

**TO WHAT EXTENT WERE THE MUJAHEDDEEN DEPENDENT ON SUPPORT FROM PAKISTAN  
DURING THE AFGHAN SOVIET WAR (1979-1989)?**

EXTENDED ESSAY

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay will analyse the question: “To what extent were the Mujahedeen dependent on support from Pakistan during the Afghan Soviet War (1979-1989)?” The key lines of argument develop the ways in which the Mujahedeen were dependent on assistance from Pakistan, and also, the Mujahedeen’s dependence on aid from the USA. Finally, the view that the Mujahedeen were in actuality not reliant on foreign support and were a capable fighting force in their own right is considered. Both primary and secondary documents were used. The historians Sandy Gall, Ahmed Rashid and Lester W. Grau were evaluated in the analysis of this question as they promote contrasting perspectives on the question. The essay highlights the role of the Pakistani ISI in providing logistical aid to the Mujahedeen in terms of training and military assistance, and as a key conduit for supplies across their shared border. The USA’s role was also significant as they provided the most military and economic aid during the course of the war, and the Mujahedeen appeared to depend on this in their engagements with Soviet forces. In the later years of the war, the Mujahedeen relied on American weaponry, and in particular, the ‘Stinger missile.’ The aid provided by the USA intensified the war, and accelerated Soviet withdrawal. The strength of the Mujahedeen as a guerrilla force is also analysed. The Mujahedeen had its own strong leadership and ideology, and both were key in securing popular support and maintaining morale. In conclusion, it is found that the Mujahedeen could have waged a limited and protracted insurgency against the Soviets independently, but needed the support of Pakistan to sustain the intensity of their campaigns and were ultimately dependent on US aid to defeat the Soviet forces.

WORD COUNT: 288

## INTRODUCTION

The Afghan-Soviet War was a significant conflict at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a pivotal event in the final stages of the Cold War. The war broke out in 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on the basis of defending a fledgling communist regime. In response, the Afghan tribal leaders called for jihad against the Soviets and took up arms in an attempt to drive out the communist forces from Afghanistan. The use of guerrilla tactics, and abundant foreign aid led to the eventual victory of the Afghan Mujahedeen, the Islamic tribal rebels, in 1989. This victory would have crucial international implications. The defeat catalysed the collapse of the USSR and helped bring about the end of the Cold War. The civil war that followed victory in Afghanistan fragmented the country and fostered the rise of the Islamic fundamentalist militia, the Taliban.<sup>1</sup> The actions of this successor Taliban regime led to the most recent foreign invasion, this time by Western forces in 2001.<sup>2</sup> Today, the disunity of Afghanistan can be linked to the course of the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989) and the ultimate victory of Islamic fundamentalist groups. During the Afghan-Soviet war, foreign intervention by Pakistan as well as by the USA played a key role in the supply of military, economic and political aid, which allowed the Afghans to secure victory. Their dependence on their neighbour, Pakistan, which had similar ideology and shared a border with Afghanistan, was essential for the survival of the Mujahedeen during the course of the war.

Richard Tanter, a professor at the School of Political and Social Studies at the University of Melbourne argues that even today, following years of dependence during the Afghan-Soviet War, "Afghanistan has become so reliant on [Pakistan's] economic and military aid that it can no longer survive without it."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the question that will be analysed is: "To what extent were the Mujahedeen dependent on support from Pakistan during the Afghan Soviet War (1979-1989)?" The scope will be to analyse firstly, the Afghan's reliance on Pakistan and then compare and contrast this with their potential dependence on American aid; and finally, consider the independent strengths of the Mujahedeen.

## THE MUJAHEDDEEN WERE DEPENDENT ON PAKISTAN

The Mujahedeen were dependent on the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan during their war with the USSR between 1979 and 1989. The ISI was a conduit for billions of dollars supplied in economic aid from other foreign nations and provided training and arms to the Mujahedeen.<sup>4</sup> Their strong ideological and religious ties with Afghanistan meant that the Afghans trusted the aid they received from the ISI.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the ISI's distribution of weaponry was key in facilitating the Mujahedeen's campaigns.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY, USA: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2001), Page 13

<sup>2</sup> "Afghanistan Profile," BBC News, last modified June 19, 2013, accessed October 29, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12024253>

<sup>3</sup> *The World Today: The Full Story*, "What Now for Afghanistan?," ABC News, October 29, 2013, hosted by Martin Cuddihy, accessed November 12, 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2013/s3879089.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> A.Z. Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan* (Cornwall, Great Britain: MPG Books, 2005), Page 167.

<sup>5</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 2

<sup>6</sup> Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History* (New York, NY, USA: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2003), Page 108.

The Mujahedeen were specifically dependent on the Pakistani ISI as it played a pivotal role in training the guerrilla fighters. Between 1980 and 1983, the ISI established 78 training centres in Pakistan to train and supply the Mujahedeen with troops, including air defence gunners and saboteurs.<sup>7</sup> The results of this can be seen in the successful shelling attack made against the Soviets on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1983, when ISI-trained men, along with weapons supplied by Pakistani intelligence including 82 mm mortars, two RPG-7s, and fix-six antitank mines, were used to carry out the operation.<sup>8</sup> Sandy Gall, a British ITN journalist working in Afghanistan during the war states that, “as the war expanded, there was little doubt that the ISI influence over the Mujahedeen grew with it.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the ISI expanded their training camps and battalions throughout the war. The ISI Director of the coordination of the war, Brigadier Mohammed Yousaf claims that between 1983 and 1987, close to 80,000 Mujahedeen militants passed through ISI training courses.<sup>10</sup> In March 1982, Pakistan organised an airborne battalion, which searched villages for Soviet troops.<sup>11</sup> In addition, Pakistan organised training camps in Iran, Pakistan, Egypt and China and supplied 15,000 instructors and 50,000 trainees.<sup>12</sup> From these, 2,500-3,000 guerrilla fighters would graduate each month.<sup>13</sup> The leaders of the Mujahedeen had been born in Pakistani refugee camps, educated in Pakistani madrassas and had trained in military camps in Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Mujahedeen were dependent on Pakistan for the supplies of men, training and arms.

The Mujahedeen were also dependent on economic aid from Pakistan. In 1980, Pakistan’s President Zia appealed to President Carter to offer more than US\$400 million to the Mujahedeen.<sup>15</sup> In 1986, it cost US\$15-20 per kg to move supplies such as food, medical equipment and weaponry from Pakistan to North Afghanistan, totalling US\$1000 per mortar; a transportation cost which was funded 85% by the ISI in Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> Sandy Gall believes, “President Zia, in reality, ran the Afghan war.”<sup>17</sup> Gall’s firsthand experience in Afghanistan at the time of the war<sup>18</sup> allowed him to view events as they happened and assess the Mujahedeen’s dependence on Pakistani aid. He believed that the Afghan forces had been entirely dependent on Pakistan. This opinion differed significantly from the views of the Pakistani historian, Ahmed Rashid. However, Gall was working as a journalist, and may have experienced a limited number of units in the field. He would also not necessarily have

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<sup>7</sup> Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Kansas, USA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), Page 60

<sup>8</sup> Ali Ahmed Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, 1995 ed. (St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing Company, 2001), Page 113

<sup>9</sup> Sandy Gall, *War Against the Taliban: Why it all Went Wrong in Afghanistan* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2012), Page 12

<sup>10</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Page 199

<sup>11</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 288

<sup>12</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 60

<sup>13</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 60

<sup>14</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 23

<sup>15</sup> Gregory Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet War in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New York City, NY: Harper Perennial, 2009), Page 130

<sup>16</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (Cambridge, UK: Press Syndicate, 1989), Page 197

<sup>17</sup> Gall, *War Against the Taliban: Why it all Went Wrong in Afghanistan*, Page 12

<sup>18</sup> Gall, *War Against the Taliban: Why it all Went Wrong in Afghanistan*, Back Cover

knowledge of the role of the US at the time, unlike Rashid who would have had access to both US and Pakistani sources as a professional academic writing 15 years after the war.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the Mujahedeen were reliant on Pakistan as it controlled the flow of military supplies during the war due to the ethnic and religious ties that bound the two nations.<sup>20</sup> Their geographical proximity and shared border meant that containers of weaponry would be transported by the ISI to warehouses near Rawalpindi and Quetta in Pakistan before being sent to depots controlled by Mujahedeen groups in the border regions and cities of Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> It can be argued that the Mujahedeen depended on this to wage war against the Soviets. Between July and August 1979, medical equipment and radios were sent to the ISI to distribute to Afghan rebels.<sup>22</sup> These radios were then used on an attack on Soviet columns along the major southwest highway connecting Kabul to Ghazni and Kandahar.<sup>23</sup> Later on in the war, in October 1983, Brigadier Mohammed Yousaf, stated that “the entire planning of the war ... and the distribution of arms and supplies were the sole responsibility of the ISI and my office in particular.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, in 1985, the ISI systematically distributed foreign weaponry<sup>25</sup> including Chinese manufactured rockets,<sup>26</sup> and transported them to villages within the range of Soviet artillery posts.<sup>27</sup> This foreign equipment could not have reached the Mujahedeen were it not for Pakistan’s ability to distribute it. About 80% of the weaponry, which included mostly BShK machine guns and mortars, were sent to Mujahedeen commanders by the ISI.<sup>28</sup> The ISI itself even rewarded commanders for effective use of weapons against the Soviets.<sup>29</sup> Islamabad also allowed the Mujahedeen to set up base camps in its lawless Northwest Frontier Province, providing a discreet and key location for the rebel fighters to launch a series of attacks in 1985.<sup>30</sup> From the Pakistani border, the Mujahedeen launched 20 to 800 rockets a day, and between April 1985 and January 1987, they launched 23,500 shelling attacks on Soviet posts, which were organised by the ISI.<sup>31</sup>

## **THE MUJAHEDDEEN WERE RELIANT ON THE USA**

However, it could also be argued that the role played by Pakistan was less important as in reality, as the Mujahedeen were dependent on the substantial economic and military aid provided by the USA. Without American aid, Pakistan would have had far less aid to supply to the Mujahedeen, and the ISI would not have had funds to train the Afghan guerrilla

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<sup>19</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 284-304

<sup>20</sup> Amin Saikal and William Maley, *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey, USA: Yale University Press, 2002), Page 45

<sup>21</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of the Afghanistan*, Page 197

<sup>22</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, Page 46

<sup>23</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 49

<sup>24</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 107

<sup>25</sup> Adrian Hänni and Lukas Hegi, "The Pakistani Godfather: The Inter-Services Intelligence and the Afghan Taliban 1994-2010," *Small Wars Journal*, April 2, 2013, [Page 1], accessed May 14, 2013, doi:"http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-pakistani-godfather-the-inter-services-intelligence-and-the-afghan-taliban-1994-2010.

<sup>26</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 68

<sup>27</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 68

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Page 199

<sup>29</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Page 196

<sup>30</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 55

<sup>31</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 69

fighters. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor<sup>32</sup> states that despite CIA records showing that aid to the Mujahedeen only began after the Soviet invasion on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1979, President Carter had already signed for secret aid to be sent to the Afghans in July 1979.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the US gave considerable economic assistance. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1979, Carter authorised US\$500,000 worth of propaganda materials, radio and medical equipment, and cash to Afghan rebels<sup>34</sup> in what would be known as Operation Cyclone.<sup>35</sup> Charles Wilson, a member of the US House of Representatives and the main figure in leading congress into supporting the Mujahedeen stated in a speech to Congress in July 1980: The Afghan war was "the right war" and "US\$30 million is peanuts for this good war."<sup>36</sup> A.Z. Hilali, a Pakistani professor at the University of Peshawar and an expert in the Afghan-Soviet war notes Wilson was successful in getting the extra US\$90 million by July 1981.<sup>37</sup> In September 1981, Ronald Reagan's administration increased this sum and allocated a total of US\$3.2 billion for the Afghan resistance.<sup>38</sup> Donald L. Barlett, an American investigative journalist wrote that aid given to the Mujahedeen was one of the CIA's "longest and most expensive covert operations."<sup>39</sup> A CIA report dated May 1983 showed that assistance to Afghanistan amounted to US\$222 million in 1981.<sup>40</sup> The CIA report provides insight into the extent of US involvement in Afghanistan. As it is a recently declassified governmental document, it has value as an official record of its financial assistance. It highlights the magnitude of America's involvement, as well as the importance of the CIA's role in aiding the Mujahedeen. In total, the USA committed US\$4-5 billion between 1980 and 1992 in aid.<sup>41</sup> Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani historian who has particular expertise in the Afghan-Soviet War believes that the Mujahedeen were very much reliant on the USA. He argues "jihad took a new momentum [in Afghanistan] as the USA poured in money to the Mujahedeen."<sup>42</sup> His access to not only Pakistani, but also Afghan and American sources<sup>43</sup> allows him to gain multiple perspectives as he also has the benefit of hindsight, writing in 2001. However, due to the fact that significantly less Pakistani ISI declassified documents were available at the time of his research, his argument may focus primarily on CIA sources and this may lead to the emphasis on the USA's role in the war.

In addition, the Mujahedeen were dependent on the USA militarily. The US transported vast quantities of arms to the Mujahedeen, which allowed them to attain victory in several

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<sup>32</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The CIA's Intervention in Afghanistan," interview, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 15, 1998, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/BRZ110A.html>

<sup>33</sup> Brzezinski, "The CIA's Intervention in Afghanistan," interview.

<sup>34</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars* (New York, USA: Penguin Press, 2005), Page 46

<sup>35</sup> Nolan Kraszkiewicz, "Operation Cyclone (1979-1989): A Brief Analysis of US Involvement in the Afghan-Soviet War" (unpublished manuscript, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, October 1, 2012), Page 1, accessed September 19, 2013, [http://www.academia.edu/2897792/Operation\\_Cyclone\\_1979-](http://www.academia.edu/2897792/Operation_Cyclone_1979-1989_A_Brief_Analysis_of_the_U.S._Involvement_in_the_Soviet-Afghan_War)

[1989\\_A\\_Brief\\_Analysis\\_of\\_the\\_U.S.\\_Involvement\\_in\\_the\\_Soviet-Afghan\\_War](http://www.academia.edu/2897792/Operation_Cyclone_1979-1989_A_Brief_Analysis_of_the_U.S._Involvement_in_the_Soviet-Afghan_War).

<sup>36</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan*(Cornwall, Page 167

<sup>37</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion*, Page 167

<sup>38</sup> Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet*, Page 131

<sup>39</sup> Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, "The Oily Americans," *Time Magazine*, May 13, 2003, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,450997-2,00.html>.

<sup>40</sup> CIA, The Economic Impact of Soviet Involvement in Afghanistan, DDB-1900-32-83 (Wash. May 1983). Accessed November 13, 2013. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/us4.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, UNHCR

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY, USA: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2001), Page 13

<sup>43</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 284-304

turning point battles throughout the war. The CIA bought RPG-7 rocket grenade launchers, DShK 12.7mm machine guns and British Lee Enfield rifles from nations such as Greece and India and shipped them to the region to be supplied to the Mujahedeen.<sup>44</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski estimates that close to US\$3 billion worth of military aid was used to train and equip Afghan troops with weapons.<sup>45</sup> The USA agreed a military package spread over six years, selling 40 advanced F-16 fighter jets to the Mujahedeen in 1981,<sup>46</sup> along with arms, vehicles, satellite photographs, maps, radio equipment and advisors to train instructors on technical matters and the use of weaponry and equipment.<sup>47</sup> The impact of this assistance can be seen in the attack on Soviet forces in Gerdab on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1983.<sup>48</sup> This attack was successful due to the use of CIA weaponry, including SAM-7 missiles.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the war, Mujahedeen assaults were enabled by US material support, like in July 1984, when two Soviet tanks were destroyed using US guns in the Mahipar Raid.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, weapons were shipped to Afghanistan consistently. In 1984, a shipment of 100,000 .303 rifles were sent to the Mujahedeen.<sup>51</sup> A year later, in 1985, the Mujahedeen launched a series of successful ambushes using the .303 rifles against the Soviets, along with the direct assistance of Fred Ikle, the director of US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.<sup>52</sup> Ikle had flown American C-130s over Afghanistan and dropped weapons caches to Afghan commanders.<sup>53</sup> The US itself believed the Mujahedeen to be dependent on their support, as a CIA report dated November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1985 stated that it was essential to continue to aid the Mujahedeen throughout the war.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, grenade launchers, machine guns, and snipers supplied by the CIA were used to launch 10,000 ambushes between 1985 and 1987.<sup>55</sup> The US also trained the Mujahedeen in the use of modern weapons, including AK-47s, 82mm mortars and SAM-7 missiles, which were bought and delivered by the CIA to Afghanistan.<sup>56</sup> By 1988, the Mujahedeen had received an average of US\$100 million a month worth of arms, including tanks, heavy machine guns and 82mm mortars.<sup>57</sup> Some of these arms were used to destroy three highway bridges on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1988, which blocked Soviet communications lines.<sup>58</sup> Evidently, these weapons were the reason the Mujahedeen were able to match the Soviet's technologically advanced war machine.

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<sup>44</sup> Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet*, Page 132

<sup>45</sup> Brzezinski, "Good Guys Bad Guys," interview, George Washington University

<sup>46</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>47</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 107

<sup>48</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 113

<sup>49</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, Page 136

<sup>50</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 90

<sup>51</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 108

<sup>52</sup> T. Rees Shapiro, "Fred Charles Ikle, Reagan Defence Official, Dies at 87," *Washington Post* (Washington DC, USA), November 16, 2011, Obituaries, accessed November 12, 2013, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-16/local/35282581\\_1\\_war-plan-nuclear-arms-control-richard-perle](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-16/local/35282581_1_war-plan-nuclear-arms-control-richard-perle)

<sup>53</sup> Kirsten Lundberg, Ernest May, and Philip Zelikow, "1546.0 Politics of a Covert Action: The U.S., the Mujahideen, and the Stinger Missile" (unpublished manuscript, Harvard Kennedy School, November 9, 1999), Page 52, accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.case.hks.harvard.edu/casetitle.asp?caseNo=1546.0>

<sup>54</sup> CIA, Response to Request for Intelligence for Afghan Resistance, 1982-S-26553/DB-2C (Wash. 5 November 1982). Accessed November 13, 2013. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/us3.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 65

<sup>56</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 109

<sup>57</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion*, Page 168

<sup>58</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 175

Furthermore, some historians have seen the ‘turning point’ in the war for the Mujahedeen was the introduction of the ‘Stinger missile.’ On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1986, the USA introduced Stinger missiles, which could effectively shoot down Soviet helicopter gunships<sup>59</sup> and they incentivised the Mujahedeen by stating that each plane confirmed down by a Stinger would result in the commander responsible being given two more missiles.<sup>60</sup> The historian and political scientist, Alan Kuperman asserts that the Stinger missile was the single most important factor in hastening Soviet defeat.<sup>61</sup> The use of Stinger missiles by the Mujahedeen undermined the USSR’s air superiority.<sup>62</sup> Between 1986 and 1989, US sources believe that the Mujahedeen shot down 269 Soviet planes in 340 engagements.<sup>63</sup> By 1989, the use of the Stinger missiles by the Mujahedeen resulted in an estimated 79% kill ratio.<sup>64</sup> The theatre the Soviets had come to rely on had been nullified by this US supplied weapon.

The Mujahedeen also relied on US political influence to gain support from other foreign powers, specifically the Arab nations of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran, as well as China.<sup>65</sup> In 1979, Saudi Arabia channelled more than half a billion dollars to CIA accounts in Switzerland and the Cayman Islands, which was then used to fund Afghan rebels in the first year of the war.<sup>66</sup> The Americans pushed Saudi Arabia into giving US\$250 million annually,<sup>67</sup> and by the end of the war, the CIA had encouraged Egypt and Iran to contribute US\$10 billion, most of which was used to purchase weaponry, including DShK machine guns.<sup>68</sup> In 1980, Bill Casey, the CIA director, asked Egypt to provide Soviet-style weaponry<sup>69</sup> due to their large stockpiles of automatic weapons, land mines, grenade launchers and anti-aircraft missiles.<sup>70</sup> By 1981, the USA had used their political influence to contract the manufacture of ‘Soviet-style weapons’ in Cairo.<sup>71</sup> In addition, between 1981 and 1982, agreements were made between the United States and Saudi Arabia to enhance military cooperation in Afghanistan including an US\$8.5 million weapons deal in 1982.<sup>72</sup> The CIA also contracted the Chinese to manufacture rocket launchers and AK-47s.<sup>73</sup> These Chinese weapons were key in the success of raids such as those on the Mahipar Outposts in July 1984.<sup>74</sup> But, as historian Gregory Feifer has highlighted, aid from Beijing and Egypt was “all under the lead of the CIA.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the Mujahedeen were dependent on the vast economic and military assistance provided by the USA.

<sup>59</sup> "Timeline: Soviet War in Afghanistan," BBC News, last modified February 17, 2009, accessed July 16, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7883532.stm>

<sup>60</sup> Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, Page 196

<sup>61</sup> Alan J. Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S. Intervention in Afghanistan," *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 2 (1999): [Page 219], accessed November 13, 2013,

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/2657738?uid=3738032&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21102914461287>

<sup>62</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, [Page 136]

<sup>63</sup> Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S.," Page 29

<sup>64</sup> Kuperman, "The Stinger Missile and U.S.," Page 29

<sup>65</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>66</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 106

<sup>67</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion*, Page 167

<sup>68</sup> *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, UNHCR

<sup>69</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>70</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>71</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>72</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship: Soviet Invasion*, Page 167

<sup>73</sup> Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, Page 105

<sup>74</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 89

<sup>75</sup> Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet*, Page 132

## THE STRENGTH OF THE MUJAHEDDEEN

Nevertheless, the Mujahedeen were a capable guerrilla force and may not have been wholly dependent on either assistance from Pakistan or the USA. Though Ahmed Rashid stresses the role of the USA, the lack of declassified Mujahedeen and Pakistani intelligence sources could have led to him overstating the impact of the USA. It may be argued that foreign aid allowed for a swifter victory, but it was ultimately guerrilla warfare, tactical strength, leadership, and the role of their ideology that allowed the Afghan rebels to defeat the Soviets in a war of attrition. Historically, the tribal forces of Afghanistan had proven themselves a force to be reckoned with resisting the might of the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British made three attempts to conquer Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps the Mujahedeen did not need training and arms from foreign powers. During the war against the USSR in the 1980s, the Mujahedeen fought in small units, which gave them greater mobility and allowed them to ambush Soviet forces and bases.<sup>77</sup> Their combat groups consisted of only 15-50 men, a commander, and 10-20 riflemen.<sup>78</sup> On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980 in a night raid in the Alingar District capital, the guerrilla fighters used tactical night raid techniques to surprise Soviet militia groups.<sup>79</sup> They captured the town in one night, and they were able to seize large quantities of the Soviets' weapons.<sup>80</sup> The capture of this garrison in Alingar provided the Mujahedeen forces with 80 heavy weapons and 1,200 small arms, including a 76mm mountain gun, 76mm field gun, 82mm mortars and DShK heavy machine guns.<sup>81</sup> Thus, guerrilla tactics meant the Mujahedeen could acquire the arms they needed independently. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983, the Mujahedeen successfully cut enemy communications along the Paghman highway, again using ambush tactics at night.<sup>82</sup> This then led to a Soviet withdrawal back to Kabul.<sup>83</sup> Later that year during an ambush in Samarkhel on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1983, the Mujahedeen utilised the mountainous terrain, making it impossible for Soviet artillery to reach their firing positions.<sup>84</sup> Their familiarity with the terrain, and effective use of the environment provided the Mujahedeen with a key military advantage against the Soviets. In the Fall of 1984, the Mujahedeen surrounded Highway 4 and a ridge of hills adjacent, and ably destroyed three armoured vehicles while simultaneously defending the suburbs of Kandahar.<sup>85</sup> Their competence as guerrilla fighters was demonstrated throughout the war.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, many battles fought by the Mujahedeen were successful due to the way they fought, rather than the foreign aid weapons they used. For example, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1988, the Mujahedeen launched one of its largest attacks on the Soviets, known as Operation Arrow.<sup>87</sup> The attack resulted in the loss of 500 Soviet soldiers, the capture of 212 soldiers and 11 officers; and the

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<sup>76</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 11

<sup>77</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 58

<sup>78</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 58

<sup>79</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 121

<sup>80</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 121

<sup>81</sup> Michael Bhatia and Mark Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2008), Page 43

<sup>82</sup> Sahak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 153

<sup>83</sup> Sahak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 153

<sup>84</sup> Yasini, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 113-115

<sup>85</sup> Sultan Mohammed of Topkhana, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 303-304

<sup>86</sup> Yasini, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 112

<sup>87</sup> Wardak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 184

acquisition of pistols, assault rifles, DShK machine guns, RPG-7 grenade launchers and 82mm mortars.<sup>88</sup> Only 53 Mujahedeen were wounded and 18 killed.<sup>89</sup> Over all, small unit assaults led to 78% success in all of the Mujahedeen's ambushes in 1982, 1985 and 1987.<sup>90</sup> It was ultimately the rebels' guerrilla tactics that meant they could engage the Soviet forces.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, the Mujahedeen's leadership meant they were not dependent on foreign support. Their leaders were efficient organisers and capable motivators of the jihadi groups, as Ahmed Shah Massoud, a key Mujahedeen leader, claimed: "Only meticulous planning [by leaders] would enable the [Mujahedeen] to win."<sup>92</sup> In March 1982, the formation of the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan, formed by fundamentalist leaders increased its following, which allowed them to hold a numerical advantage over the Soviets.<sup>93</sup> As a result of this growth, they could attack multiple regions simultaneously.<sup>94</sup> Mohammed Wakil, another prominent Mujahedeen leader who coordinated a seven-day siege near Kabul from the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 1988, oversaw the destruction of five SU-25 aircraft, and claimed his success was due to keeping morale higher than that of the enemy.<sup>95</sup> In addition, Operation Arrow on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1988, led by Mohammed Wardak, was one of the Mujahedeen's most successful attacks during which Wardak argues that he directed the preparation, resupply and movement of Mujahedeen forces and it was his leadership that ensured results.<sup>96</sup> The Research Coordinator for the Foreign Military Office in Kansas and an expert on the Afghan-Soviet, Lester W. Grau, holds the view that the key to the Mujahedeen campaigns was the thorough planning and coordination by the Mujahedeen commanders.<sup>97</sup> Grau's collaboration with members of the Mujahedeen throughout his research is valuable, as he was able to gain insight into the perspectives of the Afghan fighters' who had experienced the war.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, his view is based on academic sources and first-hand accounts. However, this could also be viewed as a limitation, as Grau does focus his research on the Mujahedeen. Additionally, the lack of US or Pakistani sources in his citations suggests that he may neglect contrasting views regarding the Mujahedeen's reliance on foreign aid.

In addition, the Mujahedeen had territorial advantages over the Soviets. The terrain and the guerrillas' familiarity with it meant the war would be long a long war of attrition, and it enabled the guerrillas to maintain an insurgency without foreign assistance. The most powerful Mujahedeen units (around 85% of the total number) were concentrated in and around Kabul and in central, eastern and southern provinces of the country.<sup>99</sup> This meant they had access to enemy bases within ideal terrain for guerrilla tactics.<sup>100</sup> In 1983, the

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<sup>88</sup> Wardak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 184

<sup>89</sup> Wardak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 184

<sup>90</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 65

<sup>91</sup> Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet*, Page 202

<sup>92</sup> Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), Page 79

<sup>93</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 54

<sup>94</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 54

<sup>95</sup> Wakil, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 136

<sup>96</sup> Wardak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 183

<sup>97</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 185

<sup>98</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 65

<sup>99</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 57

<sup>100</sup> Grau and Gress, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower*, Page 57

Mujahedeen were able to capture the district capital of Sorubay, which allowed them to gain a political advantage, in that it gave them a degree of legitimacy among tribal leaders.<sup>101</sup> The Storming of Gula'j on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1985 and the destruction of the Bagh-E Mumtaz Brigade in 1988 were only possible due to the concentration of Mujahedeen fighters in the mountains.<sup>102</sup> By 1988, the Mujahedeen were on the offensive due to the control they had over key regions.<sup>103</sup> For example, in Herat they operated in and from the mountainous regions near the Soviet Union's border, which allowed them to attack incoming vehicles and then melt away into the hills and caves.<sup>104</sup>

Their unifying Islamic ideology of the Mujahedeen, and ingrained Afghan nationalism were important strengths that were not only independent of foreign interference but risked being undermined by Western involvement. The Mujahedeen were fighting a jihad, a religious war against an enemy that had a conflicting ideology to that of the majority of the population.<sup>105</sup> Their Islamic ideology resonated strongly with civilians and combatants alike.<sup>106</sup> Among scholars who believed the Russians were anti-Islamic in practice, the Mujahedeen could present themselves as its saviours.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the education of women and girls by the Soviets was regarded as anti-Islamic and was deeply unpopular with scholars and traditional tribal leaders who hoped to implement traditional practices within their own tribes.<sup>108</sup> As the war progressed, it was evident that Soviet soldiers fought to stay alive, while their enemy was fighting for its beliefs.<sup>109</sup> Nushin Arbabzadah, a member of the Mujahedeen believed that their military strength was due to the power of jihad and stated: "Islam is the sole language of political legitimacy."<sup>110</sup> The Mujahedeen led talks in madrassas within major cities, throughout 1985, in which they preached the implementation of Sharia law and the practices of the Quran.<sup>111</sup> This galvanised popular support, like, for example, on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1983, when the Mujahedeen had key support from the locals during their attack on the Paghman Highway.<sup>112</sup> Islamic committees conducted ideological propaganda against the Soviets to turn their supporters against the occupiers,<sup>113</sup> and extreme Islamic fundamentalism was taught in madrassas and training camps throughout Afghanistan.<sup>114</sup> Ideology, it could be argued, meant it was the 'duty' for Muslims to take up arms against the Soviets, shown through propaganda depicting jihad 'crushing' communism in Afghanistan,

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<sup>101</sup> Hemat, Toryalai, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 131

<sup>102</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerrilla Warfare*, Page 135

<sup>103</sup> Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, Page 61

<sup>104</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerrilla Warfare*, Page 298-300

<sup>105</sup> *The Afghan-Soviet War: Soldiers of God*, directed by Guy Desi, CNN, 2010, accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQBFXM1PIhM>

<sup>106</sup> Grau, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Page 21

<sup>107</sup> James Fergusson, *Taliban* (London, UK: Bantam Press, 2010), Page 21

<sup>108</sup> *The Afghan-Soviet War: Soldiers of God*

<sup>109</sup> Feifer, *The Great Gamble: The Soviet*, Page 202

<sup>110</sup> Nushin Arbabzadah, "The 1980s Mujahideen, the Taliban and the Shifting Idea of Jihad," *The Guardian* (United Kingdom), April 28, 2011, Middle East, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentsfree/2011/apr/28/afghanistan-mujahideen-taliban>.

<sup>111</sup> Jalali and Grau, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 3, 115

<sup>112</sup> Sahak, *Afghan Guerilla Warfare*, Page 153

<sup>113</sup> Grau, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Page 53

<sup>114</sup> Grau, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Page 53

while Afghan-Soviet leaders were shown as non-believers.<sup>115</sup> Fundamentalist movements during the war were concentrated throughout tribal areas and promoted the belief that the Soviets would crush Islam in Afghanistan.<sup>116</sup> Thus, it can be argued that it was ultimately ideology that became the most important force for the Mujahedeen. The momentum of jihad that indoctrinated the 'holy warriors', allowed them to maintain morale, gain popular support and effectively execute guerrilla warfare.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the Mujahedeen were not entirely dependent on Pakistan to engage in an insurgency against the Soviet occupation. They independently fought effective guerrilla campaigns and had committed to a long war of attrition. Their ideology united the Afghan tribal leaders and they were able to seize their own weapons from raids on Soviet bases. However, the Mujahedeen were significantly assisted by Pakistan as a key conduit for all foreign aid into Afghanistan and the Mujahedeen were trained and armed throughout the war by the ISI. It would have been a far more protracted war without their assistance. Over all, the ISI coordinated and developed the Mujahedeen into a formidable force. However, as the war developed, the Mujahedeen came to depend on the vast quantity of arms supplied by the Americans. It was ultimately the USA that provided the most substantial aid, both economically and militarily; and it was the introduction of the Stinger missile, which fatally undermined Soviet air superiority. Indeed, as the historian Ahmed Rashid states, by the final years of the war, "The Mujahedeen were to become the US-dependent, anti-Soviet shock troops."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Mujahedeen Propaganda*, illustration, Digital Poster Collection, Digital Poster Collection, accessed July 16, 2013, <http://www.digitalpostercollection.com/propaganda/1979-1989-soviet-afghanistan-war/mujahideen>

<sup>116</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 25

<sup>117</sup> Rashid, *Taliban*, Page 13

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