise rejoiced in their apparent victory. Journalists were greeted with scenes of open celebration among the Afghan people: “women, without veils, ran up to the nearest mujahaddin warriors and hugged them. Men with tears still streaming down their faces went to nearby fields and began clearing them of shells and junk, restoring them for farming” (Lohbeck; 240). For their part, the Parties pledged to form a united Afghan Interim Government, which would take

control of the nation upon the anticipated immediate collapse of the Najibullah regime. Not even the Soviets had any serious expectation that the PDPA could hold out against a unified onslaught of the mujahideen. Despite leaving more than $1 billion worth of military equipment and supplies for the Afghan army, there was little hope in the Soviet leadership that the "Afghanization" of the conflict could stop the mujahideen (Lohbeck; 240). An anonymous Moscow analyst gave the major cities like Kabul and Kandahar six months before they would be captured, but he predicted the total political collapse of the Marxist regime long before then (Overby; 198). Understandably, the CIA and ISI had even more dire forecasts for the apparent imminent fate of the regime in Kabul. However, no one was prepared for what was the most shockingly unexpected event of the Afghan civil war up to 1989: the survival of the Najibullah government.

The President and his advisors managed to tenuously hold onto the reigns of the country for several key reasons. Firstly, on March 8, 1989, unified mujahideen forces made a major attempt to overrun and capture the city of Jalalabad. The parties involved in the Afghan Interim Government project planned on using Jalalabad as a temporary national capital and base of operations to strike at Kabul. However, the attack was a miserable failure and displayed a horrendous lack of coordination among the mujahideen and the Peshawar parties. Moreover, there was a near total lack of heavy weapons and close air support. The summary justice executed on surrendering government troops by some over-enthusiastic rebels was more than enough dissuasion against desertion for most Afghan army soldiers. However, the primary reason for the failure to capture Jalalabad was the absolute lack of trust between the parties and their associated mujahideen units. The presence of the colossal Soviet enemy had usually been enough to

keep the various Parties from each other's throats. The enormous vacuum left by the exit of the Soviets let loose political and social tensions that had accumulated over the ten years of occupation. As one tribal leader sadly observed to a German correspondent, "since we freed the valley and no longer have a common enemy, blood feuds have broken out in our tribe" (Overby; 199). Rather than uniting to remove Najibullah and impose an Islamic government, each political faction was now primarily interested in being the first to seize Kabul and wipe out its rivals. The bitter infighting that followed between virtually every political and military camp did not win much support from the Afghan people, most of whom were tired of the incessant warfare that plagued their nation. The major winner was Najibullah, who managed to consolidate support from various circles of Afghan society by transforming the PDPA into a nationalist-oriented party known as *Watan* ("Nation") (Overby; 199).

But the circumstances permitting Najibullah to retain a desperate grasp on power quickly deteriorated in the first years of the 1990s. The demise of the Soviet Union cut the remaining foreign support for the Afghan regime. This lifeline was officially cut on January 1, 1992, when the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. formally ended all aid to their proxy partners in Afghanistan. Both superpowers were relatively eager to sign this agreement: Russia could not afford to further buttress the Afghan regime and the U.S. no longer saw the Peshawar parties or the mujahideen as reliable allies. Without a constant influx of military aid, there was little chance of Najibullah surviving for very long. Already by April 15, mujahideen forces led primarily by Ahmad Shah Massoud, had seized the strategic Bagram Airbase on the outskirts of Kabul. Faced with the now inevitable collapse of his government, Najibullah resigned on April 16 and the Afghan regime fell

into total chaos. Rejecting UN mediation efforts, the various mujahideen commanders forcibly entered Kabul between April 25-29, 1992. Unfortunately, however, the suffering of the Afghan people did not come to an end. The provisional government formed on April 30, 1992 was not accepted by all mujahideen factions. Hekmatyar, ever the hardliner, furiously objected to the inclusion of Uzbek militia forces under the lead of Rashid Dostum. Dostum, until a bitter dispute with Najibullah a few months earlier, had been allied with the communist government. Hekmatyar, refusing to cede any power to Dostum, once again launched rocket barrages against the capital. Kabul was quickly carved up into political and territorial zones, and the parties initiated a deadly, "Beirut style" urban war of attrition against each other (Marsden; 38). Further attempts to achieve peace with Hekmatyar through negotiation of a new power-sharing agreement failed and the fighting continued.

The conflict was not limited to Hekmatyar's stubborn intransigence. In a very serious development, the Peshawar parties and their mujahideen gangs were now splitting up along ethnic and religious lines. Iranian Shiite groups clashed with Saudi-financed Sunni wahhabis. In February 1993, Ahmad Shah Massoud united with the Sunni groups, and viciously attacked Shiite positions in western Kabul in an incident known as the Afshar massacre (Marsden; 39). Ethnic minority rebels, mainly Tajiks and Uzbeks, were soon facing off with mujahideen from the majority Pushtu population. Inflamed once again, Afghanistan's traditional social divides tore the country apart in open warfare (Overby; 200-202). This created an extremely dangerous regional situation, especially when the conflict spread across international borders to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Ahmad Shah Massoud and other northern mujahideen commanders suddenly became

actively involved in supporting their ethnic and religious brethren against the secular government in Tajikistan. Hundreds of Tajik Islamist guerillas took refuge in northern Afghanistan, launching frequent cross-border raids against their homeland. Uzbek President Islam Karimov was also involved in encouraging various alliances of mujahideen against Massoud and his allies in Kabul, even to the point of attempting reconciliation between Hekmatyar and Dostum. Pakistan was also a major player in this complicated mess of politico-military strategy. Discouraged by the disunity among the Afghan parties leading up to and following the events of April 1992, the Pakistanis were vigorously attempting to unilaterally take control of the reigning chaos and force a settlement of the issues besetting Afghanistan. When officials in the government of Benazir Bhutto realized the uselessness of trying to influence Hekmatyar, Massoud, and the others, they began a search for a more unconventional solution to fill the power vacuum still present since the Soviet withdrawal (Rubin).

The answer to the dilemma of the Pakistanis came in the form of thousands of eager Sunni religious students in Pakistani *madrasas* (theological schools). These madrasas were under the domination of the ultra-conservative *Jamiat-i-Ulema* party, led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman. The students, or *Taliban*, a combination of Pakistanis and Afghan refugees, were taught fundamentalist political lessons, and were exhorted to revive the degraded state of Islam across the world. Both the Taliban and their ulema mentors were heavily involved in supporting the jihad against the Soviets. Many had even been mujahideen, but had become gradually distanced from the Peshawar leadership. They bitterly criticized the post-Soviet internecine warfare of the Afghan mujahideen, who they regarded as having squandered a tremendous victory against the

infidels granted by God. Angry at the perceived connivance of the West in this tragedy, the Taliban were a powder keg waiting to explode. In the hopes of redefining the future of Afghanistan to its own ends, the Pakistani government conveniently decided to provide the spark. General Naseerullah Babar, appointed Interior Minister by Bhutto, engaged in a campaign of active incitement of the Taliban "to provide the backbone of the Afghan Pushtoon resistance against the Afghan-Tajik regime… in Kabul. The idea was to create an effective countervailing force to the Kabul regime and force it to relinquish power to a Sunni Pushtoon group dependent on Pakistan" ("The Taliban are Coming"; 1-3). Allegedly aiding Babar in this task was a combination of ISI tactical support and Saudi financial assistance.

On November 1, 1994, the Taliban emerged from the shadows and made their presence known. When renegade tribal units captured a Pakistani aid convoy headed into Afghanistan, Taliban partisans seized the opportunity and "streamed across the border armed with new weapons" (Rubin). The students, taking advantage of the near total absence of political order, not only freed the convoy but also managed to easily conquer the city of Kandahar. Executing remaining political faction representatives in the city and confiscating weapons, the Taliban quickly clamped down firm order upon the city. They also strictly enforced their Sunni religious agenda upon the region, forbidding music, games, television, and "any representation of the human or animal form" (Marsden; 46). Moreover, women were forbidden to work and forced to wear an all-encompassing garment that hid them from public view. But despite these harsh measures, many welcomed the lawful order that the Taliban established in the wake of the bloody chaos that had ensued since the Soviet withdrawal. Many Afghanis were

simply tired of constant and unending bloody war. In this respect, the armed students adamantly declared their intention to "liberate" Afghanistan from factionalist tyranny and restore law and order. There was also a tremendous fear of the Taliban, who were imbued with much of the same religious fury that had possessed the early units of mujahideen. As the various mujahideen factions discovered, it was nearly impossible to defeat "a wave of men willing to martyr themselves for the cause" (Marsden; 47). Taliban recruits flung themselves without hesitation across minefields and through walls of machine gun fire. Out of both fear and respect, many of the mujahideen defected *en masse* to the advancing Taliban armies. Not all of these newfound allies were accepted graciously by the students. In February 1995, as the Taliban approached Kabul, the Shiite forces in control of the western suburbs invited the Taliban to take their positions. Though the Shiites were suspicious of the intentions of the Sunni Taliban, at the time they wrongly perceived Massoud as the greater threat. Generally intolerant of the Shi'i faith, the Taliban arrested their leader, Abdul Ali Mazari, and he mysteriously disappeared while in their custody (Marsden; 46-47). When the Taliban seized the predominantly Shiite city of Herat in September 1995, many residents desperately attempted to flee to Iran.

The weakened remaining mujahideen could not stop the blitzkrieg onslaught of the Taliban. On September 26, 1996, they marched into Kabul with little opposition, summarily executing Ahmedzai Najibullah. Between 1996 and 1998, fighting between Taliban forces and remaining mujahideen factions (under the leadership of Dostam and Massoud) ground to a near standstill. Though the Taliban were able to deal disastrous defeats upon the so-called "Northern Alliance" and even managed to seize their

headquarters at Mazar-i-Sharif during the summer of 1998, the Taliban still faced stiff resistance from their remaining adversaries. The grinding of the war to a halt frustrated many among the Taliban (who had anticipated a total victory) and had a distinct effect upon their military policies. Though previously known for their abstinence from marauding captured enemy territory, bitterness ate away at these convictions. In Kabul, Taliban troops went on house-to-house searches for suspected supporters of Massoud, dragging away a number of citizens to an unknown fate (Marsden; 50-52). Punishments were executed without judicial proceedings on hundreds of Afghanis alleged to have violated the Shari'a (Islamic law). However, the most egregious instance of brutality inflicted by the Taliban came during their angry conquest of Mazar-I-Sharif, when their forces killed between 5,000 and 8,000 people over a four day period. Resorting to methods that can only be described as medieval, Taliban troops went on an orgy of sadistic torture and murder directed against the local population: "Some were boiled or asphyxiated to death after being left crammed inside sealed metal containers under a hot August sun. In at least one hospital, as many as 30 patients were shot as they lay helplessly in their beds" (Colville; 8). The conquering soldiers left dead bodies where they were "as a stark warning to the city's remaining inhabitants. Horrified witnesses saw dogs tearing at the corpses, but were instructed over loudspeakers and by radio announcements not to remove or bury them" (Colville; 8). In the eyes of the Taliban, this unconscionably horrible scene was merely divine justice. These people had supported their enemies, and thus themselves were the enemy of God. Given their perceived treachery, no mercy would be afforded to them.

Afghanistan today lies in utter ruin, resembling an apocalyptic nightmare. The tyranny of the mujahideen has merely been replaced by the even more outrageous Taliban. Support for the notorious Afghan Arab terrorist Usamah bin Laden has left the nation almost entirely cut off from the world and suffering more than ever. Twenty years of horrifying warfare have not only devastated Afghanistan, but it has brought into question its very survival as a unified entity. After so much bitter conflict and hatred over ethnicity, religion, and politics, there is great room for doubt that national reconciliation can ever be reached. Alien ideologies of Marxism and radical fundamentalism have grasped the nation in a death-grip, nearly choking it to death. These extremist dogmas and their totalitarian progenitors have precluded any possibility of consensual political change. So much blood has been spilled that the culpability for the Afghan tragedy is, unfortunately, virtually irrelevant at this point. As much as their growth was spurred by Pakistani and outside Islamic influences, the Taliban are not an entirely an artificial creation. Rather, their flourishing power is directly the result of an ordinary people being subjected to the endless horrors of war, bombarded with persuasive propaganda, and desperate for hope in a land of misery and despair. The mindless brutality of the Taliban comes from the scars of a battered nation, hardened to absolute indifference at bloody carnage, and frantic to form a new political and social order for themselves. It is clear that the Soviet invasion did not create the problems of Afghanistan. However, the harsh and brutal war that followed was responsible for aggravating them to the point of explosion. The numerous parties that engaged themselves directly and indirectly in the war, including the U.S.S.R., the U.S., Pakistan,

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and others bear the ultimate terrible responsibility for the state of Afghanistan today, and what in essence was its total political and social destruction.

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