

## THE GENESIS OF GLOBAL JIHAD IN AFGHANISTAN

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The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979 turned out to be – contrary to the expectations of the Kremlin leadership – the largest, longest, and costliest military operation in Soviet history. The United States, in support of the Afghan resistance, waged an exceedingly elaborate, expensive, and ultimately successful covert war. Unlike other proxy wars in Africa and South America, for the first time ever, the United States supported a guerrilla army firing on Soviet troops. With Pakistan’s General Zia-ul-Haq as America’s foremost ally and Saudi Arabia as the principal source of funds, the CIA openly recruited Islamic holy warriors from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Algeria. Radical Islam went into overdrive as its superpower ally and mentor funneled support to the mujahiddin. In 1988 Soviet troops withdrew unconditionally and US-Pakistan-Saudi-Egypt alliance emerged victorious. A chapter of history seemed complete.

Appearances were illusory, however, and events over the next two decades were to reveal the true costs of the victory. Even in the mid 1990’s – long before the 9/11 attack on the United States – it was clear that the victorious alliance had unwittingly created a dynamic now beyond its control. The network of Islamic militant organizations created primarily out of the need to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan did not disappear after the immediate goal was achieved but, instead, like any good military-industrial complex, grew from strength to strength. It now exists with extensive transnational cooperation, coordination, and close ties. Indeed these non-state actors have repeatedly targeted their former sponsors, as well as other states and governments globally – Pakistan, India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, Indonesia, Russia, and the United States have been attacked in recent times.

### **Prologue To The Soviet Invasion:**

Building upon the crumbled edifice of European colonialism, the United States had emerged as a superpower at the end of the Second World War with vast global strategic and economic interests. Desolate and tribal, Afghanistan was of only marginal interest. Although there were some attempts to increase US influence through economic aid in the early 1950’s this dry, mountainous and barren land was understood to have no significant strategic or economic value. Indeed, there had been implicit acceptance of Afghanistan as belonging to the Soviet sphere of influence. For example, in the Eisenhower era, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had turned down Afghan requests for American arms. Moreover it placed high value upon Pakistan, a key US ally in the fight against communism, and saw no reason to offend it. Pakistan had – and still has – a simmering border dispute with Afghanistan over the legitimacy of the “Durand Line” by which British colonialism had rather arbitrarily divided the two countries.

Because of its geographical proximity, the Soviet interest in Afghanistan was greater. Aid to Afghanistan – motivated both by ideals of internationalist solidarity and the desire to increase political influence – became of considerable significance during the first decade of the Cold War. By 1956, Afghanistan possessed Mig-17s, Ilyushin-28s, and T-34 tanks. Suspicions of Soviet desires to install a socialist regime in Afghanistan were sometimes aired in the West. But, as a highly fragmented Islamic tribal society, Afghanistan appeared a highly unlikely candidate for socialism. Tribal law and traditions held sway, making it impossible for Afghanistan to function as a modern nation state. There was neither a proletariat, nor a feudal system in the usual sense. Even today cave-dwellers are common in Afghanistan. The subsistence economy provided no market of any interest.

Significant changes, with Soviet support, began occurring in the period of Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan who served as the prime minister of Afghanistan 1953-1963. The first Afghan university was established in Kabul, and in parts of the country a small start was made on public education. Daud's brother-in-law, Muhammad Zahir Shah, had been the King of Afghanistan since 1933. In 1963, he suddenly dismissed Daud. Ten years later, Daud staged a coup, returned to power, and abolished the monarchy. Zahir Shah was exiled to Rome (from where he eventually returned after the 9/11 attack). Daud was supported by some Army officers who later joined the Afghan Communist Party, and by Babrak Karmal, a leftist politician. (Six years later, when the Soviets invaded, they installed Karmal as President of Afghanistan.) By all accounts, the Kremlin leadership was entirely satisfied with the state of affairs in the early years of Daud's rule. Soviet influence grew, and the Soviet Union became Afghanistan's leading trading partner as well as its leading arms supplier.

By abolishing the monarchy, however, Daud had removed the one symbol of legitimacy that had held Afghanistan together and established the idea of seizing political power through a military coup. A small Marxist party, The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, under the leadership of Nur Muhammad Taraki, was to carry this tradition much further. From its inception the PDPA was bitterly divided into two factions, each named after its respective newspaper. Taraki's "Khalq" faction was made up mostly of Pushtuns from rural areas but it aspired to be a Leninist working-class party. Babrak Karmal's "Parcham" presented itself as a broad national democratic front ready to work within the system. Hafizullah Amin, an instructor at the Teachers' Training School in Kabul, had just received an M.A. at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York. He was described by some as "all charm and friendliness" but ultimately was directly responsible for the execution of probably 6000 political opponents. Babrak Karmal also had a devoted disciple – a former medical student named Najibullah. In each case, the disciple ousted his patron in order to assume the presidency of Afghanistan. Today they are all dead.

In 1978, despite bitter divisions, the PDPA was able to pull together enough unity to engineer a coup against Daud. The Soviet Union, which was watching the Shah of Iran's overtures to Daud, had become wary of Daud and saw a determined effort to draw Afghanistan into a US-tilted regional and economic sphere. It endorsed the coup but controlling this most unorthodox Communist Party was a nearly impossible task, because its leadership was seriously divided, with Karmal challenging Taraki for power from the very beginning. At the time of the coup, at least a third of the Afghan Army's officer corps was Soviet-trained. Nevertheless, nobody in power, in Afghanistan or outside it, foresaw the coup. Taraki boasted that the news of our revolution took both superpowers by complete surprise.

By a series of decrees, the PDPA set out to change Afghan society. To be sure, many of the reforms had honorable intent. For example, child marriages were declared illegal and the minimum marriageable age for girls was set at 16. The purchase and sale of women, sanctioned by tribal law, was deemed an offence, as were barter marriages. Female education was declared compulsory. These reforms were to end tragically, but the reason was not just the conservatism of Afghan society. From the very beginning, the PDPA pursued a disastrous course calculated to provoke resistance among the people. Taraki's name occurred repeatedly during a radio or TV broadcast with ludicrous titles appended to it, his house was turned into a "revolutionary shrine", and his shoes, pens, and inkpots were put on display. The traditional Afghan flag with colors of Islam was replaced with a red banner. Inexperienced and imperious bureaucrats from Kabul infuriated the peasants by enforcing clumsy "land-reform". It was almost as if the revolutionary leaders had decided, in the name of progress, to outrage every segment of Afghan society.

By the winter of 1978-79, Afghanistan was up in arms against the communists. In the fall of 1978, supported by Pakistan, the Islamic-fundamentalist guerrilla groups that had operated against Daud between 1973 and 1976 reentered Afghanistan with a force of about five thousand. There followed major armed rebellions, which the conscripts in the Afghan Army were unable to put down. Many of them, horrified at being asked to kill their own kin, joined the resistance, bringing their weapons with them. Units of the Afghan Army in the provincial capital of Asadabad defected en masse. In March of 1979, an uprising broke out in Herat, an ancient city near the Iranian border populated by Shiites, who were enthralled by the Khomeini revolution. These pro-Iranian rebels went from house to house looking for government collaborators and Soviet advisers. About a thousand people, including a number of Soviet advisers and their families, were killed; in reprisal, parts of the city were destroyed. In June of 1979, Tehran Radio broadcast the appeal of a senior ayatollah calling upon the people of Afghanistan to rise up against the Communists. The Shiite population of the Hazarajat region staged another uprising.

As detailed in Raja Anwar's seminal important book "The Tragedy of Afghanistan", Soviet efforts to regulate Afghan affairs succeeded only in worsening the situation. On September 4, 1979, Anwar reports, Taraki left for a visit to Havana, and in his absence

one of his supporters drew up plans to assassinate Amin. However upon Taraki's return from a visit to Moscow, Amin ordered tanks into all key points in Kabul and had Taraki arrested and confined to his quarters. Three weeks later, the founder of Afghanistan's revolutionary party was murdered, on Amin's orders. Though Amin moved quickly to placate the opposition, mostly by promising religious freedom, and though he was given increasing Soviet military help, he could neither put down the insurgency nor win wider political support. He turned to diplomacy to, relieve the pressure, courting both Pakistan and the United States. Yet at the same time he kept asking for more Soviet military aid. By July, there were fifteen hundred Soviet military advisers assigned to the Afghan Army, and a Soviet light-airborne battalion was deployed near Kabul for their protection. In late November, Amin asked the Soviets to bring in ten thousand soldiers to protect Kabul, so that he could free Afghan forces to attack the rebels in the countryside.

### **The Soviets Invade**

In December 1979, Soviet troops crossed the Afghan frontier and, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, forcibly entered the territory of a sovereign Muslim country. The overriding reason for the invasion was that the civil strife inside Afghanistan was viewed in the Kremlin as “a seat of serious danger to the security of the Soviet state” as Leonid Brezhnev put it two weeks later. Afghanistan has a thousand-mile border with the Muslim Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union, which are populated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen peoples that also inhabit Afghanistan. In 1978, there had been a riot of Tajiks against the Russians in Dushanbe, a town on the Soviet side of the frontier. Toward the end of 1979, the Khomeini revolution in Iran was stirring up Islamic nationalism in the entire region, and the taking of American hostages at the American Embassy in Tehran on November 4<sup>th</sup> increased the possibility of American military action against Iran within a few hundred miles of the Soviet border.

An extraordinary meeting of 35 Islamic countries met in Islamabad on January 27, 1980 to condemn the “Soviet military aggression against the Afghan people” and to urge that no Muslim country recognize the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan – the name given by the Soviet-installed government in Kabul. But, pointing to the disunity in the Arab world, and to its long-standing support for the Palestinian struggle, the Soviet Union blunted the criticism substantially. Four months later the denunciations began to fade. This was understandable because many Arab countries had strong military and economic ties with the Soviet Union.

Reactions in the United States were much harsher. Many US commentators believed the invasion was the first move in a grand strategic plan aimed at expanding Soviet power. President Carter quickly accepted the judgment of his national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, that the invasion was a threat to the rest of the region. Carter deemed the Soviet invasion as “the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War,” and on January 23, 1980, he announced a policy that came to be known as the Carter Doctrine: “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be

regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” US experts declared that Leonid Brezhnev had taken up Peter the Great's quest for a warm-water port and may next break through landlocked Afghanistan to eventually arrive at the Persian Gulf by invading either Pakistan or Iran. Afghanistan now became a metaphor for the Soviet Union's boundless appetite and unpredictable behavior.

### **America Organizes The Great Jihad**

History may well have taken a different course if the year of the Soviet invasion had not also been the year for presidential elections in the US. But with Ronald Reagan as the rival candidate, Jimmy Carter could not afford to appear soft on the Soviets. Angrily condemning Soviet expansionism, Carter withdrew the SALT II treaty from consideration by the Senate, announced that the United States would boycott the Moscow Olympics, and prepared a major military buildup, which included a Rapid Deployment Force, intended primarily for the Persian Gulf. The Administration requested approval for a C.I.A. covert operation in Afghanistan, and offered Pakistan four hundred million dollars in aid, which General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military ruler, dismissed as “peanuts” in an astute political move. Suddenly, Afghanistan had become the focal point of American global strategy.

From the day the Soviets invaded, American diplomatic strategy was to mobilize world opinion against the Soviets. American ire was aroused not out of sympathy for the particular victim but by the act of aggression itself and what it portended for the future. Afghanistan was doomed to be a domino. Officials like Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of defense, saw Afghanistan not as the locale of a harsh and dangerous conflict to be ended but as a place to teach the Russians a lesson. Such “bleeders” became the most influential people in Washington.

Given the highly conservative nature of Afghan society and the spontaneous resistance to the Afghan communist resistance, it did not need a genius to suggest that Islamic international solidarity could be used as a powerful weapon. The task of creating such solidarity fell upon Saudi Arabia, together with other conservative Arab monarchies. This duty was accepted readily and they quickly made the Afghan Jihad their central cause. It was a natural course of action to take. First, they felt genuinely threatened by the Soviets. Second, it shielded their patron and ally, the United States, whose direct confrontation with the Soviets would have been dangerous and unwise in a nuclear-armed world. But still more importantly, to go heart and soul for jihad was crucial at a time when Saudi legitimacy as the guardians of Islam was under strong challenge by Iran, which pointed to the continued occupation of Palestine by America's partner, Israel. An increasing number of Saudis were becoming disaffected by the House of Saud – its corruption, self-indulgence, repression, and closeness to the US. Therefore, the Jihad in Afghanistan

provided an excellent outlet for the growing number of militant Sunni activists in Saudi Arabia, and a way to deal with the daily taunts of the Iranian clergy.

Support for the Mujahideen also fitted perfectly with the Reagan Doctrine – a global package of widely publicized covert aid for anti-Communist guerrillas fighting the established governments in Nicaragua, Angola, Kampuchea, and Afghanistan. Now the United States decided to play in the global game of guerrilla politics and to do what the Soviets had done in the sixties and seventies when they had encouraged wars of national liberation. The US would henceforth do the same by sponsoring right-wing guerrilla movements in the eighties.

The US supplied support package had three essential components – organization and logistics, military technology, and ideological support for sustaining and encouraging the Afghan resistance.

With William Casey as the director of the CIA, the largest covert operation in history was launched after Reagan signed the “National Security Decision Directive 166”, calling for American efforts to drive Soviet forces from Afghanistan “by all means available”. US counter-insurgency experts worked closely with the ISI in organizing mujahideen groups and in planning operations inside Afghanistan. Indeed, it was evident to residents in Islamabad and Peshawar in the 1980’s that large numbers of Americans were present and involved in mysterious activities. But the most important contribution of the US was to create international linkages and bring in men and material from around the Arab world and beyond. The most hardened and ideologically dedicated men were sought on the logic that they would be the best fighters. Advertisements, paid for from CIA funds, were placed in newspapers and newsletters around the world offering inducements and motivations to join the Jihad.

At the initial stage of the US involvement, fears that the Soviet Union would react harshly against Pakistan prompted caution in supplying arms and military technology to the Afghan resistance. Therefore the strategy then was to minimize the appearance of American involvement and so preserve deniability. Indeed, in the early years, the CIA procured arms of Soviet manufacture captured by the Israelis during various Middle Eastern wars and even manufactured simulated Soviet arms in a clandestine factory. Some time into the war, however, the US began to take a much more overt position and US supplied technology played a key role in defeating the Soviet war machine in Afghanistan.

Perhaps the most decisive single weapon was the shoulder-fired ground-to-air missile known as the Stinger. From 1986 the Afghan mujahideen started receiving Blowpipe and Stinger ground-to-air missiles from Britain and the United States. The first shipment went exclusively to the fundamentalist wing of the resistance; that is, the three groups favored

by the ISI and headed by Hekmatyar, Khalis, and Rabbani. The new weapons made Soviet helicopters and low-flying air-support missions exceedingly vulnerable and, even today, helicopter and aircraft wrecks litter Afghanistan's landscape.

The decision to send Stingers was popular in Congress and seen as a way to hurt the Soviets. Some officials in the Pentagon, however, were aware of the risks that these sophisticated weapons channeled through the ISI could land up in other places. Indeed, only a few months after the first Stingers had been supplied, fragments of these missiles were found in the wreckage of two Iranian gunboats. A vigorous world arms market offered high prices for these missiles, and it is likely that many were sold off. The number of missiles supplied by the CIA is said to exceed 1500 and their recovery is still under way<sup>1</sup>.

The third component of the Reagan doctrine, emphasizing ideological support to the Afghan resistance, was implemented through extensive propaganda in the global mass media. US television channels lavished praise on the "brave fighters for freedom" and special documentary programs were produced with adaptations for Islamic countries. Less well known is the extraordinary effort that went into creating propaganda for Afghan children<sup>2</sup>.

An example is the textbook series underwritten by US grants through the mujahideen-operated "Education Center for Afghanistan" in the 1980's. These textbooks sought to counterbalance Marxism through creating enthusiasm in Islamic militancy. A third-grade mathematics textbook, for example, asks the following question:

One group of mujahidin attack 50 Russian soldiers. In that attack 20 Russians are killed. How many Russians fled?

Another example from a fourth-grade mathematics textbook poses the following problem:

The speed of a Kalashnikov bullet is 800 meters per second. If a Russian is at a distance of 3200 meters from a mujahid, and that mujahid aims at the Russian's head, calculate how many seconds it will take for the bullet to strike the Russian in the forehead

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<sup>1</sup> During and after the US offensive against Al-Qaida forces in Afghanistan, US agents sought to buy back these shoulder-fired missiles. Even though their internal batteries have overrun their shelf-life, they continue to constitute a danger to US aircraft. The local arms industry in Darra is said to have found a way to revitalize the Stingers. According to Pakistani newspaper reports, several Stingers have recently been bought back and the going rate is said to be around \$50,000 a piece.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Craig Davis in *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2000. The author, who was a doctoral candidate at Indiana University, conducted fieldwork in Afghan education in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 1999-2000. The examples quoted in the present essay are from his work.

The quotes above are taken from children's textbooks published under a \$50 million grant from the United States Agency for International Development that ran from September 1986 through June 1994 and was administered by the University of Nebraska at Omaha. According to Craig Davis, the UNO program staff chose to ignore the images of Islamic militancy in the children's textbooks for the first five years of the program because "the University of Nebraska did not wish to be seen imposing American values on Afghan educators".

US-sponsored textbooks, which exhort Afghan children to pluck out the eyes of their enemies and cut off their legs, are still widely available in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some in their original form<sup>3</sup>. Years after they were first printed, they were approved by the Taliban for use in madrassas.

### **Pakistan Plays The Key Role**

In the decade 1979-1989 Pakistan became the front-line state in fight against communism. But it is important to realize that Pakistan's involvement in organizing the Afghan Islamic resistance dates much before the Soviet invasion of 1979. In 1973, when Daud, a Pushtun, took over the government in Kabul for the second time, he renewed encouragement to the Pushtuns of Pakistan to secede and join their blood brothers under the Afghan flag. At that point, the government of Pakistan fought back by organizing the Pushtuns into a guerrilla movement to harass the Afghan government. For fifteen years, two very different Pakistani governments, the civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq, used the Afghan resistance first as a way of exerting pressure on Kabul, then as a means to strengthen the often wavering American commitment to Pakistan. The more the United States involved itself in the Afghan cause, the more Pakistan would emerge as the indispensable staging area for the fight against Communism, and the more secure the flow of American aid to Pakistan would be.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, with headquarters in Islamabad, was charged with distributing the weapons. This was part of the bargain – in fact the part that the US profoundly regrets today – which was the most crucial in determining the character and composition of the Afghan resistance. Throughout the Soviet occupation, the ISI gave only token aid to the Pushtun tribes identified with Zahir Shah even though they were the most important tribes. Zahir Shah himself was not allowed to come to Pakistan to organize Pushtun resistance forces under his banner, which he attempted to do on several occasions. Pakistan decided which groups in the Afghan resistance got the \$3 billion that the United States and its friends poured in. Most of that \$3 billion went to Islamic fundamentalist groups that represented a tiny minority of Afghans but were favored by the ISI. Pakistan was looking for trusted collaborators who would help them to establish a Pakistan-oriented client state in Kabul after the war in order to realize Zia's

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<sup>3</sup> As recently as the time of this conference (Nov 2002) books with a similar content continue to be used in some schools in Islamabad.

dream of “strategic realignment”<sup>4</sup> They wanted to make sure that no U.S. guns or money went to Pushtuns who might try to get back the lost Pushtun tribal areas that now make up the Northwest Frontier province of Pakistan. All training camps were under direct control and operated by the ISI. Years after the Afghan war was won and the Soviets defeated, these camps would be used for training jihadists to fight in Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Philippines, Russia, and the United States.

By 1985 the Soviets were in bad trouble militarily. They realized that they had blundered into a situation that offered no respite and offered to withdraw without a political settlement. The switch in the Soviet position provoked an immediate switch in the position of Pakistan that hitherto had only demanded a Soviet withdrawal. Like the “bleeders” in Washington, Pakistani military and intelligence officials were in no mood to let go of a windfall that had brought them immense power, privilege, and money. It therefore became crucial for them to seek means for avoiding a settlement. Indeed, Zia-ul-Haq considered any kind of deal as a betrayal of Pakistan. He spoke bitterly to newspaper editors in Islamabad. “America and Russia have reached an understanding” he said. “By brokering in coal, we have blackened our face.” In the absence of a coalition government including the Mujahideen, refugees, and the ruling PDPA, he said, “Soviet withdrawal would only lead the country into chaos, bloodshed, anarchy, and civil war.” In such a situation, he claimed that millions of refugees in Pakistan would resist being returned to their homes. But, in fact, these were tactical ploys – Zia had a grand design that envisioned a different concept for Pakistan<sup>5</sup> and refused to be distracted.

In 1987, the Afghan government of Najibullah extended the olive branch to Pakistan, declaring a unilateral ceasefire and offering a government of national unity. This was rejected. Certainly, this rejection was a blow to Mikhail Gorbachev who was now intent on withdrawing from the Afghan quagmire. Nevertheless, Gorbachev was undeterred and the Russians withdrew unconditionally.

### **Some Luminaries Of The Afghan Jihad**

Months after the Soviet invasion, the US had been pressing hard upon Arab governments to get more involved in the Afghan situation. President Anwar Sadat readily complied, sending the growing Islamic resistance weaponry and military advisers. This act emboldened Islamists in Egypt who, together with leftists, had hitherto been suppressed by the government. These Egyptian Islamists were to form the core of a cohesive Arab

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<sup>4</sup> This notion of achieving “strategic depth” has long been espoused by key Pakistani generals including, Akhtar Abdur Rahman (killed along with Zia), Hamid Gul, and Mirza Aslam Beg. This, in fact, was the *raison d’etre* for Pakistan’s unstinting support for the Taliban until 9/11.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with an American journalist Zia said, “All right, you Americans wanted us to be a front-line state. By helping you we have earned the right to have a regime in Afghanistan to our liking. We took risks as a front-line state, and we won't permit it to be like it was before, with Indian and Russian influence there and claims on our territory. It will be a real Islamic state, a real Islamic confederation. We won't have passports between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It will be part of a pan-Islamic revival that will one day win over the Muslims in the Soviet Union, you will see.”

movement based in Afghanistan. The CIA actively sought volunteers from Muslim countries across the globe to fight the Soviets, emphasizing Islamic solidarity together with pledges of full financial support. Pre-occupied with a need to bleed the Soviets as much as possible, American officials rarely paused to think of the doubtful qualities of the individuals they had chosen to support. Had they chosen to listen to what the seven resistance groups in Peshawar were openly saying during the course of the Afghan Jihad, their enthusiasm could have been considerably dampened.

*Osama bin Laden* was among the first Arabs to go to Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion. It was a turning point in his life. Speaking to an Arab journalist, he said “I was enraged and went there at once” and added that “one day in Afghanistan was like praying one thousand days in a mosque”. He was appalled at the chaos, disunity, and lack of clear objectives. Although there does not appear to be truth to a frequently made allegation that bin Laden was recruited by the CIA, he did undoubtedly benefit from CIA assistance in establishing a recruitment drive that, over the next several years, would bring thousands of Arab fighters into Afghanistan. He met the expenses from his own funds – derived from a vast construction empire in Saudi Arabia – and set up training camps. The Ma’sadat Al-Ansar became the main base for training Afghan mujahideen. His close links with the ISI greatly weakened after the debacle in the battle for Jalalabad in March 1989, just shortly after the Soviet withdrawal<sup>6</sup>

*Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri* and *Ahmad Shawqi al-Islambuli* were among the first Egyptians to arrive in Afghanistan. Zawahiri was an Egyptian pediatrician who became Osama’s second-in-command and a dedicated commander. Islambuli too was a hard-core fundamentalist and brother of Khalid al-Islambuli, who later assassinated Sadat. Both men eventually became top-leaders of the Al-Qaida network.

*Gulbadin Hekmatyar* was a young engineering student at Kabul University in 1973 when he was contacted by a Pakistani official, Naseerullah Babar, who later became Minister of the Interior under Benazir Bhutto and is credited with creating the Taliban as a political force. Hekmatyar came from an Afghan rural-tribal background. Contact with modernity at Kabul University changed him – as happens not infrequently when East meets West – into a hard-line Islamist. This made him a Pakistani favorite and a major recipient of C.I.A. aid although he was also well known for his outspoken contempt for the United States. He declared that he would not stop fighting until a fundamentalist order in Afghanistan was established, and if Pakistan closed its doors then he would continue the fight from Iran. After being elected chairman of the alliance of resistance groups in Peshawar, he declared plans to liberate the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. After the Russians left, Pakistan picked Hekmatyar to be its man in Kabul, but he had little popular support because his forces had lobbed rockets and artillery shells at the beleaguered city for months. He was dropped when the Taliban appeared on the scene. When the Taliban were destroyed by the American offensive he tried hard to fight his

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<sup>6</sup> Osama was extremely angry and convinced that the ISI had drawn the mujahideen into needless slaughter by deliberately misinforming them about the strength of Afghan government troops. But, General Asad Durrani, a former Director General of the ISI, emphatically denied this during our recent conversation on this subject and, instead, put the blame on the lack of organizational discipline of the mujahideen.

way back into the political scene but he seems to have lost out and is currently either in Iran or Peshawar.

*Burhannudin Rabbani*, a graduate of Al-Azhar University in Cairo was another favorite of the ISI because of his close integration into the infrastructure of Islamic movements such as the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen and Muslim Brotherhood. He was particularly influenced by the writings of Hasan-al-Bana and Sayyid Qutb who called for violent overthrow of governments in Muslim countries to establish a true Islamic state. Rabbani considered both the US and the Soviet Union as sworn enemies of Islam and opposed to Iranian and Afghan revolutions. Thousands of Kabul residents were killed in the fighting between pro-Rabbani and pro-Hikmatyar forces after the Soviet withdrawal and the overthrow of Najibullah.

*Younis Khalis*, a theologian of the stern Wahabi tradition and a graduate from a Deobandi madrassa was ideologically close to Rabbani but subsequently split and formed the Hizb-e-Islami. In an interview Khalis told Eqbal Ahmad that he went to Pakistan in 1973 to organize resistance forces to fight Daud, whom he considered a dangerous modernist, even a Communist.

*Ismail Khan*, the warlord governor of Herat, and a high-ranking member of the Jamiat-I-Islami, is accused of butchering and torturing thousands. His claim to fame is that, during the Soviet occupation he refused to fire on a crowd and, instead, turned his guns on to the Soviets killing over 350 men and their family members. He is currently with Hamid Karzai's government and considered a pillar of support by the US. He also maintains close relations with Iran.

Today the mujahideen leaders are condemned universally as murderers and thugs but it shall remain a historical fact that these very men had been celebrated as heroes in the US media. TV cameras have recorded for posterity the day when Ronald Reagan feted them on the lawn of White House, lavishing praise on "brave freedom fighters challenging the Evil Empire" and claiming that there were "the moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers [of America]".

### **Fathering Global Militant Islamic Revivalism**

Why did the Afghan jihad succeed when so many other initiatives to promote Muslim unity (e.g. revival of the Caliphate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) failed? In large part, this was because of a gradual but fundamental change in Muslim attitudes towards the world around them. Islamic fundamentalism simply did not exist until approximately 30 years ago as a political force. Today many important Muslim leaders are fundamentalists but, looking back at the last century, there was not even one! Turkey's Kemal Ataturk, Algeria's Ahmed Ben Bella, Indonesia's Sukarno, Pakistan's Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Iran's Mohammed Mosaddeq all sought to organize their societies on the basis of secular values.

It took barely a generation or two for the nationalist period to be cancelled out by rising religious fervor. The reasons are complex<sup>7</sup> but one truth stands out – the imperial interests of Britain, and later the United States, feared independent nationalism. Anyone willing to collaborate was preferred, including the ultraconservative Islamic regime of Saudi Arabia. In time, as the Cold War pressed in, independent nationalism became still more intolerable. In 1953, Mosaddeq of Iran was overthrown in a CIA coup and replaced by Reza Shah Pahlavi who faithfully served US economic and political interests. Again, for economic motives, Britain targeted Nasser while Indonesia's nationalist president Sukarno was replaced by Suharto after a bloody CIA-led coup that left hundreds of thousands dead.

Secular, nationalist governments all over the Muslim world started collapsing. Pressed from outside, corrupt and incompetent from within, they proved unable to defend national interests or deliver social justice. They began to frustrate democracy and dictatorships flourished. These failures left a vacuum that Islamic religious movements eventually grew to fill. The theoretical basis for such movements had been laid in the late 1950s by Maulana Abul Ala Maudoodi of Pakistan, Saiyyid Qutb of Egypt, and later by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Theirs was a call to arms, to stop the decay of Muslim civilization and values, and to return to the Golden Age of early Islam. But their message was largely ignored until the turn of events suddenly made them relevant.

The Iranian revolution was the first milestone in forging a strong Islamic militancy. Its impact would have been still greater but for Iran's Shia character. Soon thereafter General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq seized power and ruled Pakistan for eleven years during which he strove to Islamize both state and society. In Sudan an Islamic state arose under Jaafar al-Nimeiry wherein amputation of hands and limbs was sanctioned. Then, in 1982 the PLO was decisively routed by the Israelis and forced out of Beirut. This largely secular organization was subsequently eclipsed by Hamas, a fundamentalist Muslim movement. Every secular government in Muslim countries was increasingly challenged from within by Islamic forces.

Although Muslim frustration kept growing, the anger was undirected and unable to generate a coherent path of action. The real breakthrough came when the Afghan jihad pitted Sunnis against communist infidels and gained full support from the world's most powerful nation, the United States. Its superb organizational skills, massive human and technical resources, and single-minded dedication to anti-communism enabled it to create potent and unified Islamic entities. No 20<sup>th</sup> century Muslim ideologue could even have dreamed of such spectacular success. The global jihad industry had finally come into its own.

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<sup>7</sup> For one analysis of the Muslim world's predicament with science and modern thought, see "Islam and Science – Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality", Pervez Hoodbhoy, Zed Books, London, 1991.

At least until 11 September, US policy makers were unrepentant, even proud of their winning strategy. A few years ago, Carter's U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the key players and "bleeders" of the time gave an interview to the Paris weekly *Nouvel Observateur*. He was asked whether in retrospect, given that "Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today", US policy might have been a mistake. Brzezinski promptly retorted:

*What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?*

What Brzezinski had not quite calculated was that his "stirred up Moslems" wanted to change the world. And in this they were to succeed beyond all doubt.

### Acknowledgment

My perception of events in Afghanistan was entirely shaped by Eqbal Ahmad, my mentor and friend. This essay is unoriginal – it owes heavily to his published and unpublished works, and even more to his lectures, thoughts, and the close interactions we had over decades. His extraordinary depth of political analysis and understanding of world events was unparalleled among scholars of the subcontinent. His death on 11 May 1999 left a deep, permanent void in the lives of many.

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