Betrayals
Blowback and American Policymaking in Afghanistan from 1979

A Case Study By:
Benjamin Fitzgerald Crawford
Abstract

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What if you were told that the Soviet Red Army, the CIA, Osama bin Laden, Camel Bombs, the Afghan Mujahideen and 9/11 all had something in common? Would you believe that decisions made in 1979 half a world away might be affecting our safety right this very minute? Should you like to see how these dots are connected, read on.

The following is a case study designed to narrate about and give commentary on a particular aspect of U.S. policymaking over the course of nearly twenty-five years. The aim of this work is primarily to elucidate the policy decisions that were made in response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, the repercussions of those choices, and the underestimation by the U.S. Government since of potential blowback from those decisions. The case study is divided into two parts: Part I will deal with the politics at home and abroad and the effects they had on U.S. policymakers during the Afghan War. Part II will concern itself with the policy concerns that have been generated directly and indirectly as a result of our involvement in Afghanistan, and the U.S. response (and sometimes, non-response) to threats of blowback.
By signing this page I am indicating that I have read this case study, I approve of its readiness to be considered complete and its fitness to be tendered to the Honors Department.

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Introduction

Ask nearly any baby boomer where they were when Kennedy was assassinated, and they’ll likely be able to tell you in clear detail. The same goes for their parents and Pearl Harbor. When airliners collided into the towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on a clear morning in September, 2001, my generation found themselves doubtless similarly transfixed, and unbelieving. For me, many hours of wide-eyed searching ensued, through webpages and television channels, groping for information, some indication, any clue as to why.

There was very little clarity coming from news sources or the government in those first few days, only that the attacks were the act of Islamist terrorist organizations. Later information emerged that the intelligence community believed the attacks to be linked a hitherto little-known Islamist network called Al-Qaeda, at the head of which sat commanders in Afghanistan.

Popular media concerning the question of why America had become the target of Islamist militants was, and has continued to be, abysmal. At best, investigations have covered the stated motivations of Osama bin Laden, but have constituted only superficial attempts to understand the roots of the terrorist’s furor. Using what I had gathered from the news, I began to investigate what was known about Osama bin Laden and what his connection was to Afghanistan. How was it, after all, that he was able to base his operations there? The picture that emerged was an extremely complicated one; one which
had its roots beginning back nearly twenty-five years. Surprisingly, the ascent to power of the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and the Al-Qaeda network was intimately involved with the Cold War and the superpower involvement in the Middle East that it brought. Indeed, much of the weaponry, technique, and funding that was supplied to Afghan rebels during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan constituted a keystone not only in the fight against the U.S.S.R., but today against U.S. interests and U.S. supported governments throughout the world.

The more information that became available, the more I read. I more I learned, the clearer the picture became. Slowly, connections began to materialize connecting decisions made by the United States concerning the Middle East ranging from 1979 until today, and the difficulties that have emerged as of late in the form of terrorist attacks.

Yet all of the information that I was coming across began to beg a whole other set of why-questions regarding 9-11. I began to investigate what the government knew in the months and years prior to the attack, and what measures were taken in response. Particularly in the popular television media, the current administration has placed the blame squarely in the realm of U.S. intelligence. Evidence suggests that, indeed, had a more integrated intelligence apparatus existed, a clearer picture of pre 9/11 terrorist activities might have emerged, as different agencies had discovered different pieces of the puzzle. Thus, it is clear that the U.S. intelligence community would benefit from a consolidation in the face of this new challenge. However, what has also become clear is
that the administration seems to be using its intelligence apparatus as a scapegoat for its own negligence. Despite the fractionalized nature of U.S. intelligence agencies, there has been a significant flow of information regarding terrorist plots against U.S. interests both at home and abroad since 1994. Specific warning actually came from French intelligence in that year that told the Clinton administration that the Al-Qaeda network was planning to crash commercial aircraft into important buildings within the borders of the United States. This being the case, we must ask ourselves if the issue was truly a matter of intelligence, or an executive underestimation of Islamist operational capabilities.

This essay is a compilation of key information that has emerged since the 9-11 attacks that will hopefully, as it did for me, elucidate for the reader just exactly how U.S. foreign policy dating back as early as 1979 has had a significant role to play in our current global difficulties with terrorism. It is divided into two sections, the first of which is a detailed explanation of the U.S. decisions that were made concerning Afghanistan during the Cold War throughout both the Carter and the Reagan Administrations. It will provide a firm historical understanding of what the nature of our involvement with the Afghan Mujahideen was during that period of time, and how those decisions have continued to have repercussions for us until today. The second section of this essay details the complete retraction of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the Soviets, and how that negligence led to the emergence of the Taliban, and the strengthening of Osama bin Laden’s network. Additionally, the second section will analyze the interplay between the U.S. government and Islamist Terrorists in the
world in the decade before the 2001 attacks on American soil. It attempts to flesh out an accurate account of exactly what was known in those years prior, and why nothing preventative was done.

In sum, this essay in its entirety reports on U.S. policymaking in regards to terrorist threats in the historical context of the Cold War up until the present day. It attempts to convey an understanding of the folly of shortsighted foreign policy decisions, for which the U.S. government is notorious, particularly during the Cold War. It is also an account of the dangers of underestimating any foe, particularly one that is well funded, globally networked, and vehemently anti-American. It essentially constitutes the narrative of the 9-11 tragedy from the perspective of American policymaking and is intended to create a perspective from which the reality of the situation can be better understood.
Visions of September 11th, 2001 continue to haunt the memories of Americans. The nightmarish images of the disintegration of the World Trade Center towers are inextricably bound with the mug shots of the responsible Islamic fundamentalist operatives. While it seems clear today that many radical Islamic groups are pitted against America and her interests, such has not always been the case. In fact, there was a time when the American Government gave weapons, monies and training to ragtag groups of Islamic militants in Afghanistan to support them in their guerrilla campaigns against the Soviet Red Army. There was a time when, in the words of William Blum, the mujahideen’s jihad was America’s jihad. This section is an investigation into the American foreign policy shift that accompanied the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It will answer a number of questions: What was going on in American politics before the invasion, and how did it change directly after? What response did Presidents Carter and Reagan choose? How were American’s foreign policy decisions implemented in Afghanistan? How did the American government become involved with the Afghan mujahideen? What was the potential for later security risks?

In the late nineteen seventies the eyes of the American intelligence community were narrowed on the political turmoil afoot in Afghanistan. The activities of the USSR in the politics of Afghanistan were manifest, despite the relatively little investment of
resources offered at that time. There were indications that the USSR had an interest in the establishment of a friendly communist government. In 1977 evidence arose indicating that the Soviets were attempting to destabilize Mohammed Daoud’s government.

Intelligence analyst Anthony Arnold later wrote:

“One of the key developments that preceded the 1978 coup, however, was the reconciliation in mid-1977 between the Parcham and Khalq factions of the PDPA. That should have sounded warning bells in Washington, for it should have been obvious to analysts of Afghanistan that this was no freely achieved political compromise…but an imposed union that overrode deep-seated antagonisms. Only one outside force could have predominated over the mutual distrust that Parcham and Khalq felt for one another …”

The United States government either failed to recognize the significance of such a ludicrous political union, or chose simply to ignore its implications. Regardless, the United States neglected at that time to respond.

It is entirely possible that the future Soviet invasion of Afghanistan could have been preempted had the U.S. chosen to counteract the communist leanings before they precipitated a coup. Arnold further observed:

“Before the April 1978 coup, however, the Soviet commitment had been relatively light. If that coup had failed, the USSR would have shrugged off its losses…For the United States, the time to have taken preventative measures was before the coup; thereafter, most options were closed and the Soviet commitment became increasingly difficult to reverse.”

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1 Arnold, Anthony. Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective. p 130
2 ibid p 129
The President had two options: He could approach Congress with an aid package for the Daoud government in an attempt to lighten the load of national poverty, or could covertly supply anti-communist factions within the nation with money and weapons. Yet the politics of the day were not permitting. “Neither of these would have been a viable option in the late 1970’s. Foreign aid was increasingly difficult to obtain from the American Congress, and ‘meddling in internal affairs’ of foreign lands had become extremely unpopular among the American electorate.” An American nation, still reeling from Vietnam, was deeply loathe to involve itself further in foreign affairs. The public had tied President Carter’s hands.

Accordingly, the administration watched anxiously as a coup by the People’s Democratic Party took place in April of 1978, ousting Daoud, and replacing him with a socialist government. Intelligence indicated that the Soviet Union had worked to establish a communist government in Afghanistan, but time would tell that this was not entirely true. The leaders of this new government were not so much Marxist as they were progressive socialists.

“Reform with a socialist bent was the new government’s ambition: land reform, controls on prices and profits, and strengthening of the public sector, as well as separation of church and state, eradication of illiteracy, legalization of trade unions, and the emancipation of women in a land almost entirely Muslim.”

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3 ibid p 130
The USSR, with whom Afghanistan shared a 1000-mile border, seemed the logical source of support for a modern socialist government. In response, nine tribes of Afghans came together and created a loose confederation between themselves, calling the organization the ‘mujahideen’, or the holy warriors. Islamic Fundamentalists all, they declared jihad on the ‘Marxist’ government, and furiously resisted. They believed that the establishment of a political system opposed to religion was a travesty for their homeland, and dedicated their lives to its destruction. In its place they would construct a government built upon the principles of Islam. As history has told, however, the frustration of the mujahideen might not have been driven so much by religious fervor as by economic interest. Author William Blum notes two news articles written at that time that suggested the mujahideen were more motivated by capitalist concerns rather than religious ideology:

“…the New York Times stated that the religious issue ‘is being used by some Afghans who actually object more to President Taraki’s plans for land reforms and other changes in this feudal society’. Many of the Muslim clergy were in fact rich landowners. The rebels, concluded a BBC reporter who spent four months with them, are ‘fighting to retain their feudal system and stop the Kabul government’s left-wing reforms which are considered anti-Islamic’.”

Clearly aghast at the geopolitical implications of a communist-supported government in Afghanistan, Carter and the American intelligence community began to consider ways to undermine it. But, as it seemed, the work was already being done for them by roving bands of Islamic rebels. The newly instated communist regime was

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5 ibid.p 341
unstable, and increasingly so due to the guerrilla tactics of the ferocious mujahideen. The success of the resistance escalated the potential for a superpower conflict over Afghanistan, as the soviets became ever more convinced to intervene. “On the Afghan side, the mujahideen were ever more popular and the DRA was ever more politically bankrupt. For the USSR the choice was between humiliating retreat or a quantum jump in their investment. To the cocksure Soviet generals, that was no choice at all.” From the perspective of the Kremlin, instability in Afghanistan was an embarassment, and the new Afghani government was in chaos.

“Marxist President Hafizullah Amin was reportedly killed in a shoot-out with Soviet agents and other Afghans in his own office. Amin had enjoyed complete powers for only a few months since the ouster of his own predecessor, the Marxist Nur Mohammed Taraki. Now Amin, in turn, lost out to another communist faction headed by Babrak Karmal who assumed the office of president. Karmal immediately asked for major Soviet assistance, an appeal that became the official justification for the Soviet intervention.”

Islamic rebels relentlessly attacked the new government and put into serious jeopardy the integrity of the government the USSR had worked to construct in Afghanistan. John Prados, author of Presidents’ Secret Wars wrote, “A tribal resistance movement already existed in Afghanistan, opposing Kabul’s control…This evident deterioration in the security situation was one of the main factors that led the Soviets down the slope toward their decision to invade.”

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6 Arnold, Anthony. Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective p.129  
7 Prados, John. Presidents’ Secret Wars. p.356  
8 ibid p. 356
The situation was analyzed, and ultimately Carter decided to do nothing. Yet suspicions began to arise of a possible Soviet takeover. It was believed that the Soviets would bring military forces into Afghanistan in an attempt to stabilize the government. While the Americans definitely did not want this, it was believed that if the U.S. began to assist the mujahideen against the Taraki and Amin governments, it would be viewed as aggression, and a legitimate justification for the entry of Soviet troops. It turned out, as intelligence analyst Anthony Arnold writes, the Americans made the prudent decision:

“The temptation to provide military support to Afghan insurgents who were fighting the Taraki and Amin regimes was resisted. This withholding of aid was painful but it was the correct decision in light of the subsequent developments. Had there been such U.S. support, there would have been a significant body of opinion in the United States and throughout the world that U.S. ‘meddling’ had prompted and justified the Soviet invasion…”

Then another separate dilemma in American foreign policy occurred, which ultimately gave the USSR the security to launch an invasion into Afghanistan. When Iranian students stormed and laid siege to the U.S. embassy in Tehran, the Soviets were watching closely. The Kremlin themselves had little tolerance for terrorism, and would have violently retaken their embassy had they been in a similar position. When they saw that the United States was not so immediately willing to spill blood, it was taken as a sign of weakness: “The apparent helplessness of the U.S. giant when Iranian students first seized the entire American Embassy staff in Tehran and then held it hostage with

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Arnold, Anthony. Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective p.131
impunity for week after week was painfully symbolic, and the symbolism was not lost on those watching from the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{10}\textsuperscript{11}

Had the U.S involved the military in that crisis, an American military presence in the region would have posed too high of a risk for the Soviets to invade Afghanistan, and such a powerful response would have given the Kremlin pause. But this was not the case. Soviet leadership correctly guessed that they would have nothing to fear from a U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, and consequently went busily about its planning.

The eventual Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and prior clandestine political activity came as no surprise to the Americans. As early as the summer before the invasion, National Security Advisor Brzezinski relayed to President Carter that the Soviets were planning a coup on the Daoud government. Thereafter, steady increases of USSR military advisors were observed in Afghanistan, and a military buildup was observed on the border. The U.S. knew what was coming. Anticipatory warnings began to pass through diplomatic channels: “…the United States delivered to the USSR no fewer than five warnings against invasion, but that was during the last weeks of 1979, too late to be effective.” In late December, 1979, 85,000 Soviet troops crossed the border heading for Kabul.

\textsuperscript{10} ibid p.129
\textsuperscript{11} ibid p.131
The Carter administration watched the USSR operate in Afghanistan between 1977 and late 1978. Politically the President’s hands were tied from intervening by a recalcitrant American public. Yet, even if the President had launched a covert operation then, it would have served only to give the Russians an internationally legitimated reason to invade. Thus, the administration prudently watched and waited for the inevitable. When Soviet soldiers crossed into Afghanistan in December of 1979, the ball was in the Americans’ court.

The American Response: Carter Administration

The American response was swift, but cautious. Carter immediately decried the Soviet invasion as “direct aggression against a freedom loving people.” Rhetoric was the name of the game. U.S. Special Envoy Clark Clifford on Jan 23, 1980 told reporters in New Delhi that “The Soviet Union must understand that if they move toward the Persian Gulf, that means war.” The very same day Harold Brown (Sec Def) told the Senate Armed Services Committee, “…we can’t assure you that we would win a war there, but to cast doubt on our ability to deter or fight effectively is unnecessarily damaging to U.S. security.” The president’s first reactions were intended for their symbolic and legitimizing functions as much as for their actual efficacy at putting pressure on the USSR. He ordered significant cuts in the amount of American grain being

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12 Prados, John. *Presidents’ Secret Wars*. p 355
sent to the Soviets, proclaimed an American boycott of the Moscow Olympics, and halted the SALT II ratification process in the Senate. Regardless of the fact that the grain embargo hurt American farmers more than it did the USSR, and the fact that the SALT II talks were already doomed, an international message was sent—and the Americans had the political impetus for action. In 1982, after the decision had already been made, President Carter revealed to a group of undergraduates at Emory University that, “…a covert program was the best was to punish the Soviets short of going to war, which wasn’t feasible." There already existed, in the mountains of Afghanistan, a formidable counterforce to the communists, and the Americans had the power of right to support them as ‘freedom fighters’.

It seemed the Soviet encroachment meant an end to Jimmy Carter’s dreams of détente. Previous to the invasion of Afghanistan, the focus of President Carter’s foreign policy was on the establishment of détente with the Soviets and the eventual ratification of the SALT II talks. Regardless of whether or not Carter had his suspicions of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, it seemed that the invasion had come as a shock. “Carter publicly confessed his earlier optimistic views when he said that the Soviet action had ‘made a more dramatic change in my opinion of what the Soviets’ ultimate goals are than anything they’ve done in the previous time I’ve been in office.’ The move literally annihilated any hope Carter may have harbored for détente, for the encroachment on the region forced an American response because of its sensitive oil interests. The President

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15 Spanier, John. *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*. P. 215
decided that in order to convey the White House’s frustration to Moscow, he would put the knife to détente by announcing the buildup of NATO forces. What better way to spit back at the Russians than to publicly strengthen the international military organization dedicated to protection against them?

Soviet control of Afghanistan brought worrisome implications for American national security. It placed the Red Army in a position where it could make a move on the oil-rich Persian Gulf, and pincer American access to it. President Carter delivered a powerful message in his State of the Union Address in 1980: “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.” In response, history saw the White House take a position that would later become known as the “Carter Doctrine”. The President promised American military intervention against the USSR if it at any time attempted aggression against vital oil-producing nations in the area. The Carter Doctrine was more than mere words, it meant action:

“The doctrine was imparted credibility by the American naval build-up in the Near East; the completion of negotiations over bases in Somalia, Kenya, Oman and Egypt; and a renewed American call for a rapid deployment force to extinguish brush-fire crises in the region.”

16 T.G. Fraser and Donnette Murray. *America and the World Since 1945*. p.208
17 McCormick, Thomas J. *America’s Half-Century* p 201
Behind the scenes it was decided that a covert operation would be best suited for the Afghanistan situation. In the beginning the American objective was not to drive the Soviets from Afghanistan. It was not believed, in the end, that guerrilla warfare would win out. Instead, covert support of the Islamic rebels began as a quest simply to exact a dear price upon the Soviets for their Afghani real estate. Jeffrey T. Richelson, author of the book *The U.S. Intelligence Community* confirms this when he writes, “The United States did not expect, however, that the rebels would be able to drive the Soviets out. Rather, the program was intended to help the rebels in conducting ‘harassment’ of the Soviet occupying forces.” The administration scrambled to throw together a covert operation to ‘harass’ the Soviets for their encroachments. In January of 1980, United States Secretary of Defense traveled to China to negotiate an agreement on the covert shipment of Soviet-made weapons into Afghanistan for the edification of resistance forces there. SAM-7 antiaircraft rockets and rocket-propelled grenades would be shipped into Pakistan, and covertly over the border into Afghanistan. In the eyes of many American policy makers, the Soviets had walked themselves into a perilous trap. The conditions were all ripe to make for a terribly damaging, costly and bloody decade. A fierce band of civilian guerrillas, fearless of death and burning with religious fervor, coupled with unfriendly terrain made for a situation some would later call the Soviets’ Vietnam. Texas Representative Charles Wilson is recorded as having said, “There were 58,000 dead in Vietnam and we owe the Russians one…I have a slight obsession with it,

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18 Richelson, Jeffrey T. *The U.S. Intelligence Community*. P 349
because of Vietnam. I thought the Soviets ought to get a dose of it… The Americans felt they had snared the Red Army, and had begun to hatch a plan to devastate it.

Yet the agreement with China was only one small part of the plan. An alliance was forged between Pakistan, Egypt, China and the U.S. Egypt and Anwar Sadat were approached immediately. Quoting Anwar Sadat. “The first instant that the Afghan incident took place, the U.S. contacted me…and the transport of armaments to the Afghan rebels started in Cairo on U.S. planes.” Egypt was an ideal candidate for cooperation in this operation for a number of reasons: Primarily, Egypt still possessed large numbers of outdated Soviet weapons from when Nassar was its president. Also, with the normalization of relations between the United States and Egypt in 1974, that country’s president was looking to improve its relations, economic and otherwise, with the United States. The CIA sought outdated Soviet weapons so that their appearance on the battlefield in the hands of the mujahideen would not obviously point to any specific country, let alone America. Egypt just so happened to have the hardware and the disposition for the operation. But how did it work?

The United States, via the CIA, would buy outdated Soviet weapons from Egypt, and be allowed to operate factories producing Soviet weapons in Cairo. In return the United States would sell Egypt updated weapons systems. The CIA would then operate an airlift into Pakistan. Using commercial aircraft, and cleverly changing the logos on the

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20 Blum, William. *Killing Hope*. P. 345
21 Richelton, Jeffrey T. *The U.S. Intelligence Community*. P 349
outside of the planes each time they were used, the CIA delivered these weapons into Pakistan where they were placed in the hands of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID). Under that organization’s supervision, the cargo was transported by the Pakistani military to mujahideen operatives. The negotiation of this plan with Pakistan was politically tenuous for a number of reasons, as explained by Anthony Arnold.

“U.S. relations with the government of General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq have been complicated by his human rights record, by the apparent intent of Pakistan to develop a nuclear weapons capability, and by the necessity for the United States to maintain some balance in its relations with Pakistan and India.”

Aside from the obvious political tension those issues created in the negotiation of sensitive, multinational covert operations, there was also the question of American credibility. If the USSR got wind of Pakistan’s participation in covert operations against its assets, would it lash out against Pakistan? More importantly, would the U.S. defend it? Anthony Arnold points out that America’s credibility in such areas was less than strong. What Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq really wanted was bi-partisan support in Congress for American covert operations, and further, a pledge to defend Pakistan against the USSR. While Zia’s expectations were not fully met until the Reagan presidency, he begrudgingly agreed to limited arms smuggling during the Carter administration.

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2 Richelton, Jeffrey T. *The U.S. Intelligence Community*. p.350
24 Arnold, Anthony. *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective* p.137
The American Response: The Reagan Administration

The covert operation begun by Carter was continued and escalated during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. The Afghanistan situation marked the birth of a new doctrine in American foreign policy labeled the “Reagan Doctrine”. This was essentially an ethic, which stated that America would not tolerate totalitarian communism in the world, and would support any groups who sought to destabilize or preempt the foundation of such a government. The CIA’s covert assistance of the mujahideen was the first project under the new “Reagan Doctrine”, but an operation of the magnitude envisioned by the White House would require international allies.

Realizing that the cooperation of Pakistan was absolutely vital to a possible escalation in American arms aid to the mujahideen, Reagan increased his budget for covert operations in Afghanistan from $200 million to $3.2 billion. An investment of this magnitude seemed to convince the Pakistani government that the United States was duly committed to the operation. Congress supported the President in his escalation of arms aid to Afghanistan by introducing a joint resolution in 1982. Taking the introduction and support of a joint resolution in Congress as a green light, President Reagan told his Director of Central Intelligence William J. Casey to increase both the quality and quantity

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25 ibid. p. 138
of weapons going to the mujahideen. Accordingly, “…the CIA began to supply heavier weapons, including bazookas, mortars, grenade launchers, mines and recoilless rifles…” As the river of arms flowing into Afghanistan deepened, so too did the deception of clandestine U.S. operations. The government was attempting to leave as few obvious clues as possible to reveal its involvement in a shadow war against the Red Army. Special appropriations to DOD spending in 1983 had to be secretly rerouted and voted upon. Representative Charles Wilson both in 1983 and 1984 proposed secret amendments to defense appropriations bills, which provided $40 million and $50 million for arms aid in those years respectively. Reagan approved the spending of over $625 million dollars over the first four years of his presidency, and in 1985 alone, $250 million.

While covert operations against the Red Army in Afghanistan began to ramp up, so too did Reagan’s domestic and international struggles for popular anti-Soviet sentiment. Foreign policy during the early years of the Reagan presidency was almost entirely occupied with combating the ‘evil empire’. History has shown that his administration grasped hastily onto any bit of vilifying intelligence that could possibly be used to paint the Soviets as eminently dangerous and evil. One such incident involved the accusation that the USSR was using chemicals to kill dissenters in Laos, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

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26 Richelson, Jeffrey T. *The U.S. Intelligence Community*. P.350
27 ibid. p. 351
“...the so-called ‘yellow rain’ had caused more than ten thousand deaths by 1982 alone. Secretary of State Alexander Haig was a prime dispenser of such stories, and President Reagan himself denounced the Soviet Union thusly more than 15 times in documents and speeches. The ‘yellow rain’, it turned out, was pollen-laden feces dropped by huge swarms of honeybees flying far overhead. Then, in 1987, it was disclosed that the Reagan administration had made its accusations even though government scientists at the time had been unable to confirm any of them, and considered the evidence to be flimsy and misleading. 28"

The drumming up of real and imaginary dirt on the USSR was not just a ruse practiced by the Republican Administration, but also by some in the Congress. Addressing the Congress from the floor, Bob Dole told the body in 1980 that the Russians had developed chemical weapons far beyond the defensive capabilities of the American military and that, “To even suggest a leveling off of defense spending for our nation by the Carter administration at such a critical time in our history is unfathomable.” Eventually, as a result of information on the ‘yellow rain’, President Reagan came to Congress in 1982 to ask for funding to accelerate production of chemical weapons 29. Conservatives in the Congress and in the White House were quite successful at gaining public support against the Soviets during the Reagan years. This led to more ambitious programs and goals overall.

Reagan’s aims to rally the American people against Soviet aggression and to coax them out of an isolationist stance were effective. As John Spanier observes, the tide of American opinion seemed to have shed its Vietnam syndrome to some degree, at least

28 Blum, William. Killing Hope. P. 349
29 ibid. p 350
enough that it was again willing to defend international democracy. “By the late 1980s Americans, while still cautious about protracted military interventions and involvements, had recaptured much of their patriotism and pride in America’s mission of defending and, where possible, advancing democratic values."

In 1985, Reagan sought no longer simply to annoy the Russians, but to bloody them so severely so as to drive them out of Afghanistan. When secret operations began, it was but an international game of harassment, but President Reagan had more significant objectives in mind. National Security Directive 166 was signed in 1985, thus greatly upping the ante on the conflict. Contained within this directive was not only a shift in mission objectives, but also increased provisions necessary to their attainment. It called for the provision of advanced communications technologies, remote detonation technologies, C4 explosives, anti-tank missiles, aiming mechanisms for mortars, long distance sniper rifles, satellite photography, attack plans modeled after that data and the training to make all of these new tools effective. Included was also recognition of the necessity for adequate antiaircraft weapons. In 1985 Congress secretly allocated $470 million dollars, in part for the purchase and transport of 150 Stinger antiaircraft missile launchers. This decision was based upon an intelligence recognition that the Russians were depending heavily upon low-altitude air assaults upon the mujahideen. The key to keeping the rebels alive and effective would be giving them a weapon to defend against

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30 Spanier, John. *American Foreign Policy Since World War II*. P. 346
the Soviet’s primary weapon—airpower\textsuperscript{31}. This move was certainly more overt. The Stinger missile system was an American product. Therefore the Government was running the risk, should the Soviets discover the mujahideen in possession of Stingers, of stepping outside of the plausible deniability it was so careful to preserve all along. It was believed that the potential for positive outcomes outweighed the possibility of being unmasked internationally for surreptitiously supporting the Islamic rebels.

Simultaneously, CIA and military operatives were at work in Pakistan training their personnel, who in turn would train the mujahideen rebels. When the weapons were distributed and know-how was adequately disseminated, CIA cleared the holy warriors to use those weapons provided by National Security Directive 166. The results were highly prolific.

“Once the Afghan resistance began effectively employing the Stingers, Soviet pilots were forced to fly higher, reducing the effectiveness of air power against the guerrillas. The first day the Stingers were used in Afghanistan, the missiles were responsible for three Soviet helicopters being shot down. Several hundred additional aircraft succumbed to the Stingers in the following two years.\textsuperscript{32}"

The rebels could not obtain the objectives set by the American government (removal of the Soviet Army) without proper antiaircraft weapons. When they had access to the older SA-7 Strela SAMs, rebels were unable to effectively bring down Russian aircraft. This allowed their air forces to keep low hard-decks and launch extremely

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\textsuperscript{31} Richelton, Jeffrey T. The U.S. Intelligence Community. p. 350-351
\textsuperscript{32} ibid p. 351
accurate sorties. A U.S. Army study found the Stinger missile to be the ‘decisive weapon’ of the conflict\textsuperscript{33}.

The authorized activities of the CIA during the Afghan War were viewed through a philosophical lens where the ends justified the means, regardless of the fact that the means were producing some very negative consequences for U.S. foreign policy. The millions of dollars in weapons and aid being furtively funneled through Egypt, Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia into Afghanistan had reportedly dwindled to 25% of its value and magnitude by the time it actually reached rebel hands. This meant that millions of dollars worth of weapons were being skimmed off and into the hands of terrorist organizations and potentially unfriendly governments. The precariousness of the situation became real for American helicopter pilots, when in 1987 a stinger missile was fired at them from the bow of an Iranian patrol in the Persian Gulf\textsuperscript{34}. Mujahideen officers used the production and sale of poppies from vast fields owned by rebel commanders to fund the resistance. CIA funded transportation and monies that helped to ship the product and to process it into heroin. “The output provided an estimated one-third to one-half of the heroin used annually in the United States and three quarters of that used in Western Europe.” Yet in the very Machiavellian sense of things, the CIA and the American Government were largely unphased, despite the very clear contradiction in foreign policy objectives. Punishing the Soviets was obviously worth the setback in the war on drugs.

\textsuperscript{33} ibid p.351-352
\textsuperscript{34} Blum, William. \textit{Killing Hope}. P. 351
Toleration of the drug smuggling and weapons theft were looked at as the conditions for doing business in the Middle East$^{35}$.

CIA support for mujahideen operations was not merely military. Clothing, food, and medical supplies also accompanied weapon shipments and were just as vital to the proper conduct of battle as were guns. Aside from that, CIA also provided at least $2 Billion in counterfeit Afghani currency. This was intended to pay the fees asked by truckers and others in the clandestine transfer of guns, explosives and personnel. Such funds also provided for bribes of citizens or officials involved with the Soviets, in order to gain sensitive information$^{36}$.

The American CIA operatives active in Pakistan and Afghanistan were tremendously useful as instruments of war as well. Agents Milt Bearden and Frank Anderson tell a story of an improvement they made upon the mujahideen’s guerilla tactics with both technology and technique. The rebels were accustomed to building truck and car bombs, but the Soviets had adapted to those types of attacks. Instead they devised a plan where they would pack a camel up inconspicuously with 150 pounds of symtek explosives, and quietly tie him up outside the Soviet officer’s club. They had built a ‘Camel Bomb’$^{37}$. The results were disastrous for the Soviet military hierarchy in Afghanistan. But the holes blown in the ranks of Soviet officers was perhaps the least of the Kremlin’s concerns. The Soviet military was sustaining massive economic and

$^{35}$ ibid. p 351  
$^{36}$ Richelson, Jeffrey T. *The U.S. Intelligence Community*. p. 352  
$^{37}$ CIA Video
personnel damage. “By 1985 cumulative Soviet losses were assessed at 40,000 to 60,000 with over 10,000 dead. Dollar costs of the war are even less certain but probably range between $5 billion and $7 billion per year—more than $15 million per day.” When the Red Army finally crossed the bridge out of Afghanistan on February 15th, 1989 it had suffered upwards of 13,000 combat deaths.

**Reflections**

In many ways the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan, and the American response, marked the playing out of the last chapter of the Cold War. The moral defeat of the Soviets by the mujahideen was catastrophic for their leadership, but not nearly so manifestly destructive as the economic impact. While the retreat of the Red Army across Afghan lines marked the beginning of the end for the USSR, it did not mark the end of American security concerns in the region. The CIA and the Carter and Reagan presidencies worked passionately to oppose the Soviets in Afghanistan, but did not consider or, as history has told, give proper weight to the possible repercussions of their ‘jihad’. What the CIA and White House failed to recognize was that the mujahideen hated the Americans at least as much as they hated the Russians. They just happened, at that time, to loathe the Soviets more because of their invasion. Their cooperation with US intelligence is not difficult to understand from a practical perspective. The Soviets were within their crosshairs, and they welcomed unconditional access to better weapons, regardless of their source. They were going to be executing a resistance with or without

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38 Prados, John. *Presidents’ Secret Wars.* p.359
39 CIA Video
the Americans, and while cooperation with the US was unsavory for the mujahideen, it was strategically crucial.

In 1979 the American public still had its head in the ground, inert to international affairs, suffering still from the shock of Vietnam. President Carter dedicated himself early on to the establishment of détente with the USSR, hoping that the status quo could be maintained, and that tension between the superpowers could be minimized. The invasion of Afghanistan obliterated Carter’s hopes of peace. But the president at that time was restrained by American recalcitrance for international involvement. Despite the shackles of his public’s opinion, Carter was able to engineer a covert response to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and to diplomatically set the stage for a grand shadow war over the Afghani landscape. Still, funding was not immediately forthcoming. With the announcement of the so-called “Carter Doctrine”, the President had effectively roused the public from its isolationism, and started into motion a gradual acceptance of American resistance of Soviet expansionism while at the same time building the foundation of what would become a massive covert operation against the Red Army.

The election of Ronald Reagan to the White House marked the change in America’s perspective on the world. Toleration of further Soviet aggression would be nil. He came into office with the mandate of the people to resist the Communists. Funding shot up, support rose and the CIA became very active in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The “Reagan Doctrine” was supported, as the push to oppose the Soviets became again
popular. America would support any group that opposed totalitarian communist
governments. Yet the decision-makers failed to ask themselves if such a policy was wise.
Cold War concerns were so commanding of time and energy, American policy-makers
seemed not to be able to take the long view. Any Cold War concern trumped any concern
on the eventual outcome of foreign policy decisions.

After the Soviets had left Afghanistan, a conflict raged on. Finally, the Kabul
government folded to the US-backed mujahideen. When all traces of socialism and the
Soviet lifestyle were eradicated from Afghani soil, a war continued between feuding
factions of what was once a united resistance. The winners of that conflict founded the
now infamous Taliban government, which was usurped in 2002 by coalition forces in
response to its harboring of terrorist organizations responsible for the September 11th,
2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Anti-American sentiment was
pervasive in the Taliban government that precipitated in the wake of the Afghan invasion,
yet, we had aided and abetted in the establishment of a nation fundamentally opposed to
America and her way of life. The result of this error in judgment has been costly.

In the days preceding the invasion of Iraq by American forces in 2003, news
agencies all over the world reported officials ordering high security around airports, for
there was suggestive evidence that Islamic terrorists might attempt to fire ground-based
stinger antiaircraft missiles at commercial jets. The stinger missile is a weapon
manufactured in the United States. How could terrorist organizations have obtained such
a lethal weapon? Ask the CIA. Clearly, our foreign policy during the Soviet invasion has had some very negative long-term effects on US national security. The situation involving the mujahideen and the invasion of Afghanistan is a case study in American foreign policy exemplifying the necessity of fully understanding the ideological position of those we support militarily, and the importance of having a genuine, thorough and long term commitment to the establishment of democratic governments. The government built in Afghanistan from the dust of the shadow war was clearly not democratic, nor American-friendly. The cost of this mistake was paid dearly in 2001.

Let us now look to U.S. foreign policy objectives following the defeat of the Red Army. What did U.S. involvement mean for the future of Afghanistan, and for the future of its own security? Are current fears of terrorism for Americans in any way connected to our involvement in Afghanistan? Have there been repercussions from our tryst with the mujahideen?
Part II: Afghan Blowback and U.S. Foreign Policy

“The causes of the September 11 events and their aftermath are highly complex and involve, for starters, the failure of U.S. intelligence; the destructive consequences of U.S. interventionalism foreign policy since the later 1970’s; and the policies of the Carter, Reagan, Clinton and both Bush administrations. In other words, there is no one cause or faction responsible for the catastrophe but a wide range of responsibility to be ascribed. Taking account of the history and complexity of the issues involved, Johnson’s model of blowback arguably provides the most convincing account of how U.S. policy and institutions contributed to producing the worst terrorist crime in U.S. history with fateful consequences still threatening.” -- Douglas Kellner

Blowback. In the above quote Douglas Kellner, author and Chair of UCLA’s Philosophy of Education Program, argues firmly that the 9/11 tragedy and our current War on Terror are skeletons from our closet, furiously reanimated. These tragic times, according to him, are symptoms of decades of miscalculations in U.S. foreign policy—violent manifestations of blowback. The purpose of the second portion of this case study is to take into account the facts presented previously, and to understand the events that followed the end of the Afghan War. Its intention is to attempt to understand to what degree current events have their roots in our Cold War activities amongst the mujahideen. It will attempt to measure the accuracy of Douglas Kellner’s assertion. Accordingly, this section concerns itself with the recounting of events as they unfolded following the Russian retreat, and does so in the context of American policy decisions.

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Kellner, Douglas. *From 9/11 to Terror War.* p. 30
Let us now turn our attention to the events that transpired following the retreat of the Red Army from Afghan soils. Through an analysis of the information available, I will attempt to answer a number of questions: What was the role played by the Americans following the ousting of the Soviets in Afghanistan? What repercussions resulted, if any, because of American involvement? How did the Taliban come into existence, and what roll did the United States play in their assent to power? What was the relationship between Osama bin Laden and the Taliban? How and why did the nature of the relationship between the United States Government and the Taliban change over time? What connections, if any, exist between the war on terror that we are fighting presently, and the guerrilla war we bankrolled in the 70s? Finally, all of these queries probe ultimately at the different pillars of the same overarching question: To what degree is the current state of global unrest the result of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan?

Invoking Machiavelli: U.S. Policy Perspective on Cold War Afghanistan

One cannot understand what happened during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan outside of the context of the Cold War. The Soviet encroachment was entirely motivated by strategy aimed at obtaining an advantage over the Americans. We certainly couldn’t begin to fathom U.S. foreign policy without first realizing how overwhelming a policy objective spiting the Russians was. In the face of fears of assured mutual destruction from the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, knocking the feet out from under the other by conventional means was the name of the game. It is from this standpoint that we must view the machinations of the Americans during the Afghan War. For instance, why
would the Americans, who ordinarily place high value on supporting stable, modernizing
countries, arm and train Islamic extremists to overthrow a progressive, modernizing
government in Kabul? Answer: This government was a socialist state, supported by the
Soviets. The act of arming extremists to decimate a modernizing government might
certainly set the advancement of the people of Afghanistan back even further. True. Yet,
it was believed that the Soviets could be drawn into a quagmire there, thus the ends
would justify the means...right? A memo from the State Department sent in 1979 read as
follows:

“The United States’ larger interest would be served by the demise of the
Taraki-Amin regime, despite whatever setbacks this might mean for future
social and economic reforms in Afghanistan. The overthrow of the DRA
would show the rest of the world, particularly the Third World, that the
Soviet’s view of the socialist course of history being inevitable is not
accurate. 41”

The truth of the matter is that from this perspective, the campaign in Afghanistan
was a success. The Islamists fought ardently against the Soviets, and in the end, cost them
huge sums of money, a humiliating military defeat, and arguably the political instability
that caused the crumbling of the U.S.S.R. Through American eyes in the short term, that
being the Cold War, the ends did justify the means. But what was the danger of arming
droves of Islamic extremists, known to be anti-modern? The dangers obviously did not
occur to policymakers in the U.S., or were underestimated—either way they were
neglected for serious consideration. The following excerpt from an interview with Jimmy
Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbignew Brzezinski clearly demonstrates the

41 Kellner, Douglas. From 9/11 to Terror War p. 31
overwhelming objective that was Soviet agitation, and how this overshadowed any other concerns.

“In a 1998 Le Monde interview, President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor Zbignew Brzezinski had bragged about how he conceived of arming extremist Islamic militants against the Afghan government as a ploy to draw in the Soviet Union more deeply and thus help destroy their system. What Brzezinski proudly proclaimed as his contribution to defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War appears in retrospect as a highly problematic U.S. intervention in the late 1970s that intensified civil war in Afghanistan. Overthrow of the secular and modernizing regime in Afghanistan by Islamic fundamentalists helped mobilize and empower the forces that would turn on the U.S. and institute a reign of global terrorism in the current situation.”

But what were the risks of arming Islamic extremists? For one, putting weapons, particularly stinger anti-aircraft missiles, in the hands of a man who might someday be your enemy seems a particularly large risk. The flooding of the region with arms could also effect the security of nations internationally, particularly Israel, an ally of the United States. The arming of a group as large and formidable as the Afghan mujahideen would enable them not only to stand up against the Russians, but potentially against anyone they cared to attack. Arming the mujahideen groups enabled them better to organize, and also provided them with a resource that could be traded and used all over the world.

“The decision of the USA to provide first covert aid, in 1979, and then overt aid on a massive scale from 1986 onwards, using Pakistan as a conduit, made it possible for the Islamist parties to move from a position of weakness to one in which they served as a major channel for arms and other resources to the Muhjahideen fighting within Afghanistan.”

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42 Ibid. p.31-32
43 Marsden, Peter. The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan p. 28
There is also the danger of funding and arming hands that were not meant to be armed. While the Pakistani ISI and the CIA were responsible for funneling arms into Afghanistan, there was no reliable way to insure that weapons were not being siphoned off into groups for which they were not intended. Yet, perhaps the greatest danger, one not adequately questioned by the Americans before involving themselves in Afghanistan, is what happens to the armed mobs once their mission is over? Where will those arms go, and what will they be used for? The unfortunate reality is that they ended up in unfriendly hands, like al-Qaeda.

“In the 1980s, the U.S. began more aggressively supporting Islamic fundamentalist Jihad groups and the Afghan project was a major covert foreign policy project of the Reagan-Bush administration. During this period, the CIA trained, armed, and financed precisely those Islamic fundamentalist groups who later became part of the Al Qaeda terror network that is now the nemesis of the West, the new ‘evil empire.’”

Afghanistan: In the Wake of the Red Army

Negotiations between the United States and the U.S.S.R. over the withdrawal date of the Red Army from Afghanistan were completed in 1989. As soon as the date was set for February 15th, American foreign policy goals changed radically—from dedication to Soviet removal to complete disregard for the region. The U.S. had attained its primary goal by achieving the withdrawal of the Soviets, and believed that the Russian-backed regime still in place in Kabul would soon succumb to the wrath of the mujahideen.

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44 Kellner, Douglas. *From 9/11 to Terror War*. p. 32
Through the eyes of many policymakers, Afghanistan had become another officially closed chapter of the Cold War.

“With the Soviet withdrawal and the subsequent fall of the Najibullah regime, Afghanistan ceased to be any sort of priority for US policymakers. To a large extent, the post 1992 environment marked the successful completion of US goals through what was officially earlier described as the ‘restoration of the strategic balance in the region.’ Even before the Soviet withdrawal, the US had no interest in nation-building in Afghanistan and no real template for a post-Soviet government. As one US official noted, ‘our objectives weren’t peace and grooviness in Afghanistan. Our objective was killing commies and getting the Russians out.”

The presence of the Red Army in Afghanistan was strategically worrisome to the Americans because it broke the ring of containment for one, but for the additional reason that it placed Moscow within striking distance of the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula. The objective was never humanitarian, nor was it to help build democracy—the only goal was to spite the communists, and to maintain Western access to oil. Taking the toppling of the Najibullah regime in Kabul as a foregone conclusion, the U.S. decided to play only a token role in the establishment of stability after the Soviet withdrawal, but did so through the intermediary of its ally Pakistan. But the Najibullah regime did not fall at once to the Islamists, due mostly to domestic infighting between factions already scrapping over post-conflict predominance. America’s apathy to the post-Soviet situation in Afghanistan is demonstrated by the fact that they chose Pakistan as a trustee of the peace. Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan were not to establish a fair and representative government, but a

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45 Lansford, Tom. *A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan.* p. 144
government that would be ‘friendly’ concerning its geopolitical rivalry with neighboring India.

“Zia [the then leader of Pakistan] had a clear ambition to establish in Kabul a government over which Pakistan could exercise control. The strategy behind this was one that was central to Pakistan’s defence [sic]: to create strategic strength against India through the formation of an Islamic bloc stretching from Pakistan to Central Asia.”

These decisions both amounted to grave miscalculations in respect to the establishment of law and order in Afghanistan. Whether this necessarily denotes a genuine apathy or simply a gross misapprehension of the situation in Afghanistan is not so important as the fact that it occurred, and that it had serious consequences for the future. Through the vessel of Pakistan, and its intelligence service the ISI, the Americans pushed for the adoption of a intermediate government which had been formed amongst Afghani political elites, who had been living in exile in Pakistan. While this plan went ahead, it was already destined to fail, for under the direction of the ISI, this interim government neglected to represent significant portions of the Afghani population.

“Although the United States played a major role in supporting the mujahideen in their revolt against the Soviet Union, Washington had never endeavored to exert significant influence on the internal political machinations of the rebel movement. It had abrogated that role to its key ally Pakistan. Consequently, successive governments in Islamabad had been able to promote the interests of those mujahideen groups that conformed with Pakistani foreign policy. This further undermined the

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46 Marsden, Peter. The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan p 28
potential for a united front since it alienated the non-Pashtun groups and those that were aligned with or supported the former royal family.47,

Even after the Soviets had left, war still raged on in Afghanistan. Due to a lack of coordination and cooperation between the disparate mujahideen factions, the Soviet-backed government in Kabul was able not only to survive, but also to re-entrench itself. The continual exchange of arms between the government and the rebels carried on for another four years. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the loss of support, the Soviet regime in Kabul began to deteriorate. After the Soviet-sponsored government broke down, talks of establishing a government ‘in waiting’ began. Initial attempts to establish a government by the Americans and Pakistanis failed because the different representatives brought to the table could not reach an adequate consensus. Meanwhile inside Afghanistan, a tentative agreement was in the works amongst the major commanders of the mujahideen forces. These commanders sought to join together to form the NCS (National Commanders Shura), which would be essentially a committee intended to discuss options for the a post-Soviet Afghanistan. It was through this committee that the nation would be ordered, and a stable government might emerge. At the helm of this effort was Ahmed Shah Massoud, a powerful commander from the north. He was advised that the external forces present internationally, and on the border in Pakistan, lacked the efficacy to unite the factions under a single banner. Indeed, that a government would have to precipitate as a result of an agreement between the armed mujahideen.

“...General Saffi, an ex-military general, advised Ahmed Shah Massoud on the formation of the NCS leaders in Kabul. General Saffi’s proposal called for the establishment of a revolutionary council and argued for the formation of the national army under the major Mujahideen commanders, of which Ahmed Shah Massoud would be the chief. In this case, the external front leaders would be banned from entering Afghanistan until the national army was formed and the enforcement of peace and security was ensured. At the same time General M. Nabi Azimi in charge of the ex-government military division, insisted on a similar proposal. Ahmed Shah Massoud rejected both proposals and instead asked the external leaders to form a transitional government in Pakistan to be put in place in Kabul.48,

By deferring to the external political forces in Islamabad and Washington, Massoud set the stage for a furious political meltdown. The interim government that had been formed in Pakistan, as mentioned before, was biased against certain armed groups within Afghanistan, and by deferring to such a scheme Massoud ignited a tremendous power struggle, which decimated any hope of nurturing a grassroots council from amongst the commanders. Theoretically speaking, had the commanders been able to come to an agreement, the external powers could do little to object, as the muhajideen were in possession of all the arms. But this was not to be. Instead, the case was that many of those who had been rejected in the formation of the interim government were still in the possession of a great many weapons and significant manpower. As the table was set in Kabul for a new government, the excluded brought to bare their fury upon the capital, and Afghanistan had a true civil war on its hands—due in no small part of the meddling of the ISI.

48 Nojumi, Neamatollah. The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, 111
“The Afghans did not have the resources to put the country on its feet, making it vulnerable to the interference of neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan. The Pakistani ISI, which had been the agency distributing the U.S. military and financial aid to Mujahideen, supported Hekmatyar in his effort for a military takeover of Kabul. In 1992, Hekmatyar forces under the direct support of the ISI opened fire on the newly established Mujahideen government in Kabul. Thus the internal war in the country was ignited.\textsuperscript{99}

Afghanistan, just freed of the burden of the Red Army, once again found itself encumbered by a real shooting war. The difference this time was that the mujahideen no longer resisted an occupying force, but began to further factionalize on the basis of family, tribe and ethnicity. The entire militarized country divided into essentially two camps, and engaged each other in a bloody civil war. The first materialized around Massoud and consisted mainly of ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks, the second group was made up almost entirely of ethnic Pashtuns, and accreted around the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar\textsuperscript{50}.

In the shadow of the failure of the Pakistani based interim government, and the outbreak of civil war in an already war torn nation, came the election of George H.W.Bush in the U.S.. What had been an inadequate effort at nation-building in Afghanistan suddenly became complete disinterest. This move would prove to have significant future repercussions that, according to Douglas Kellner, are directly linked to our current difficulties with terrorism:

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p 223  
\textsuperscript{50} Lansford, Tom. A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan. p 143
“Over 2 million people had died in the ten years of the Afghan war, and the U.S. had invested billions of dollars in overthrowing the Russian-sponsored regime and in arming, training, and financing the Islamic fundamentalists. But rather than help the Afghan people produce a viable government, the first Bush administration turned away, and the most radical extremist Islamic fundamentalists groups that the U.S. and Pakistan had organized took over the country after some years more of civil war, setting up the present conflict.  

It was out of this environment, a chaotic, war torn maelstrom of rockets and AK-47 blasts that the Taliban grew, which in recent memory became the focus of a significant dilemma in U.S. foreign policy. Thus, having investigated the difficulties that abounded in Afghanistan, and the neglect shown to the region by the U.S., it is now time to begin to discuss how the Taliban emerged, brought a relative sense of order to the country, and became a thorn in the side of the only remaining superpower in the world.

Warrior Monks

Civil war raged on throughout Afghanistan following the failed installation of two interim governments. Travel was nearly impossible, as different tribes controlled the several thoroughfares, and charged tolls for the passage of vehicles—true highway robbery. Thus commerce was almost completely stifled. Those businesses that could be operated became prey for rampant banditry and lawlessness. Shells burst and battles raged at all hours of the day as factions fought one another in the streets Beirut-style. This was the scene the Americans left behind them when Bush Sr. crossed it off the State Department’s ‘to do’ list. It was out of this same scene that the next major force in

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51 Kellner, Douglas. From 9/11 to Terror War. p 33
Afghani history emerged. As the history books tell it, the Taliban officially came onto the radar with an incident that took place in August of 1994:

“In August 1994, a 30-truck Pakistani convoy accompanied by the several ISI officers crossed the border into Afghanistan to reach Turkmenistan. There were several military and ISI officers, such a Colonel Imam, a prominent ISI field officer, on board. This convoy seemed suspicious and was held by the local armed groups headed by Mansur Achekzai Ustad Halim, and Amir Lalai, who were now controlling the road between Quandahar and Pakistan. The action of these groups upset many businesses on both sides of the border in addition to the Pakistani government. In early September, armed groups comprised of religious students who called themselves the Taliban, rose up and answered the local communities’ call for justice. The Taliban, commanded by Mullah Omar, helped the local disputed and carried out military operations against the brutalities of the local armed groups. The Taliban were supported by the local villagers and the business communities..." 

The people of Afghanistan had long endured the hardships of war and disorder. They saw these warrior monks as heroes who promised to ease their suffering, and bring a sense of order to their lives. It is not difficult to imagine why such a group would be as well embraced by a population as the Taliban was. As Taliban forces swept across the Afghan landscape, collecting weapons and sparring with the thieving and the bellicose, popular support for their movement snowballed, as did their personnel numbers.

“The Taliban captured a large quantity of arms, including numerous armored vehicles, artilleries, and most importantly, six Mig-21 fighters, and several helicopters. They took control of the commercial road between Qandahar and Pakistan and disarmed the local armed groups. In a matter of days, they seized the military garrison and administration in Qandahar

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52 Nojumi, Neamatollah. The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, p.118
and kept the commercial road secure and free for exports and imports as well as for the travelers.\(^{53}\)

Yet all of this history begs the question: what enabled the Taliban, out of innumerable warring factions, to rise to preeminence in Afghanistan? I have already answered this question in part. The leadership under Mullah Omar was wise enough to recognize the overwhelming public desire for stability and predictability. It also realized that Afghanistan was not going to be brought under control by any other means than military. But the Talibs, (‘students’ in Arabic) were not only winning the battles that removed groups that extorted monies and blocked highways, but were winning the battles for the hearts and minds of the Afghani people.

Yet Perhaps more importantly than the tactics employed by the Taliban was the atmosphere in Afghanistan following the U.S. pullout:

“In reality, the Taliban movement emerged in a gap between the general public and the Mujahideen leadership after 1992. This gap was the direct result of fighting over political power by these leaders in Kabul and their failure to form a nationally based government. This absence of a nationally accepted leadership allowed the Taliban to emerge strongly and aggressively.\(^{54}\)”

With the collapse of the U.S.S.R., Afghanistan had virtually vanished from the U.S. foreign policy radar. The ascent of the Taliban into power was not viewed as either

\(^{53}\) Ibid. p. 118
\(^{54}\) Ibid. p. 121
an international problem, nor as an internal security risk. With but a passing glance, the
U.S. even welcomed the coming of the Taliban as a source of stabilization for the
region—taking for granted that regional stability in Afghanistan spelled national security
for America. Indeed, “The State Department was inclined to consider Taliban rule was
the best possible outcome for stability in Afghanistan, while also underestimating the
threat posed to both regional stability and international security.55” Having been
complacent to the construction of any real government in Afghanistan, the United States
would simply choose to except the Taliban at face value, miscalculating the danger posed
to the only remaining superpower by a government composed entirely of extremist
revolutionary Islamists. While we all now know that the Taliban did pose a significant
security threat to the United States, it might not have become so horrifically clear had it
not been for another byproduct of the Afghan War: Osama bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden studied at the King Abdul Aziz University under Abdullah
Azzam, a man known to be connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group
active in Egypt. By the time he had turned 22, and left to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan,
bin Laden had already been actively involved in fanatic circles.56 Saudi Prince Turki al-
Feisal gave bin Laden the command to go to Afghanistan as his agent, to organize the
arming and funding of the thousands of Arabs rushing into fight against the Soviets. By
all accounts, his resolve to resist the encroachment of the U.S.S.R. into the Islamic world

55 ibid p 223
56 ibid. p 226
only hardened with time. He worked in Pakistan building training facilities and a network of financial contacts to fund the movement. It is known that he received U.S. dollars to facilitate his efforts along the Pakistani border. The network built by bin Laden originally to resist the Soviets, which U.S. dollars enabled, later grew into what is now known as ‘Al-Qaeda’.

Eventually Osama left Pakistan and picked up his AK-47:

“...Osama bin Laden fully committed to the resistance. He left the rear bases in Pakistan and permanently settled in the eastern part of Afghanistan, in the region of Nangarhar. He tried to get closer to the front lines fighting the Soviets, and he joined with the men of the Hezb-e-Islami movement of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a rebel faction supported by the ISI, the Pakistani secret service.”

It was through the shedding of his blood and sweat against the Red Army that the conflict became bin Laden’s. He believed in the jihad unhesitatingly. It was during this period of time that he dedicated his life to fighting jihads for the interest of Muslims everywhere. In 1990 he returned to Saudi Arabia to beseech Prince Turki al-Feisal to allow him to bring his network and resources to bear upon Saddam Hussein’s invading army. His offer was declined by the Saudi government. Instead they chose to allow the United States to launch an offensive from bases located within the heart of the country—the birthplace of Islam. Later that same year, the United States persuaded the

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57 Jacquard, Roland. *In The Name of Osama Bin Laden*. p.22
58 ibid. p 24
59 Marsden, Peter. *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan* p. 146
Saudis to terminate their aid of the Afghan mujahideen. Bin Laden’s fury over the stationing of U.S. military troops in the Muslim holy land is well documented. Perhaps that which was even more vexing to him was the cessation of Saudi funds and operations in Afghanistan, for his station had been eliminated.

“Bin Laden had no intention of abandoning his idealistic aims in this way. Convinced as he was of the legitimacy of the battle of the Afghani resistance, he had already made substantial personal sacrifices; he refused to give up...he pleaded eloquently in the cause of his comrades in arms, but his partisan language neither charmed nor persuaded the authorities, who had already made the decision to withdrawal from Afghanistan. It was a political decision, not open to question. Osama bin Laden apparently felt that he had lost ten years of his life and that he had been betrayed.  

There is little doubt that Osama felt utterly betrayed by the Saudi government, and there is also little question that he blamed the meddling of the United States for turning his own government against him. Regardless of the fact that he was bankrolled by the Americans in Afghanistan, there is reason to believe that he was never fond of the United States, as would be evidenced by his early affiliations with Islamists groups, which view the Western way of life as degenerate. Hence it was by no wrong of U.S. government that Osama bin Laden felt affronted. However they were later to fall into fault for their failure to recognize and act upon the real threat that he and the Taliban would together represent.

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60 Jacquard, Roland. *In The Name of Osama Bin Laden.* p.25
Blowback: The Kabul Connection

Having been expelled from Saudi Arabia and chased out of the Sudan, Osama bin Laden returned to Afghanistan to the welcoming embrace of the Mullah Mohammed Omar and the Taliban. In return the Taliban was thanked with over $100 million in donations and personal gifts from bin Laden. In 1996, as the Taliban gave him the go ahead for plans to build training centers in Afghanistan, bin Laden publicly declared war on the United States and launched deadly terror attacks against U.S. military barracks in Saudi Arabia. When bombs blasted through the walls of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, the United States immediately implicated Osama bin Laden, and began to demand of the Taliban that he be extradited to the U.S. for trial. Mullah Mohammed Omar was not about to comply. Reports surfaced that Osama bin Laden and Omar had become fast friends, and even that Omar had become his new spiritual leader. Other reports indicated that bin Laden paid the Taliban $50 million for their protection. Yet, the outpourings of wealth showered upon the Taliban did not stop there:

“Bin Laden was always generous to the cleric; he bought a house in Kandahar for him, his three wives, and his four children. But he also supported him politically by financing several projects that put the Taliban in good light, including the construction of an irrigation canal...and the provision of electricity and water for Kandahar. In exchange, Osama bin Laden was always free to travel among his various residences...”

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61 Lansford, Tom. A Bitter Harvest: US Foreign Policy and Afghanistan 150
62 Jacquard, Roland. In The Name of Osama Bin Laden. p.48
From the perspective of the Taliban and their pocketbooks, bin Laden was becoming a model citizen. This may help to account for the Taliban’s complete unwillingness to cooperate with the United States following the attacks on their embassies. The U.S. continued to demand the extradition of bin Laden into its custody, and the Taliban echoed their willingness to try him in an Islamic court, should the U.S. be able to produce the proper evidence. But the U.S. never tendered any evidence, and instead opted to take matters into their own hands.

“Without waiting to build up a body of evidence against him [bin Laden] to justify his extradition, the USA immediately demanded that the Taliban hand him over to them. The Taliban responded by stating that they were not prepared to hand over Osama bin Laden to the USA, insisting that he was not responsible for the bomb attacks. Less than two weeks after the terrorist attacks, the USA opted to use force rather than pursue the legal channels available to them. On 20 August, air strikes were launched on alleged terrorist training camps in eastern Afghanistan and on a pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan where, the USA alleged, Osama bin Laden was producing chemical weapons.63

In October of 1999 the U.S. went to the U.N. Security Council and persuaded them to freeze all overseas assets of the Taliban government. The air strikes on the terrorist bases in Afghanistan and the UN sanctions heightened that nation’s sense of resentment towards America, began to shift public favor towards Osama bin Laden and the Taliban, and away from American and the Western worldview. “The US air strikes and the earlier sanctions had already led to an immediate increase in the number of Afghans seeking asylum in the West, arising from an increased climate of fear and threat

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63 Marsden, Peter. *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan* p. 46-47
for moderates and intellectuals as a result of the build-up of support for Osama bin Laden and the Taliban.64

According to the government, the August missile attacks were not intended to assassinate Osama bin Laden as, in accordance with Executive Order 12333, forbids any government employee from participating in an assassination plot. Instead, the reported intention was to eliminate terrorist resources in an attempt to thwart future attacks:

“According to intelligence services, the Khost target was known to be a training and housing complex designed for organizing attacks against the United States. According to several reports from deserters from the Bin Laden Brotherhood at the time, the personnel on the base had significantly grown, indicating and increase in force that could be justified only by plans for terrorist action. In short, the United States had no regrets, and Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen told the press on August 23: ‘There could be more strikes.’”

In the late 90s America was not making any friends in the Islamic world. The policies they chose in their dealings with the Taliban were not constructive. For one, they did not obtain the extradition of bin Laden. For all of the diplomatic and military effort exerted, there was no net gain in this area. What the U.S. policies did accomplish was to ‘shoot itself in the foot’. For instance, in 1998, when President Clinton approved plans to launch cruise missiles at facilities in the Sudan and Afghanistan believed to belong to Osama bin Laden, the effect was not to cripple his capabilities nor to kill him, but instead to paint him as the would-be martyr of the Muslim world. According to Peter Marsden,

64 ibid. p 149
65 Jacquard, Roland. In The Name of Osama Bin Laden. p.47
“The strikes did, however, have the immediate effect of raising both Osama bin Laden and the Taliban to heroic status within the Islamic world, particularly among radical elements in Pakistan and the Gulf...”

With the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in 2000 tensions continued to escalate between the U.S. and the Taliban-- until they reached their breaking point, as bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda network notoriously demonstrated on September 11th, 2001. The Bush administration began to threaten the Taliban with military intervention, if they would not release bin Laden into their custody. The Taliban continued to stonewall the demands of the Americans. In response, Bush unleashed the U.S. military onto Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001:

“On my orders, the United States military has begun strikes against al-Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. These carefully targeted actions are designed to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime.”

While U.S. military action in Afghanistan did successfully push the Taliban government, and certain key elements of the Al-Qaeda network, into the wild and out of a position of power, it is far too early to sound a victory. The Al-Qaeda organization is by no means incapacitated, as they have demonstrated by demolishing several Spanish commuter trains in mid-March of 2004. There is still much work to be done. The

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66 Ibid. p 147
67 President Bush Oct. 7th, 2001 Address
progress of Afghanistan towards stability and prosperity seems to me a strong litmus test for the effectiveness of U.S. anti-terrorist policies. The execution of U.S. military strikes in Afghanistan may well have created as many obstacles to stability and prosperity in the region as did the Taliban. Decisions made during the conflict, while effective against the military forces of the enemy, in large part alienated the general public from the United States. In an article written in the October 27th, 2001 issue of the Chicago Tribune, it was reported that errant U.S strikes have turned the tide of public opinion away from the U.S and back towards the Taliban. The article recounts one story of an entire family gunned down by American gunships and the furor that resulted amongst their community:

“Many of the survivors, who escaped to Pakistan in recent days with the help of family or international relief agencies, said that initially they may have supported the United Sates over the Taliban but now have turned against American and plan to fight if the U.S. or allies deploy ground troops.”

During combat Afghans were also finding themselves falling victim to fatal contact with unexploded portions of cluster bombs. A story from the Washington Post on December 18th 2002 reported that Human Rights Watch was accusing the U.S. military of violating International Human Rights legislation when they dropped cluster bombs on inhabited areas of Afghanistan.

“The group’s report said that the United States dropped 1,228 cluster bombs on Afghanistan—5 percent of the 26,000 bombs dropped between October 2001 and March 2002. The cluster bombs contained 248, 056 bomblets. The groups estimated that at least 12,400 unexploded bomblets

remain on the ground, using what the group said was the Pentagon’s ‘conservative’ dud rate of 5 percent.69

Those who were fortunate enough to avoid becoming subject to collateral damage were dying because they were caught between warring sides without anything to eat. The failure of the U.S. to adequately answer the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan during its removal of the Taliban also constitutes a failure to win the hearts and minds of the people with whom they would later need to depend for the nation-building process. Reported in the *Guardian* on January 9th, 2002 was the story of whole communities of Afghans wasting away, having nothing more than grass to nourish themselves.

The root of the terrorist difficulties the U.S has experienced did originate from Afghanistan, and were brought most lethally to life in the form of 9/11, which was orchestrated from under the aegis of the Taliban regime. Having removed them from power, it has become incumbent upon the U.S. and the international community to nation-build in Afghanistan, for it is recognized that the decision by the United States following the Afghan War may have led in large part to the current struggles. Progress has been made. The cover story of the March 8th, 2004 issue of *Time* offered a scorecard with some promising figures about the quality of life in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. It reported that the number of children enrolled in schools before the war amounted to 1

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million, and had since the fall of the Taliban risen to nearly 4 million. Additionally, the average daily wage of an Afghan laborer has increased from $2.70 to $6.25.\footnote{Tim McGurk and Michael Ware. “Remember Afghanistan?” \textit{Time}. March 8th, 2004.}

But all is not serene today in Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai is in constant threat of assassination, and is rarely seen outside the confines of his U.S.-secured installation. Those sympathizers of the Taliban who survived the bombing campaigns have slowly reorganized themselves into terrorist cells, set solely to kill anyone associated with the U.S.

Difficulties in nation-building are coming also from non-Taliban forces within Afghanistan. Remnants of the days of the resistance, warlords still litter Afghanistan’s landscape wielding Soviet tanks and missiles and numbering up to 40,000 strong. Because of the relatively small force dedicated to the reconstruction process by the United States, they have chosen in some cases to employ these warlords to their ends:

“America’s role in supporting the warlords has been mixed. Many, like [Hazrat] Ali, owe their power to the patronage of the U.S., which handed control of swaths of territory to local commanders after the fall of the Taliban. That decision was born of necessity: the U.S. never intended to commit a military force big enough to secure the entire country, and Karzai still doesn’t have much of an army.”\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Tim McGurk and Michael Ware. “Remember Afghanistan?” \textit{Time}. March 8th, 2004.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
Some question the wisdom of such a strategy. Afghans have reported that, “... the warlords have engaged in behavior almost comparable to the abuses of the Taliban.\(^{72}\)” Should the insurgents be sufficiently stifled, and Afghanistan be able to continue on with its elections scheduled for June of 2004, the question is posed as to whether these warlords will be able to be brought under the control of the government, or will they serve as a future source of destabilization?

In our analysis of the U.S. policy connections to Afghanistan and blowback, let us now look at the failure of the American government to properly identify Osama bin Laden’s network and the Taliban as an eminent threat, and its failure to protect its major cities from devastating and iconoclastic terror attacks.

Standing with Flat Feet: The U.S. Failure to Anticipate Blowback

“Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chair Richard Shelby (R-Ala) stated: ‘There was a lot of information... I believe, and others believe, that if it had been acted on properly, we may have had a different situation on September 11.\(^{73}\)”

I do not believe that the evidence available suggests that the tragedy which occurred on September 11\(^{th}\), 2001 was necessarily a failure of intelligence, but rather the result of an underestimation by important policymakers in the U.S. government. Evidence abounds that the U.S. intelligence community, which had taken a great deal of flak since the attacks, was aware of the intention of Islamic extremists to wage jihad on the United

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
\(^{73}\) Kellner, Douglas. *From 9/11 to Terror War*. p.8
States and its interests. Take for example a report that was published in 1999 which outlined the exact plan that was executed on September 11th.

“A 1999 National Intelligence Council report on Terrorism specifically warned that bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network might undertake suicide plan hijackings against U.S. targets; the report noted that members of the Al Qaeda network had threatened to do this before and that the U.S. should be aware of such strikes.”

During the early part of 2001, reports of terrorist plans against United States interests became so frequent and specific, that it prompted Senator Dianne Feinstein to write a letter to Dick Cheney, imploring him to take some preventative actions. Yet, her imploring letters were twice ignored.

“I was deeply concerned as to whether our house was in order to prevent a terrorist attack. My work on the Intelligence Committee and as chair of the Technology and Terrorism Subcommittee had given me a sense of foreboding for some time... In fact, I was so concerned that I contacted Vice President Cheney’s office that same month [July 2001] to urge that he restructure our counter-terrorism and homeland defense programs to ensure better accountability and prevent important intelligence information from slipping through the cracks. Despite repeated efforts by myself and staff, the White House did not address my request. I followed this up last September 2001 before the attacks and was told by ‘Scooter’ Libby [Cheney’s assistant] that it might be another six months before he would be able to review the material. I told him I did not believe we had six months to wait.”

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74 ibid. p.8
75 ibid. p.11
Warnings seemed to go unheeded, as no drastic measures were taken to safeguard airport security against hijackings. Warnings had been coming to the U.S. not only from their own Intelligence Services, but from those of foreign countries from as early as 1994.

“It was also well-known in political circles that in 1994 the French had foiled a terrorist airplane attack on the Eiffel Tower, and in 1995 arrests were made of terrorists who allegedly planned to use an airplane to attack the CIA headquarters. Philippine police subsequently warned the United States that Ramzi Yousef, who had helped plan the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, had schemes to hijack and blow up a dozen U.S. airliners and was contemplating taking over and crashing a plane into the CIA headquarters himself.”

Osama bin Laden had been directing rhetoric against the United States since early in the 90s, and it was known that he was seeking refuge with the Taliban. While the U.S. attempted to gain his extradition from the terribly biased Taliban regime, the connection between bin Laden and the Taliban was not detected, as administration after administration attempted to persuade them into handing him over. This began with Clinton:

“The Clinton administration at first engaged the Taliban government in dialogue, but soon broke off relations and failed to deal with the bin Laden problem... In February 1998, Al Qaeda issued a statement, endorsed by several extreme Islamic groups, declaring it the duty of all Muslims to kill U.S. citizens—civilian or military—and their allies everywhere. The bombing of U.S. embassies in Africa later in 1998 was ascribed to the bin Laden—Al Qaeda network.”

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76 ibid. p. 7-8
77 ibid. p. 34
The Clinton administration implicated bin Laden in the 1998 embassy bombings and launched a token missile attack on training camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan; yet serious measures were not taken to safeguard the American homeland from terrorist attacks. The underestimation of terrorist capabilities by the Clinton administration proved only to become outright neglect with the election of Bush to the presidency.

Reports leaked from the FBI to the media after the 9/11 attacks that President Bush had ordered the FBI to lay off its investigation of the bin Laden family. More suspect was the action that John Ashcroft took early in the term:

“Ashcroft reportedly shut down wiretaps of Al Qaeda-related suspects connected to the 1998 bombing of African embassies and cut $58 million from an FBI request for an increase in its antiterrorism budget (while at the same time switching from commercial to government jet for his own personal flight).” 78

It was not until after Al Qaeda had struck that the Bush administration began to take the threat of terrorism seriously. It caused the impetus for the Homeland Security Act, which promised to create synergy between intelligence agencies where before there was a lack of communication or cooperation. The attacks also served as the motivation for better airport security. But the question Americans have been asking themselves ever since, is why weren’t these measures taken beforehand? In the face of what U.S. and

78 ibid p.9
foreign intelligence services had been telling the American government since 1994 about threats to the homeland, why didn’t anyone listen?

Concluding Remarks

As I am making my concluding remarks on this case study, the United States and Britain are engaged in nation-building in two middle eastern countries: Afghanistan and Iraq. It is questionable, from the perspective of international politics, whether it was particularly wise for the U.S. military to enter either country. Our foreign policy decisions in the past have set the stage in recent days for a vast uprising of hatred against the United States. Our withdrawal from Afghanistan in the midst of a Civil War made life there nearly unbearable. Years later, out of the suffering and squalor caused by years of war, the Taliban emerged. On its surface, from the perspective of American policy makers, it presented very little danger to American security. In the eyes of the Clinton administration, the Taliban ushered in a welcome era of stability in Afghanistan. But beneath the surface, the Taliban was aiding in the establishment and strengthening of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network. Bin Laden too, as a person and a movement, was a product of the Afghan War. Funded with U.S. dollars and weaponry, he built up his global networks first to fight the Soviets, then to wage jihads all over the world—most notably at the Americans who had been chosen in his stead by the Saudi Royalty to fight Saddam Hussein.

From the American experience in Afghanistan during the Cold War and the resulting blowback, which has resulted in our continued involvement in Afghanistan,
there are lessons to be learned. First and foremost, as voters we ought to encourage our policymakers to take sight not only of the short term goals and implications of their decisions, but consider the long term ramifications as well. I believe it is entirely fair to say that the current war against terror is just as demanding of the resources and attention of our government as was the defeat of the Soviets during the Cold War. But let us not forget, that the war we are fighting now is against the same groups of people who we funded and armed beginning in 1979. It is difficult to predict what might have happened had we not decided to fight a shadow war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, but, in retrospect, it is difficult for Americans to leverage winning the Afghan War with the catastrophes that we have endured from the mid-1990s at the hands of Islamic terrorists. For this reason, I find it particularly alarming that in our quest to build a stable democracy in Afghanistan today, because of an unwillingness to dedicate more peacekeeping troops, we have begun to employ the assistance of armed warlords. It is necessary when deciding policy to weigh the potential for long-term difficulties against immediate, but potentially short-lived advantages.

We must also endeavor to be more humanitarian instead of machiavellian in our future foreign policy considerations. The ends may justify the means today, but what about tomorrow? Leaving Afghanistan after the Red Army was gone left the country mired in poverty and violence, a breeding ground for extremism—and more violence. This is a lesson I am not certain has yet been sufficiently internalized. During the campaign in Afghanistan there were daily reports of civilian casualties and starving
children all over the country. Our failure to provide for the people in the vacuum of a
government causes the kind of suffering that breeds only hatred of us. When fighting
elements like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, in order to properly sow the seeds of democracy,
the people cannot live in fear, which means that we cannot leave nations in the control of
absolutist type regimes, or befriend impoverished nations that are autocratically led. It
also means that as we occupy and attempt to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan, that we must
invest the manpower and the resource necessary to provide security to those who want to
help rebuild and engender democracy—no questions asked.

Another lesson that must be internalized is that in today’s global society, no
enemy can be underestimated. In order to maintain the kind of open society that we
enjoy, threats must be taken seriously, and the infrastructure must be in place to monitor
such threats, both globally and domestically. Yet, this must be accomplished without
changing the spirit of American liberties and civil rights. Because of our government’s
failure to anticipate the 9/11 attacks, it is clear that we were not prepared to take threats
seriously, and we radically underestimated our enemy. Yet, the prudent move would not
be to allow the pendulum to swing from one extreme to the other. Instead, let us better
endeavor to provide security and maintain the rudiments of America’s greatness.

I am encouraged that the American government seems to have learned the danger
of leaving a nation in shambles, and has begun an effort to build a stable government in
both Iraq and Afghanistan. But it is clear that these attempts at nation-building are
costing the American people a great deal of money. While the investment in global
security is well worth it in my opinion, it concerns me that because of our unilateralism in both the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, we are currently having difficulty gaining international support for what really is an international problem. While this case study does not concern itself with this aspect of the Bush administration’s response to terrorism, it is certainly a similar lesson that should be internalized in the minds of future policy makers, just like the lessons we’ve taken from Afghanistan.
Bibliography of Cited Sources


