

SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR AND PAKISTAN'S ROLE

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the consequent USSR-Afghan War provided an opportunity to Pakistan to counter the Indian and Russian influences in the country, and thus Pakistan tried to install a Pak-friendly regime in Afghanistan. Despite the war in Afghanistan was termed as a 'holy' war against the 'Russian infidels', it helped Pakistan to settle a score with the traditional Afghan regimes who raised the border issues with Pakistan. Thus, the decision of Pakistan to support Afghan Mujahideen was a strategic one, and it raised the status of Pakistan in the global world as a strong and strategic country that was equipped strategically to handle critical global issues capably. Throughout the Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan fought a proxy war against the USSR by aiding the Afghan Mujahideen fighting against the Russian invaders. Being a close neighbour to Afghanistan, Pakistan's sovereignty was at stake constantly as an independent country. Pakistan was thus successful in forcing the withdrawal of the so-called superpower from Afghanistan, keeping its sovereignty intact and restoring peace and stability in the region.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, CIA, Inter-Services Intelligence, Mujahideen, Pakistan, USSR.*

INTRODUCTION

The news of the Russian forces invading Afghanistan caused alarms all over the world. The issue simultaneously alarmed the Pakistani

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regime to act to safeguard its interests against the imminent dangers of war. Moreover, the government of Pakistan quickly faced significant changes in its ties with the USA as well as other countries of the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, it could be simply comprehended how the government of Pakistan caught unaware the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and how it tried to unravel from the critical crisis looming over to its sovereignty as a free country of the world. Furthermore, it is significant to analyse the past geopolitical relations of Pakistan vis-a-vis neighbouring countries, especially with longstanding foe India on its eastern border since it was created in 1947. It is significant to comprehend the rationale of the decision of the government of Pakistan to partake in the Afghan War as an associate of the USA.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When Pakistan came into being, the relationship between Pakistan and India was always wavered and made belligerent as both the countries fought three wars. However, India enjoyed a cordial relationship with the USSR. Being in a hostile environment, Pakistan was taken aback by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Hence, it needed important decisions to safeguard its territory from hostile neighbours. Though the Soviet Union did not directly intrude into the territories of Pakistan, it posed a grave risk to its sovereignty. Thus, the Government of Pakistan took necessary measures to react the invasion of Afghanistan by the USSR (Hussain, 2005). The US government passionately supported the forces fighting against the Russians in Afghanistan. When, the Russian forces invaded Afghanistan, the American administration led by Jimmy Carter personally telephoned President Zia of Pakistan. He offered the US \$3.2 billion aid to Pakistan for supporting the USA against the Russian forces in Afghanistan and to assist the Afghan militants.

Besides, Pakistan was also going to detonate the so-called 'Islamic bomb'. The Americans and its allies promised to help the country in

its indirect fight with the Russians. The President of Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq made a deal with the USA that Pakistan would work with the CIA against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and in return, the U.S. would not only provide massive aid, but would agree to look the other way on the question of the bomb. According to Coll (2004) who wrote in his memoirs, *Ghost Wars*, the Government of Pakistan was enthusiastic for actively supporting the Islamic militants, as they needed the American support unconditionally. He further stated that General Zia was worried that unless the government of the USA offered concrete promise for the security interest of Pakistan against the Russians, it could not risk the Soviet wrath of providing needed support of Islamic militants.

Furthermore, it was restated in a talk between both countries in 1979 that in the event of Afghan aggression against Pakistan, the USA would consider the 1959 bilateral agreement to be relevant. Finally, the US assured Pakistan to help secure its territory in case the Russians attacked Pakistan and participate in the Afghan War (Gates, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The respective research defies a simple and direct methodology of research, i.e., the secondary analysis methodology was adopted. It involved utilizing qualitative data by other scholars. This methodology provided with the advantage of saving time as well as financial resources. The disadvantages of the secondary and content analysis of other studies were to a degree, offset by reliance on the data cited by eminent scholars.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pakistan's role in Soviet-Afghan war

History has proved that during the Soviet-Afghan War, the Pakistani government always helped the USA against the USSR. Hence, in 1979,

the US administration authorized covert aid to the Islamic fighters against the USSR, as stated by John K. Cooley (2002) in *Unholy Wars*, as medical assistance and a token program of propaganda. The US assistance was provided in the field of medical and radio sets to Islamic militants through Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI (Coll, 2004). However, in April 6, 1980, while talking with William Casey, the Director of the CIA, the Pakistani President Zia asked him to support the Islamic militants and, the collateral security issues posed by the Russian invasion of Afghanistan could have of Pakistan's relations with Iran and Persian Gulf countries. Moreover, President Zia explained to Casey the historical background of the region of the British-USSR administration that signed an accord and drew a line on the 'Oxus River' that nobody would cross.

Consequently, the Russians kept up their promise for over a century. Nevertheless, following the Second World War, a void created and ultimately the Russians got an occasion to send their forces into Afghanistan in 1979. Moreover, President Zia briefed and emphasized to Casey; the USA was duty-bound to warn the Russians while invading Afghanistan must not overstep the stated lines of Pak-Afghan borders and underlined that any Russian move should be challenged (Gates, 2006).

Since the USA was already engaged in the Afghan War, hence, the government of Zia secured of the assurances of Casey and agreed to provide aid to the Islamic militants and would apply necessary pressure on the USSR for invading Afghanistan. In addition, President Zia asked for providing anti-aircraft equipment. On his return to the USA, the CIA official asked for a raise in military assistance to Afghan militants, but was unsuccessful and was told to wait for more (Gates, 2006). Soon, Pakistan was able to provide the USA a new avenue of intelligence data against the Russian activities in Afghanistan. Besides, Pakistan got billions of dollar worth of military and economic aid for supporting *Mujahideen* fighting against the USSR forces in Afghanistan. Moreover, the USA developed its ties

with South-west Asian countries to protect its interest in that region. In the meantime, Brzezinski wrote in a memo to American government:

To make the above possible, we must both reassure Pakistan and encourage it to help the rebels. This will require a review of our policy toward Pakistan, more guarantees to it, more arms aid, and alas, a decision that our security policy towards Pakistan cannot be dictated by our non-proliferation (of nuclear weapons) policy (Levy & Catherine, 2007, p. 1).

Brzezinski further added, that both Iran and Afghanistan were in turmoil, and Pakistan was unstable internally and extremely apprehensive externally. So, if the Russians succeeded in Afghanistan, and [blacked out] the age-long dream of Moscow to have direct access to the Indian Ocean would have been achieved. The remarks of Zbigniew Brzezinski leave most likely that Andrew Cockburn, a security expert was speaking to him precisely. Cockburn asserted that when the father of the Pakistani bomb Dr. AQ Khan was introducing his uranium technology, his shipping manager was CIA specialist. This as well, is conceivable, given the announcement of Ruud Lubbers, ex-Prime Minister of Netherlands, that the CIA had blocked activity against A. Q. Khan in 1975 and 1979 (Cockburn, 2009).

However, in a meeting with Casey in 1982, Zia explained that the Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu informed him the covert objectives of the USSR. Further, the Romanian President stated that, Pakistan and Iran had used the Islamic card in Afghanistan, and this was alarming position for Soviet's with its Muslim states, and Moscow could intervene in Iran if required. President Zia agreed with the Romanian official that Russian forces would likely get control of the Strait of Hormuz and would advance the Pakistani Gwadar Coast (Gates, 2006). Zia also told Casey that both the USA and Pakistan concerning Afghanistan affairs should keep the pot boiling, but not

boil over, and not to incite the influence of the USSR in Pakistan. Besides, Zia asked for the provision of arms and ammunition to Afghan *Mujahideen* that included anti-air craft arms (Gates, 2006). In the meantime, when President Ronald assumed the presidency, he openly supported Pakistan and told President Zia that it was a time to reassess the ties between the two countries (Kux, 2001).

However, the American government eventually offered Pakistan US \$3.2 billion aid package of military and economic assistance. Besides, the Reagan administration recognized Pakistan as a key ally of the USA. According to Cooley: 'Pakistani support for the operation was the most vital component, as its geographical and ethnic ties to Afghanistan provided a secure base to flood the country with weaponry' (Cooley, 2002, p. 1). In fact, the accord reached by both the countries should be summed as: 'the CIA was to supply arms, finance, and training for the Mujahedeen, but it must be provided through Pakistan and not directly from the CIA' (Cooley, 2002, p. 1). Moreover, Cooley stated:

Zia placed three absolute conditions for allowing shipment of the arms... First, the countries concerned... were to maintain absolute silence about the shipments... Second, arms and other war supplies were to be shipped to Pakistan by the fastest available means. Third, the shipments by air were to be limited to two planeloads per week (Cooley, 2002, p. 2).

Overall, the critical role was played by Pakistan by supporting the USA in the Russian-Afghan War and the realization of trust between the two countries. Thus, both the countries played a critical role in helping the Afghan *Mujahideen* by providing needed arms and ammunition then train them to fight successfully against the Russian forces in Afghanistan.

The creation of dangerous ground

The US administration required close ties with Pakistan and its intelligence agency ISI to defeat the USSR in Afghanistan. In fact,

without a cordial relationship with Pakistani, it was rather implausible for the USA to provide needed assistance in shape of arms and ammunition, training to arm to Islamic militants fighting against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Hence, to win the Afghan war and safeguard its interest in the region, the US administration should work with Pakistan in providing necessary assistance to Islamic *Mujahideen* fighting against the Russian forces in Afghanistan. Respective aid was channelled through ISI who managed it for the Afghan *Mujahideen* constantly. Accordingly, by the middle of 1983, the Afghan bureau of ISI hired nearly sixty officials and over three hundred low-grade staff. Besides, the ISI usually enlisted top military officials from northern territories of Pakistan who could fluently speak Pashto, the official language of Afghanistan. Though the new officers were Pakistani belonging to the tribal areas of the country; they easily worked in Pakistan in the civilian dress, so they were undetected by the Afghan regime. Indeed, the new Afghan bureau of ISI was kept secret, and their officials were not to be posted to other regions in Pakistan (Coll, 2004).

Besides, the training of *Mujahideen* was varied; the ISI and CIA introduced various specific programs for the Islamic militants of Afghanistan. For instance, a most inclusive 10 days course helped to teach usage of mortars and rocket-propelled shells (Coll, 2004). The other significant courses were imparted by the trainers to drive a car or bike loaded with bombs to carry out attacks in metropolitan regions and for killing troops and government officials (Crile, 2003).

Thus, the Pakistani ISI played a key role in training and arming Afghan *Mujahideen* to fight with the Russian troops and Afghan National forces with the help of American aid. The American administration asked Casey to personally visit the training camps of Afghan *Mujahideen* established by the ISI in the frontier areas. Casey visited the camps, where the head of ISI, General Akhtar Abdur Rahman briefed him of the guerrilla training courses conducted for the Afghan *Mujahideen*. The ISI chief urged the Afghan *Mujahideen*

commanders and other trainees to exert maximum pressure on the Soviet and Afghan National Army and quoted to say 'Kabul must burn' (Crile, 2003).

Another American official, Howard Hart, the Station Chief in Pakistan visited the training camp in Pakistan and believed over twenty thousand *Mujahideen* were getting training there. Hart instructed more arms and ammunition for *Mujahideen* from CIA camps through ISI supervision. Hence, the Afghan *Mujahideen* got necessary assistance to fight against the Russian invaders and the Afghan National Army regularly (Crile, 2003).

In his memoirs, Steve Coll mentioned that the CIA American administration were keen makers to kill as many Russian forces through the *Mujahideen*. Thus, Hart declared several rewards for the killing of Russian troops too: ten thousand rupees for a Special Forces soldier, five thousand for a conscript, and double in either case if the prisoners were brought in alive. Moreover, Coll stated the rewards were announced as a measure to take revenge of the Vietnam War which the US lost humiliatingly. Similarly, Hart clearly stated there were guns for everyone who was enlisted to fight in the Afghan war against the Russians (Crile, 2003, p. 1).

In his account, George Crile stated that a top US representative, John McGaffin, asked Hart while visiting Pakistan 'You're the guy on the ground'. He added, 'This is your war out there. Just tell us what you need' (Crile, 2003, p. 2). While in the US, the American administration was discussing the increased aid for the Afghan *Mujahideen*. Hart categorically stated that the Afghan *Mujahideen* needed more aid and could punish the Russian forces, as the Islamic militants were willing to lay down their lives for the noble cause. Moreover, Hart proudly informed the senior American officials that he enjoyed a close relationship with President Zia-ul-Haq and ISI head, General Akhtar Abdur Rehman (Crile, 2003).

All over his tenure as Station Chief, Hart frequently visited headquarter of ISI in Pakistan and discussed Islamic militants and concurred that the training and arms supply to Afghan militants should be done through ISI. Besides, Hart concurred that no CIA official would impart training and direct ammunition to Afghan militants, while sophisticated weapons were introduced. In various meetings with the ISI chief, Akhtar Abdur Rehman, Hart wanted to know how to best equip the Afghan *Mujahideen* and took the information and said, 'Spelled out what we wanted and why, and Chuck signed off on it. That was the beginning of the big time' (Crile, 2003).

Soon, ISI asked the American government through the CIA for the supply of buffalo guns that included night-vision goggles and advanced telescopes for the Afghan *Mujahideen* to hit their targets perfectly at night. Initially, the American government was reluctant to supply highly-advanced weapons that might pose problems for them in their future programs. However, following several rounds of discussions with the Pakistani officials, the Americans agreed that the night-vision goggles and advanced telescopes would be supplied to ISI, but after some time, it would be removed. Thus, the American instructors trained ISI to handle the buffalo rifles, so that ISI trains the Afghan *Mujahideen*. Thus, hundreds of buffalo rifles were sent to Pakistan (Coll, 2004).

Throughout the tenure of Hart as the head of the CIA station in Pakistan, a large number of equipment was supplied by the American CIA to Afghan *Mujahideen* through ISI. President Reagan overtly announced the American aid was meant to *Mujahideen* in their fight against the Russians. In the meantime, another senior American delegation visited CIA Headquarter in the capital of Pakistan and conferred with the head of the ISI. In addition, the mission offered significant military aid that included satellite maps, as well as advanced explosives to be used against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan (Coll, 2004).

In view to assessing the Afghan aid program, Robert Gates, the Deputy DCI, took a brief visit to Pakistan in October 1986. Gates held a discussion with General Akhtar and key ISI officials engaged with the training of Mujahedeen. He informed that he secretly held a meeting with the forces of Masood, the Mujahedeen commander fighting the Russians in Northern Afghanistan. However, there were complaints from Masood that the ISI was choosy in providing arms to Mujahedeen movements and were not giving due share to his organization. Gates later asked ISI to provide required arms to all Mujahedeen movements.

According to Ahmad Rashid, about thirty- five thousand Muslim fighters from forty different countries took up arms in the Russian-Afghan war. The majority of those fighters were funded by Saudi Arabia for training in Pakistan. Finally, over one hundred thousand Islamic fighters got training and participated in the Afghan War (Rashid, 1999). In 1985, the number of Islamic Militants increased to one hundred fifty thousand. It was due to a constant call for Holy War against the infidel and the application of 'Islamic card' by the ISI (Grau & Gress, 2002). The Peoples Canada Daily News stated that 'George Shultz, the American Secretary of State, announced before Afghan *Mujahedeen* training in Pakistan that, 'this a gathering in the name of freedom, a gathering in the name of self-determination, a gather in the name of getting Soviet forces out of Afghanistan...fellow 'freedom fighters' we are with you' (Emadi, 1999, p. 1).

Similarly, Caspar Weinberger, the US Secretary of Defense openly applauded the Islamic fighters and told them 'I want you to know that you are not alone. You will have our support until you regain the freedom that is rightfully yours' (Kux, 2001, p. 1). Indeed, the US official posted in Pakistan stated that everyone was welcome to fight the Soviet forces in Afghanistan to punish the Russians.

Role of Inter-Services Intelligence

The US together with several countries of the world allied to oust the Russians from Afghanistan and give a befitting punishment to it. It was done under the aegis of the American CIA:

Once approved by the Carter administration to go into action, it scrutinized all intelligence about Afghanistan to assemble a suitable plan of action. Both China and Pakistan were enlisted by Washington to act as 'anchors' in the first stage of the operation (Cooley, 2002, p. 48).

ISI, the intelligence of Pakistan, played a vital role in channelling US aid from the CIA to Afghan Mujahedeen fighting against the USSR. A key official of the CIA, Charles G. Cogan, stated about Pak-US relationship in the war: 'We took the means to wage war, put them in the hands of people who could do so, for purposes for which we agreed' (Charles, 1993, p. 2). The USA continued to ship sophisticated and advanced weapons to Afghan Mujahedeen through the ISI. The Americans supplied a large amount of C-4 plastic explosives to carry out sabotage activities and British M16 for bridge attacks in Afghanistan. Moreover, it provided a highly advanced time pencil to trigger rockets or bombs and electronics E-Cell detonators to Islamic militants through the ISI. These highly sophisticated weapons were applied by Islamic militants against the Russian and Afghan troops (Coll, 2004). With the introduction of sophisticated weapons, a large number of US instructors came to Pakistan to train Pakistani military about its usage. Various Islamic movements were the beneficiaries of the sophisticated arms supplied by some foreign countries. Later, the Afghan Mujahedeen started urban guerrilla warfare strategy, 'we must keep the pot boiling at a certain temperature. We must not allow the pot to boil over' (Yousaf, Adkin & Yousaf, 1992, p. 1). The guerrilla strategy was employed to avert the direct influence of Russia on Pakistan.

Finally, the Afghan war entered into a new phase when the USA provided stinger missiles to Afghan Mujahedeen through the ISI, which drastically changed the Afghan war scenario in favour of Afghan Mujahedeen. As said by Steve Coll, that the ISI employed Abdul Ghaffar, a military engineer, educated in the USSR, to apply sophisticated missiles against Russian warplanes. Initially, Ghaffar shot on the Russian helicopter Mi-24D, however, it missed the target. Later, more missiles were fired and destroyed two Russian helicopters.

Nevertheless, the USSR was reluctant to withdraw its troops until 1985 from Afghanistan. The Russians brought into the war their best military skills against the determined Afghan Islamic militants. Mujahedeen consolidated their positions to give a strong response to the Russian troops. As a result, the cost of war for the USSR continued to rise as the Russian Air Force lost their warplanes daily. The ISI of Pakistan emerged as the key factor in Russian-Afghan war as they provided a vital conduit in supply and training of arms and ammunition to the Afghan Mujahedeen to bog down the Russians for their wrong decision against Afghanistan (Edwards, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Pakistan played a key role as a conduit of arms and ammunition to Afghan *Mujahedeen* notably supplied by the USA and several other countries of the world, namely, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran and Egypt against the Soviet invaders in 1979-89. After the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, the US administration developed a close alliance with several countries of the world, notably Pakistan. The US was successful in supplying sophisticated arms to Afghan Militants through the ISI of Pakistan, which provided necessary training to use those arms. In addition, the People's Republic of China supplied the weapons to Afghan *Mujahideen* against the Russia forces. Iran trained a large number of Iranian volunteers who fought the war in Afghanistan against the communist regime. Finally, the Afghan

Mujahideen were strong enough to expel the Russians from Afghanistan.

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