

Effects of the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan on Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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In April of 1978, a Soviet-supported coup overthrew the Afghan government and established a communist regime. By 1979 the new communist government began to falter, so the Soviet Union sent troops to prop up the loyal communist regime and protect its investments in Afghanistan.¹ The USA responded by providing support through Pakistan to a collection of insurgent groups, known as the mujahideen, who opposed the Soviet-Afghan government. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan had countless repercussions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including many casualties, vast devastation of the land and cities in Afghanistan, the creation of a large group of refugees, the growth of Afghanistan's opium industry, an increase in Pakistan's power and government corruption, and the rise in power and popularity of extremist Islamic groups.

The Soviet invasion devastated the people and land of Afghanistan. Over a million Afghans were killed in the war, of whom the overwhelming majority were civilians.² As a result of the atrocities of the communist forces, around six million Afghans fled the country, most to Pakistan and Iran. Many people also moved from the Afghanistan countryside into the cities, with over a million people entering the capital city of Kabul.³ By the middle of the 1980s, a third of the country was living as refugees in Pakistan and Iran.⁴ The Afghan refugee population caused problems in Pakistan. Food shortages were blamed on refugees smuggling grain to Afghanistan, where it was more valuable.⁵ The refugees also brought 2.5 million animals into Pakistan, who damaged the land through overgrazing. Additionally, severe deforestation caused by refugees gathering firewood in Pakistan's mountainous regions caused destructive landslides.⁶ Mujahideen bases in Pakistan also made the country a target for communist attacks, with almost six thousand people killed by Soviet attacks in Pakistan.⁷

The war resulted in widespread destruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure and economic potential. By the end of the turmoil following the Soviets' exit, 70% of Kabul

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Soviet invasion of Afghanistan", accessed December 09, 2014.

² Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 187.

³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵ A.Z. Hilali. "The costs and benefits of the Afghan War for Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 298-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

had been destroyed.⁸ In the countryside, the Soviet's strategy was to starve the mujahideen by burning crops, killing herds, and dropping landmines to prevent farming.⁹ The Soviets used landmines that were designed to maim rather than kill so that the mujahideens' resources would be drained by caring for the wounded. Many victims of Soviet landmines were children who mistook the mines for toys.¹⁰ The extensive use of landmines continued to hurt Afghanistan long after the USSR's retreat; even a decade later, four thousand people were killed each year by landmines placed during the Soviet occupation.¹¹

The broad distribution of Soviet landmines—together with the destruction of irrigation systems—forced peasants to increasingly cultivate opium poppies. Poppies were chosen because they are a lucrative cash crop, resistant to drought, and can be grown on small patches of mountainous land beyond the reach of the communist government. During the Soviet occupation, opium production quadrupled. By the end of the war, Afghanistan was producing 75% of the world's opium.¹² During this time, the Pakistani trade of Afghanistan-grown drugs earned \$4 billion a year, surpassing all of Pakistan's combined legal exports. In only five years, the influx of drugs caused the rate of drug addiction in Pakistan to triple. Now, in 2016, 3.5 million Pakistani residents are addicted to drugs—out of a population of 200 million.¹³ The sale of opium provided funding for rural warlords who rose to power beyond the control of the communist government.¹⁴

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and America's response greatly affected Pakistani politics. When the USSR entered Afghanistan, the US began providing massive amounts of money and weapons to Pakistan and to the mujahideen through the Pakistani government. In 1981, the US gave Pakistan \$3.2 billion dollars in military aid¹⁵, and by the end of the 1980s, Pakistan received more than \$600 million annually, making it the

⁸ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 203.

⁹ Ibid.,184.

¹⁰ Ibid., 184.

¹¹ Ibid., 185.

¹² Ibid., 204.

¹³ A.Z. Hilali. "The costs and benefits of the Afghan War for Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 302.

¹⁴ Ibid.,204.

¹⁵ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 179.

second largest recipient of US aid.¹⁶ The president of Pakistan at the time, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, was a military dictator who suppressed political opposition, destroyed national institutions, and Islamized Pakistan's legal code. Despite his authoritarian rule, Zia was propped up as a legitimate ruler by financial and military aid from the US.¹⁷ The inflow of money was not, however, used effectively to develop Pakistan. American aid increased corruption in Pakistan as officials misused the money and sold weapons on the black market.¹⁸ Much of the aid was wasted on purchasing foreign goods rather than improving infrastructure. Corruption became so bad in the period after the war that over twenty percent of Pakistan's GDP was lost to corruption.¹⁹ Like lottery winners who go bankrupt, Pakistan's debt grew to half the size of its GDP by the end of Zia's reign.²⁰

The invasion also allowed Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons. Before the Soviet invasion, Pakistan tried to become a nuclear power, but because they did not have proper safeguards in place, America tried to dissuade them with an embargo on aid. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, however, America wanted Pakistan as an ally in the region and decided to end the embargo and give Pakistan billions of dollars of aid previously withheld. Consequently, Pakistan produced nuclear weapons by 1988, which provided Pakistan with a powerful deterrent against India's superior military and increased Pakistan's influence in regional affairs.²¹

In Afghanistan, the invasion and withdrawal of the Soviet forces ushered a surge of radical Islam and left a country shattered between numerous warring factions, creating the environment in which the Taliban soon rose to power. When Soviet troops initially entered Afghanistan, the insurgent opposition was pitched as a holy war; the term "mujahideen" means "those who wage jihad."²² Twenty-five thousand Islamic fighters came from over fifty nations to fight with the mujahideen. Many of these men were

¹⁶ A.Z. Hilali. "The costs and benefits of the Afghan War for Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 295-6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 301; Lawrence Ziring. *Pakistan: At the Concurrent of History*. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications. 2003), 202.

¹⁸ Ibid., 301-2.

¹⁹ Feisal Khan. "Corruption and the Decline of the State in Pakistan." *Asian Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 2 (2007): 224.

²⁰ A.Z. Hilali. "The costs and benefits of the Afghan War for Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 306.

²¹ A.Z. Hilali. "The costs and benefits of the Afghan War for Pakistan." *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 292-3.

²² Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 171.

criminals and extremists released under the condition that they fight against the Soviets, and as a result, they made their groups more radical.

During the Soviet occupation, America and Pakistan increased disunity in Afghanistan by supporting many competing mujahideen factions and even gave preference to the most radical group, the Hezb-i-Islami, because they believed its leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was the best military commander.²³ Hekmatyar, however, along with the other mujahideen leaders supported by America and Pakistan, often fought among themselves, and none were broadly popular within Afghanistan. A contemporary poll reported that most Afghan refugees preferred the exiled Afghani king, Mohammed Zahir, to any of the mujahideen leaders. Pakistan, however, barred Zahir from returning to command a group.²⁴ All this left Afghanistan bitterly divided, so in 1988 when the Soviets forces decided to withdraw from Afghanistan, “an internal political solution . . . seemed unattainable.”²⁵ As the USSR retreated, Pakistan and Afghanistan met to decide the terms of the end of the war. The mujahideen, however, were excluded from these talks and thus refused to abide by its decisions. This left Afghanistan’s internal conflicts unresolved, and fighting continued.²⁶

The communist government was left in power after the Soviets withdrew but collapsed within several years.²⁷ By the mid-1990s, Afghanistan was left “as a phantom image on the world map” with no central government—the region consumed with fighting between factions.²⁸ During this period, Pakistan “fostered the [Taliban’s] existence,” helping their rise to power after all other countries—even Saudi Arabia—had condemned their cruelties. Pakistan hoped to control the Taliban for their purposes, but their plan backfired: the Taliban further agitated extremists in the region.²⁹

²³ Ibid., 173.

²⁴ Ted Carpenter. “The unintended consequences of Afghanistan.” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 1 (1994): 76.

²⁵ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 170.

²⁶ Shane Smith. “Afghanistan after the Occupation: Examining the Post-Soviet Withdraw and the Najibullah Regime it Left Behind, 1989–1992.” *The Historian*. 76, no. 2 (2007): 312.

²⁷ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 194.

²⁸ H. Sidky. “War, Changing Patterns of Warfare, State Collapse, and Transnational Violence in Afghanistan: 1978–2001.” *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 4 (2007): 870.

²⁹ Roberts, Jeffery. *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan*. (London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 236.

When the communist government fell, Afghanistan was left under the rule of warlords and "sectarian fanatics," making it an ideal "breeding ground for terrorists."³⁰ The war brought Osama Bin Laden from Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan, along with his large financial resources that were used to fund terrorism.³¹ The expulsion of the Soviet army also gave confidence to Islamist extremists in subsequent conflicts with the US. In 1998 Osama Bin Laden claimed that Afghanistan was responsible for the defeat of the Soviet military and the collapse of the USSR. In his mind, if a rag-tag group of poorly armed Afghan troops could bring down one superpower, the same could be done to the United States.³² It is in these conditions of conflict and radicalized Islam that the Taliban swept into power in Afghanistan. Often they were even welcomed in the hope that they would bring stability to the region.³³

As the evidence has shown, the Soviet Invasion and the responses by America and Pakistan had many devastating effects on Pakistan and Afghanistan. The conflict caused many civilian deaths, the displacement of Afghan refugees, a surge in opium production, increased corruption in Pakistan, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Pakistan, and the rise of radical Islam in the region.

³⁰ Ibid., 76.

³¹ H. Sidky. "War, Changing Patterns of Warfare, State Collapse, and Transnational Violence in Afghanistan: 1978–2001." *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 4 (2007): 863; Ted Carpenter. "The unintended consequences of Afghanistan." *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 1 (1994): 76.

³² Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. (New York: Facts On File Inc., 2007), 225.

³³ Roberts, Jeffery. *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan*. (London: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 236.

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