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Abstract

When the Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, very few people believed that the Soviet-backed Republic of Afghanistan could last through the end of the decade. Instead, Mohammad Najibullah’s administration surprised the world as it firmly persisted against the mujahedin forces seeking to overthrow the Afghan government. Despite the international assumption that it would face a quick demise, the Afghan government endured through April 1992, when the mujahedin took full control of the country. Four years later, the Taliban took control of the Afghan capital of Kabul, forcibly extracting Najibullah from a United Nations compound and brutally assassinating him in the streets of Kabul.

This study examines the main factors that contributed to the collapse of Afghanistan’s socialist government in 1992. In addition to the lingering effects of the decade-long Soviet intervention, several cultural and societal factors prevented the prolonged existence of a Soviet-style socialist republic in Afghanistan. Not only did these factors embolden opposition forces, but they also prevented the people of Afghanistan from embracing the ideologies of a socialist government. By examining these different elements, it is then possible to understand which factors played a more significant role in the downfall of the communist regime in Afghanistan.
As the United States hopes to give Afghanistan more independence in the coming years, it is increasingly vital that policymakers possess a holistic view of why the Republic of Afghanistan failed in 1992. A proper understanding of this issue will help the new Afghan government to thrive as a sovereign entity. However, this is not a case where the simplest answer is best. By using a variety of sources to build upon existing research, it is possible to develop a more comprehensive view of the cultural, societal, and international situation in Afghanistan.
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Introduction

As mujahedin forces tightened their noose around the Afghan capital of Kabul in late 1991, Mohammed Najibullah desperately searched for a way to prevent the collapse of his administration. In spite of numerous victories by the Afghan military, the Republic of Afghanistan only maintained control of about 10% of the country by the end of 1991.¹ For years, the Afghan government used Soviet-made military equipment to suppress the underlying problems plaguing the country, attempting to solve the Afghanistan’s cultural issues through military means. Throughout 1991 and early 1992, the Najibullah administration began to realize that a military solution was unsustainable.² As a last ditch attempt to win the support of the population, the Republic of Afghanistan³ implemented several reconciliatory policies, reversing several of the government’s more controversial reforms. However, these policies occurred too late to make a difference for the Najibullah administration. In 1992, the Republic of Afghanistan collapsed as the mujahedin solidified their control of the country and captured the capital.

² Mohammed Najibullah, "Najibullah Gives Speech on Khowst Situation" (speech, President Najibullah to Military Officials, Exact Location Not Given, Kabul, April 8, 1991).
³ For the purposes of simplicity and continuity in this thesis, the name “Republic of Afghanistan” refers to the government that was in power from 1978-1992. Originally, the socialist government was named the “Democratic Republic of Afghanistan” from 1978-1987, but was renamed in 1987 to the “Republic of Afghanistan”.
For the Najibullah administration, the period leading up to the government’s collapse consisted of numerous small victories with the ever-looming pressure of defeat. Following the withdrawal of Soviet military forces in Afghanistan in February of 1989, much of the world believed that the Afghan military would collapse within a year.\(^4\) However, Najibullah took much of the world by surprise when his government was able to stay strong against the mujahidin forces seeking to overthrow his administration. Even President Bush remarked in 1990 meeting with UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, “I was dead wrong about Najibullah—I thought he would fall when the Soviet troops withdrew.”\(^5\) Despite the many issues facing the Afghan government, such as political infighting and a misunderstanding of the influence of Islam in Afghan society, the regime was able to survive through economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union.\(^6\)

Nonetheless, in early 1991, things began to unravel for the communist government. Due to unrelenting funding from external governments, the mujahedin were able to exert constant pressure on the Afghan military. Additionally, Khost, one of Afghanistan’s largest cities in the eastern portion of the country, fell to an eleven-year siege by the mujahedin. The mujahedin victory at Khost, which is located less than 100 miles from Kabul, put further pressure on Najibullah’s regime by cutting off a critical


\(^5\) "Secretary General's Luncheon with George Bush," June 4, 1990, MS Box 10, Folder 106, Perez De Cuellar Papers, Yale University Sterling Memorial Library.

\(^6\) Testimony Before the House of Representatives Select Committee on Hunger (1989) (testimony of Ambassador Peter Tomsen).
supply route to the capital. Finally, in 1992, after the mujahedin surrounded Kabul, it became clear that Najibullah’s administration could no longer sustain its conflict against the rebel forces. On April 15, 1992, the Republic of Afghanistan broke into several factions as Najibullah announced his resignation. Though many in the West hoped that the fall of the socialist regime would bring peace to Afghanistan, the regime’s collapse brought several more years of civil war to the country until the Taliban took control in late 1996.

Though few expected the Republic of Afghanistan to last a little over three years without a Soviet military presence, very little research has focused on the main factors that contributed to the government’s collapse, with the majority of the research focusing more on the reasons that the Soviet Union decided to pull its military forces out of Afghanistan. However, when the United States launched military operations into Afghanistan in early October 2001, this issue took on a renewed relevance. As the U.S. plans to decrease the number of troops in Afghanistan over the next couple of years, it is critical that the individuals in charge of the nation’s foreign policy understand the volatile history of this region. Certainly, the current conflict in Afghanistan is different in many ways from the situation the Republic of Afghanistan experienced in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. However, in addition to the collapse of the Soviet Union, multiple factors played into the collapse of the Afghan government in 1992 and it is important that today’s policymakers study these carefully in order to prevent these same factors from destabilizing the current Afghan administration.

7 "Significance of Mujahidin Khowst Victory Analyzed," Hong Kong Agence France-Presse (AFP) (Islamabad), April 1, 1991.
Therefore, this raises the question: what were the primary factors contributing to the collapse of Afghanistan’s government following the withdrawal of Soviet military forces? Undoubtedly, there were certain events leading up to 1992 that contributed to the government’s collapse. Before understanding the collapse of the Afghan government following the withdrawal of Soviet military forces, it is also important to understand the background of the Soviet-Afghan War, particularly in the late 1980’s. Next, one must understand the various factors that contributed to the downfall of the communist government. Even though many researchers attribute the collapse of the Najibullah administration to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the loss of Soviet funding and military support only fueled the underlying issues in Afghanistan. This loss of support exacerbated the important issues that the government had previously been able to suppress, including outside influence in the conflict from Pakistan, Iran, and the United States; internal dissensions within the Afghan government; and the government’s attempt to solve the conflict through military means, instead of addressing the cultural and societal problems the country was facing. Each of these factors, including the loss of Soviet funding, played a role in destabilizing and discrediting the Republic of Afghanistan, leading to its eventual collapse in 1992.

Existing Scholarship

A plethora of scholarship on the Soviet-Afghan War exists, dating from Afghanistan’s communist revolution in 1978 to the withdrawal of Soviet military forces in 1989. Similarly, there is a large amount of research on the rise of Taliban in 1994 and
their eventual takeover in 1966. However, very little research examines the years 1989 through 1992, the period of time that saw the downfall of the socialist Republic of Afghanistan and the resurgence of civil war across the country. Furthermore, several problems exist with the few secondary sources that make up the existing research on these years.

The first problem with the existing secondary sources on this topic is that the majority of the research focuses on the reasons that the Soviet Union decided to pull its military forces out of Afghanistan or how the Taliban were able to rise to power in the civil war that followed 1992. Following 2001, these two events drew the attention of many researchers because of their connection to the current conflict in Afghanistan. Therefore, in an effort to bring up to date the research on Afghanistan, researchers focused more on these hot topics than issues such as the collapse of the Afghan government in 1992.

Second, since so few secondary sources exist on these particular years, many of these authors end up citing each other in support of their arguments. Unlike many topics, where this could be seen as laziness on the part of the researchers, it is instead largely due to the difficulty in obtaining data from primary sources in Afghanistan. Because it is difficult to enter Afghanistan in order to do field work, much less gaining access to Afghan primary sources, these researchers must rely heavily on secondary sources to support their research. Therefore, instead of being circular in their citations, these authors are merely trying to make the best of the limited resources that are available to them.
The third problem that exists with the existing research is that the secondary sources on this specific topic tend to be very one-dimensional, focusing either solely on the Soviet Union or on cultural factors when explaining the collapse of the Najibullah administration. This one-dimensional focus is a result of the different approaches that researchers take in order to study this subject. Just as researchers who approach the study of Afghanistan from an anthropological perspective may tend to ascribe events’ causes to internal factors such as culture or politics, researchers coming from a Soviet studies background are more likely to focus their research on the Soviet Union’s role in Afghan events. Ultimately, since each author is seeking to make a specific argument pertaining to their field, these sources fail to take a holistic approach when examining this event in Afghan history.

In his book, *A Long Goodbye*, Artemy Kalinovsky examines the Soviet withdraw and the events leading up to it in extensive detail. His research uses a variety of primary sources, including archival material and interviews with Soviet officials, to determine why it took the Soviet Union so long to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan.8 In doing so, Kalinovsky provides a unique view into the political situation in Afghanistan leading up to 1989, as well as the various concerns that Soviet leaders possessed regarding Afghanistan’s socialist government. Kalinovsky’s interviews with Soviet diplomats, KGB officials, Red Army officials, and top Politburo figures show that many Soviet leaders were apprehensive about continuing their relationship with the Najibullah administration. One prominent example that Kalinovsky mentions is Boris Yeltsin.

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Kalinovsky’s research demonstrates that Yeltsin, Russia’s president from 1991 to 1999, began meeting with mujahedin leaders as early as 1990, in an effort to distance Russia from the Republic of Afghanistan. Insights such as these provide an invaluable understanding of how Soviet leaders were viewing the Najibullah administration and the changing situation in Afghanistan in the years leading up to the Afghan government’s collapse.

While Kalinovsky examines the events leading up to the Soviet withdrawal in nice detail, he provides scant analysis of the events following 1989 in the conclusion of his book. Moreover, when it comes to the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan in 1992 and the ensuing takeover by mujahedin forces, he writes it off as merely being a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent loss of Soviet financial backing. Although the dissolution of the Soviet Union undeniably had an impact on the eventual collapse of the Najibullah administration, to say that this was the only reason that the Afghan government failed indicates a very shallow understanding of the situation in Afghanistan. Kalinovsky is not alone in this simplistic assessment of the government’s collapse. For example, in his book, Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89, Rodric Braithwaite completely attributes the downfall of the Najibullah regime to the loss of Russian military supplies and fuel in early 1992. What Kalinovsky, Braithwaite, and many other authors who are researching this topic from a Soviet-centric point of view fail to consider are the other factors that prevented a Soviet-style government from taking hold in Afghanistan, resulting in a one-dimensional understanding of the government’s collapse.

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9 Kalinovsky, A Long Goodbye, 204.
10 Ibid., 206.
11 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 298.
collapse in 1992. Even though it prevented the government from sustaining a conflict with the mujahedin, this loss of Soviet funding and military support only fueled the underlying issues in Afghanistan.

Conversely, David Edwards thoroughly documents Afghanistan’s cultural and societal intricacies in his book, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad*. Edwards’ primary focus in this book is to examine the circumstances that allowed the Taliban to take power in Afghanistan in 1996. However, Edwards also identifies how both societal rules and religion came together to prevent Soviet-style socialism from taking hold across the Afghan population. Edwards’ Afghan-centric point of view provides a vast source of useful information regarding how the Afghan population reacted to the Soviet-style socialist government that the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) implemented in 1978. Furthermore, Edwards’ account examines the various grievances that both the Afghan population and the mujahedin opposition had with the Najibullah administration. Through the course of his research, Edwards demonstrates the importance of understanding how internal factors prevented the Afghan population from accepting Afghanistan’s Soviet-style government.

However, Edwards transitions very quickly from the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 to the rise of the Taliban in 1994, quickly glossing over these years in his epilogue. Though he briefly touches on several aspects that contributed to the collapse of the Najibullah administration, Edwards fails to consider the influence of actors outside of Afghanistan in his explanation of the government’s downfall. Instead, Edwards simply points to the fact that the Republic of Afghanistan probably should have collapsed sooner, had it not been
for the disorganization of the mujahedin forces. Just as Kalinovsky and Braithwaite’s Soviet-centric point of view provided a very one-sided explanation of the situation in Afghanistan, Edwards’ Afghan-centric research presents an unbalanced view on the opposite end of the spectrum of the Afghan government’s collapse. Despite providing the underlying societal and cultural factors that drove the Afghan population to support the overthrow of the Najibullah administration, Edwards does not consider outside effects, such as the loss of Soviet support and international support for mujahedin forces, in his brief assessment of the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan.

Similarly, in his book, Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, Thomas Barfield focuses more on the political reasons for the failure of the Afghan government in 1992. Although he does attribute a few sentences explaining the effect the dissolution of the Soviet Union had in the Afghan government’s collapse, he frames the issue as more of a failure on the part of the Najibullah administration. Additionally, in his focus on the Afghan government’s political issues, Barfield seems to consider the mujahedin as merely an afterthought. Barfield acknowledges the presence of outside support for the opposition from Pakistan, but when he discusses the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992, he focuses purely on the government’s fragmentation due to improper governance. Even though the improper governance of both the Najibullah regime and its socialist predecessors was an unquestionably important factor in the eventual downfall, Barfield attributes too much weight to this sole factor.

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The consistent problem with the existing scholarship on the topic of the collapse of the Afghan government in 1992 is a lack of a holistic analysis. The majority of the secondary sources that examining Afghanistan in 1992 fall into one of two groups. The first group, which includes Kalinovsky and Braithwaite, attributes the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, giving very little weight to the internal factors that affected the Afghan government. On the other hand, the second group, which includes Edwards and Barfield, attributes the Afghan government’s collapse in 1992 to either cultural factors or political failure, neglecting the impact of external factors in the Republic of Afghanistan’s fate. Although neither of these groups is wrong in its analysis of which factors led the Afghan government to failure, they each devote too much weight to the specific topic that they are examining. Instead of merely choosing one group’s perspective, it is necessary to examine and evaluate the factors that both of these groups present in order to develop a complete picture of the reasons behind the Afghan government’s collapse.
Afghanistan’s History of Conflict

In order to discern the factors that contributed to the collapse of the Afghan government in 1992, one must first comprehend the circumstances surrounding the Soviet-Afghan War, including Afghanistan’s history of conflict. In addition to shedding light on the Soviet Union's intentions in the region, Afghanistan's current culture and society are a result of numerous invasions throughout several centuries. Furthermore, Afghans' deep connection to their shared history has affected the way they react to various policies and changes in government. Although this history stretches back thousands of years, Afghanistan’s first experiences with political jihad began in the 19th century during the Great Game, which pitted the imperial nations of Russia and Great Britain against each other. One after the other, the events of the 19th century shaped the mentality of the Afghans who opposed the socialist policies of the PDPA and, in turn, had a direct impact on the eventual collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan in 1992.

The Great Game

Conquering armies have sought to control Afghanistan because of its crossroads location between the major powers of China, India, and Pakistan, as well as bordering the three Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.14 In addition

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to Russia and the Soviet Union, the Persians, Central Asian Turks, Mongols, and British also attempted to control Afghanistan. Russia’s interest in Afghanistan began in the 19th century during the Great Game, in which the empires of Britain and Russia battled for dominance in Central Asia. During the Great Game, Russia sought to expand its influence in Central Asia into the area of Afghanistan. Britain saw this as a direct threat to its connection to India and launched three separate incursions into Afghanistan.

What makes the Great Game particularly relevant to the situation in Afghanistan following the Soviet military’s withdrawal is that it was the first time that Afghans carried out major resistance movements using the idea of religious and cultural illegitimacy to oppose the government in Kabul. During these first two Anglo-Afghan Wars, Afghans first began to rally around the idea of jihad, or holy war, to oppose what they perceived to be illegitimate leaders. This was the first time that non-elite Afghan groups, such as local religious leaders, framed their opposition to the government in Kabul as a religious jihad, aiming the popular resistance specifically at the infidel British.15 Abdur Rahman, who took power in Afghanistan following the Second Anglo-Afghan War, even wrote a book using various parts of the Koran, such as imagery of horseback ambushes and the beauty of paradise for martyrs, to justify the call for jihad against the British.16 Throughout the Great Game, Afghan religious and political leaders used this idea of using jihad as a rallying cry to depose illegitimate leaders, both foreign and Afghan alike. If these local leaders could convince the population that a particular leader in Kabul was going against the teachings of Islam, it would almost certainly

15 Barfield, Afghanistan, 133.
guarantee them support from the Afghan population. This method of garnering popular support would be echoed centuries later by the mujahedin in their fight against the Soviets, as well as by the Taliban in their present conflict against the United States.

Winning the First Anglo-Afghan War proved decimating for the British, with Afghan fighters wiping out over half of the British occupational forces. In 1839, as both Britain and Russia attempted to increase their influence in the region, the Russians pledged their support to Persia, who had long held territorial disputes with the Afghan government. Fearing a potential Russian-backed Persian excursion into Afghanistan and a subsequent encroachment on India, the British Empire sent a contingent of about 21,000 troops to Afghanistan. The British troops deposed the Afghan ruler Dost Mohammed Khan and put the pro-British Shah Shuja Durrani on the Afghan throne. However, following a bloody war of occupation with Afghan opposition forces, the British troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1842. That same year, Shah Shuja Durrani was assassinated and Dost Mohammed restored to the throne.\(^{17}\)

In 1878, the Afghan ruler Sher Ali Khan received a Russian envoy while simultaneously preventing a British envoy from entering Afghanistan, triggering the Second Anglo-Afghan War. This second war, which would last until 1880, proved equally as agonizing for the British as the first war, with around 1,800 soldiers dying from combat and another 8,000 dying from disease.\(^{18}\) Though British forces occupied the major cities, they faced an ever-growing opposition force in the countryside. After

suffering a crippling defeat outside of Kandahar, the arrival of Abdur Rahman provided
the British with an opportunity to cut their losses in Afghanistan with Abdur Rahman,
who had just returned from exile in Russia, rode into Kabul proclaiming himself leader of
the Afghan people. Their resolve for continuing a conflict in Afghanistan weakened, the
British reached an agreement with Abdur Rahman, granting the British control of several
territories as well as allowing the British to have considerable say in the country’s foreign
policy, in exchange for the withdraw of British military forces.

For the next 39 years, the British Empire and Afghanistan maintained relatively
good relations, with the British using financial means to sway Afghan foreign policy and
drive Afghan commerce towards India. However, when Amanullah Khan took power in
Afghanistan following the assassination of his father, he saw a potential way to boost
Afghanistan’s autonomy. As a way to distract his Afghan critics at home and restore
Afghanistan’s independence over its own foreign affairs, he made the bold decision to
invade British India, starting the Third Anglo-Afghan War in May 1919. Even though the
war lasted a mere two months, both sides of the conflict emerged somewhat successful in
August 1919. As an outcome of this third war, Afghanistan gained considerable control
over its foreign affairs, while the British received a reaffirmation of the Durand Line
from the Afghan government. In the end, Amanullah’s risky decision to attack British
India not only allowed for political gains, but also succeeded in temporarily distracting
his critics at home.

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19 Tomsen, The Wars of Afghanistan, 40-41.
Following the Third Anglo-Afghan War, Afghanistan essentially became an independent state. Afghanistan developed into a self-governing monarchy, with several monarchs fighting for control over the years. In 1964, a liberalization of the Afghan constitution by King Zahir Shah resulted in the emergence of several political parties. This liberalization led to the formation of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), an Afghan socialist party. Since its founding in 1965, the PDPA was continuously plagued by feuding between its two factions: Khalq and Parcham. The Khalq faction was mostly comprised of Pashtuns from the non-elite classes, while the Parcham faction had more urban-based members who belonged to the middle and upper middle classes. In 1978, the PDPA organized a military coup, overthrew the government, and assassinated the former Afghan leader, Mohammad Daoud, and his family, establishing the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA). However, the old feuds between the party’s factions broke out almost immediately, as each faction attempted to gain more influence than the other possessed. Over the next several years, the two parties fought for power through exiles, purges, and organized killings. However, when rivals assassinated the Afghan head of state Nur Mohammed Taraki, this infighting soon drew the attention of Afghanistan’s neighbor to the north, the Soviet Union.

In 1979, the Soviet Union saw an opportunity to gain security on the USSR’s southern border by bringing Afghanistan into the Soviet sphere of influence. One of the

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major factors influencing Leonid Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, to pursue military intervention in Afghanistan was the instability of the PDPA due to infighting.\(^24\) In order to bolster the new communist regime and help quell the unrest in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan in December of 1979, starting the Soviet-Afghan War. The Soviet government deployed its military forces to Afghanistan with the modest goals of securing the main towns and roads, stabilizing the government, and training the Afghan army and police.\(^25\) In all, the Soviet leadership expected to accomplish these goals and withdraw within six months to a year.

The Soviet-Afghan War

By all foreseeable measures at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet military should have had no problems fighting a group of Afghan rebels and bolstering the new communist government in Afghanistan. After all, the Soviets had the top weapons technology of the time, including helicopters and tanks. Meanwhile, the Afghans were fighting with whatever they could get their hands on, which often meant rifles that originated in the First World War, if not earlier. Furthermore, the majority of the Soviet leadership did not expect Soviet military forces to be in Afghanistan past the winter of 1979, thinking that the mujahedin would throw down their weapons and surrender when faced with the power of the Soviet Army.\(^26\) However, the Soviet military made several key mistakes that caused them to become bogged down in a long, drawn-

\(^{26}\) Loyn, *In Afghanistan*, 143.
out war. In particular, the Soviet military’s focus on fighting a major war, as well as widespread collateral damage, hindered the Soviet Union and the DRA’s ability to maintain control of the situation in Afghanistan. The Soviet military, similar to the American military in Vietnam, assumed that if the army was well prepared to fight a major war, it could fight minor wars successfully without too much adaptation.27 The Soviet army had spent years training for a war against the West in Europe. The Soviet military that invaded Afghanistan was “trained to fight within the context of a theater war against a modern enemy who would obligingly occupy defensive positions stretching across the northern European plain.”28 Instead, Soviet troops now found themselves facing a guerilla war.

Aside from the mujahedin’s intimate knowledge of the local terrain, which allowed them to move quickly and efficiently in the day or night, there were several major tactics that the mujahedin employed that threw off the Soviet military. Consequently, the Afghan army was equally unprepared to deal with the mujahedin threat. First, and perhaps most importantly, the mujahedin avoided direct contact with the superior might of regular forces that would have wiped them out. This, in effect, deprived the Soviet military of the face-to-face, “fair” fight for which they had trained. Second, the mujahedin never carried out positional warfare and, when threatened with encirclement, would abandon their positions. This means that the Afghan rebels did not occupy defensive positions, such as the armies of Western Europe would have done. A third advantage that the mujahedin possessed in combat was that they always strove to achieve

27 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 127.
These tactical factors not only hindered the Soviet military, but also made it incredibly difficult for the Afghan army they were advising to maintain control of its territory.

With the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, the Soviet Union began looking at ways to withdraw gracefully from the conflict in Afghanistan. By February 1989, the Soviet Union had withdrawn the last of its conventional military forces from Afghanistan. During this time, the Soviet Union did an excellent job preparing the Republic of Afghanistan for success, instead of making a hasty departure and hoping for the best. In fact, the Soviet Union waited to begin withdrawing its troops until an effective military strategy, acceptance of outside interference following the withdrawal, and a definitive timeline converged. Gorbachev, himself, stated to the Politburo, “We could leave quickly, not thinking about anything and blame everything on our predecessors. However, this is not possible. We cannot report this in front of our nation.” One of the biggest changes the Soviet leaders required was to find a strong, indomitable leader to lead the country. The Soviet leadership had lost faith in Babrak Karmal, who served as the head of the PDPA and government since the party took power

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29 Grau, The Bear Went Over the Mountain, 197.
in 1979. Therefore, in 1986, Gorbachev stated that the first step to beginning the Soviet withdrawal was to replace Karmal with Mohammed Najibullah.\textsuperscript{32}

Mohammed Najibullah

Mohammed Najibullah was born in 1947 into a prosperous family in the Paktia province of Afghanistan, which is located just south of Kabul. His father Akhtar Mohammed was the leader of the local Pashtun tribe and maintained relations with the president of Afghanistan at that time, Mohammed Daoud Khan. Between the Pashtun culture and his father’s political connections, Najibullah’s upbringing made him an ambitious politician with a deep sense of Pashtun nationalism.\textsuperscript{33}

Pashtuns make up the largest of the seven main ethnic groups in Afghanistan, comprising about 40% of the population. The majority of the country’s Pashtun population lives in Afghanistan’s southern and eastern provinces. Furthermore, there are about 28 million Pashtuns living in Pakistan, mostly along Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan. This means that the Pashtun populations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have been historically close, maintaining cultural, economic, and even family ties. Furthermore, Pashtun culture revolves around \textit{Pashtunwali}, which serves as a legal and moral code for all Pashtun peoples, solidifying a specific social order and set of responsibilities.\textsuperscript{34} As members of the Sunni branch of Islam, most Pashtuns follow a blend of Sharia law and the laws of Pashtunwali, which sometimes stray from Islamic beliefs.

\textsuperscript{32} Chernjaeva, \textit{V Politbjuro TsK KPSS}, 47.
In general, the vast majority of Pashtuns embrace this sense of traditional, spiritual, and communal identity that Pashtunwali affords them. Since he grew up in a Pashtun tribe, Najibullah maintained strong ties with the Pashtun community throughout his life, including during his time as president. However, as he became a more prominent figure in the socialist government, Najibullah found himself on the opposing side of many of his fellow Pashtun tribesmen, who saw the government’s socialist policies as interfering with Pashtunwali, their way of life.

Najibullah’s political career began as he moved to Kabul for his university education. In 1964, Najibullah entered the medical school of Kabul University in order to pursue a career in gynecology. While in medical school, he became a member of the Parcham faction of the PDPA. In 1970, the Parcham faction elected Najibullah to be the Secretary of the Parcham PDPA in Kabul, a position that commanded much more power, but demanded an even larger time commitment. Nevertheless, in 1975 he graduated university and began his profession as a gynecologist until he officially became a full-time member of the PDPA in 1978. Following the coup in April 1978, Najibullah became a member of the head council of the newly formed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. In 1980, he took control of the state security organization, Khadamat-e Aetla’at-e Dawlati (KHAD), where he served under General Secretary Babrak Karmal.35

As the Soviet leadership in Moscow began to lose faith in Karmal, they began searching for a suitable replacement. For the past six years, Najibullah had served the Party and the Afghan government faithfully as the head of the KHAD, showing

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35 GRU Dossier on Najibullah.
incredible skill in dealing with the tribal issues that were plaguing the socialist government. Furthermore, he possessed all of the leadership qualities that the Soviet Union was looking for: he was able, energetic, a good public speaker and willing to try new ideas. Because these qualities distinguished Najibullah from the other potential candidates, Gorbachev decided that Najibullah would be the best candidate to replace Karmal.

Upon Karmal’s forced resignation in late 1987, Najibullah took control of the government. Najibullah spent his first years in power attempting to smooth over his relationship with the Afghan people. He held local elections in 1987, allowing for both the formation of other political parties and a Meli Shura, or bicameral National Assembly, consisting of a Senate and a House of Representatives. Najibullah also implemented several policy changes regarding Soviet policies that his predecessor had implemented. In particular, in the newest draft of the Afghan constitution, he called for a greater relaxation of the land reform program. This land reform program was in direct conflict with both the Islamic and tribal concept of Pashtunwali and was a huge source of Pashtun discontent, further fueling the opposition movement. Additionally, due partially to pressure from Moscow, Najibullah pursued a program of national reconciliation. In 1986, he formed the National Compromise Commission, whose goal was to contact the communist government’s opposition in order to find a solution to the conflict.

Furthermore, Najibullah attempted to convince the USSR to keep a military force, however small, in Afghanistan to assist the government against the mujahedin. However,

36 Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, 67.
37 Braithwaite, *Afghans*, 276.
he was very unsuccessful in obtaining any assistance in the form of Soviet troops. In a Politburo meeting on May 21, 1987, he firmly stated that the Soviet Union would continue economic assistance to Afghanistan, but said, regarding Soviet troops in Afghanistan, that this issue would be finished within the next 18 months.39 Slightly over 18 months later, in February 1989, the last of the Soviet military force left Afghanistan, with the exception of a contingent of military advisers to assist the Afghan government. However, these advisers remained, in increasingly smaller numbers all the way through 1992, until Najibullah escorted the remaining seven advisers to the airport as the situation in Kabul became increasingly dire.40

Nonetheless, the Soviet Union ended Najibullah’s hopes of Soviet military assistance in Afghanistan with the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1988. Signed between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the U.S. and USSR serving as guarantors, the agreement covered the return of Afghan refugees, interrelations for the settling of the conflict in Afghanistan, and the timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet military troops. Regarding assistance from the Soviet military, the document explicitly prohibits any party from conducting a military occupation or any other form of intervention and interference, whether overt or covert.41 For Najibullah, this meant that he would have to rely on his own Afghan forces to defend his government from the mujahedin, with the help of Soviet political and military advisers, as well as a significant amount of economic aide.

39 Chernjaeva, _V Politburo TsK KPSS_, 193.
40 Aleksandr A. Ljahovskij, _Tragedija i Doblest’ Afgana_ (Moskva: GPL, 1995), 702.
Factors that Contributed to the Afghan Government's Collapse

Following the withdrawal of Soviet military forces in 1989, several key factors contributed to the downfall of the Afghan government. In 1992, the Soviet Union formally dissolved, drastically changing the world’s power dynamic. This caused many changes throughout the region, including the formal independence of the 12 remaining republics of the Soviet Union. Additionally, President Gorbachev officially resigned his office, making way for Russian President Boris Yeltsin to take control of affairs in Afghanistan. Less than a month later, Yeltsin’s new administration cut off all remaining military and fuel supply shipments to Afghanistan and began negotiating directly with mujahedeen leaders, instead of supporting peace talks through Najibullah and his administration. 42 Without this continued influx of weapons and fuel from the Soviet Union, the Republic of Afghanistan could not sustain its conflict with the mujahedeen opposition forces.

Undoubtedly, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, causing a loss of military and economic support to Afghanistan, was one of the key factors that led to the destabilization of the Afghan government. In most articles pertaining to Afghanistan during this period of history, many authors often mention this loss of funding and support due to the breakup of the Soviet Union as being the sole factor in the collapse of

Najibullah’s government under pressure from the mujahedins. However, this raises the question, was the loss of Soviet support the only major factor in the downfall of the communist government in Afghanistan? If not, were there other factors that played a large part in setting up the Afghan government for eventual failure? In addition to the loss of support from the Soviet Union after 1991, two additional factors stand out as having a significant effect on the Afghan government’s fate. First, outside influence in the conflict from Pakistan, Iran, and the United States allowed the mujahedeen opposition to sustain their conflict against the Republic of Afghanistan for over a decade. Second, the Najibullah administration failed to provide adequate governance, emboldening the opposition and losing the support of the populace. In particular, the infighting between the Parcham and Khalq factions plaguing the Republic of Afghanistan, a faulty assumption that they could solve the conflict through military means, and a failure to address the cultural and societal problems the country was facing set the administration on a road to failure. These factors came together in the years following the Soviet withdrawal to create an unavoidable destiny, from which Najibullah and the socialist Afghan government could not escape.

A Lack of Proper Governance

The majority of the underlying issues driving many in the Afghan population to outright violent resistance revolved around the lack of proper governance on the part of the Republic of Afghanistan. In the focus of the period following the Soviet military withdrawal in 1989, the failure of the Najibullah administration was in not addressing
these until it was too late, leading to the collapse of the socialist government in 1992. For the purposes of this paper, governance refers to the process of the Republic of Afghanistan’s decision-making and ruling throughout society. Put simply, it is the process of governing, what governments do to their citizens. Many of the cultural and societal issues that resulted in the eventual collapse of the socialist government in Afghanistan directly related to the regime’s improper decision-making and the effect this had on the Afghan population.

Although the mujahedin placed a great deal of pressure on the Republic of Afghanistan, they did not militarily depose the Najibullah administration. When the various mujahedin factions entered Kabul in mid-1992, Najibullah had already resigned under the pressure of his crumbling administration. Similarly, the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan was not a direct result of the Soviet Union’s dissolution in late 1991. Instead, the loss of economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union removed the tools that the Republic of Afghanistan had used for over a decade to suppress the rampant cultural and societal issues in Afghanistan. Since the PDPA’s rise to power in 1978, these problems had been prevalent in Afghan society. However, instead of making an effort to mold their policies to Afghanistan’s societal structure, the socialist government attempted to impose sweeping reforms upon its inception that went against both the Islamic teachings and Afghan cultural traditions held by each ethnic group.

Over the course of the next decade, the result of the socialist government’s reforms was a dysfunctional government that alienated the vast majority of the

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44 Braithwaite, *Afgantsy*, 52.
population. Even though a variety of issues factored into the Afghan government’s problem of maintaining stability in Afghanistan, two factors, in particular, stand out in leading to the government’s inability to govern the Afghan population. First, the socialist government possessed a flawed understanding of how to implement societal change in Afghanistan. This resulted in unpopular reforms that the government attempted to implement through coercion, preventing them from gaining an understanding of the problems that were driving the resistance and further exacerbating these underlying issues. Second, internal dissensions plagued the Afghan government, causing violent uprisings and inhibiting the regime’s ability to govern the population. Although Najibullah attempted to implement several programs of reconciliation in order to win back the support of the Afghan population, these dissensions within the Afghan government prevented the success of these reforms. Although many of these events occurred well before the Soviet withdrawal and Najibullah’s ascendance to the presidency, they had long-lasting effects that the PDPA felt all the way through the government’s collapse in 1992.

_A Flawed Approach to Societal Change_

Since the first centralized Afghan governments emerged in the 18th century, the most successful Afghan rulers possessed a certain understanding of how the government in Kabul should operate in relation to the rest of the country. Generally, it involved preserving some kind of semblance of national unity, despite ethnic divisions, local lawlessness, and violence. Additionally, history’s great Afghan rulers have accepted that
they must compromise their personal plans and intentions with the desire of most Afghans to preserve their independent way of life. This is clearly apparent in the example of Ahmad Shah Durrani, who established the first Afghan Empire in 1747. Although his rule was not without its trials, he is widely considered one of the most successful Afghan rulers in history. Ahmad Shah’s empire allowed him specific control over the country through a combination of centralized and delegated rule. While control over the military was highly centralized, giving Ahmad Shah a certain control over the country, he assigned provincial governors to handle local affairs. These governors guided rulings within the local tribal hierarchies, allowing the Afghan population to handle the majority of its affairs independently. Afghan rulers and monarchs used these same techniques of governance, with varied success, until the coup d’état by the PDPA in 1978.

However, unlike the centuries of Afghan leaders before them, when the PDPA took over the Afghan government in 1978, they completely disregarded these historical techniques. Instead, they immediately implemented sweeping reforms across the entire country. In addition to implementing these drastic reforms at a startling pace for the Afghan population, the PDPA offered very little room for defiance, often repressively imposing their reforms in both urban and rural areas. Although many different factors contributed, two specific issues gave rise to the Afghan resistance that would become the

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45 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 13.
47 Barfield, Afghanistan, 102.
49 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 138.
mujahedin. First, the PDPA’s radical reforms, particularly regarding land reforms and secularization, turned much of the Afghan population against the regime early on in its existence and fueled the opposition for the remainder of the conflict.50 Second, the violence with which the socialist government implemented these reforms further alienated much of the Afghan population, intensifying the Afghan population’s support for the resistance movements.51 Despite the eventual withdrawal of these reforms, the PDPA’s ignorance of Afghanistan’s history of governance set the PDPA on a path towards failure that they would endure for the next decade.

Land Reforms. The land reform program was born out a desire to recreate the Soviet-style political and economic transformations that the Soviet Union implemented in its Central Asian republics.52 In theory, the goal of the program was to take land away from wealthy landowners and divide it amongst the rural population. It was essentially the same concept that the Soviet Union employed, with a varying amount of success, in many of its more agrarian republics. In order to obtain the adequate amount of data to predict the effectiveness of a Soviet-style land reform program, the PDPA originally estimated that it would require about two years of groundwork. However, in response to the feeling that it needed to implement its reforms as quickly as possible, the socialist government pushed forward with these reforms, simply making up the data as it went along.53 Because of this lack of attention to detail, the PDPA implemented a deeply

50 Barfield, Afghanistan, 230-231.
51 Ibid., 228.
52 Ibid., 231.
53 Edwards, Before Taliban, 66.
flawed land reform program, infuriating the rural Afghan population and garnering support for the resistance.

The untested program had numerous issues, but several, in particular, stuck out in the minds of the rural Afghan population. First, though the concept of taking land away from wealthy landowners, simply giving it to peasant farmers, and having the peasants start farming may have worked in other countries, it was impractical in Afghanistan for two main reasons. The primary reason is that when the socialist government removed the wealthy landowners, they removed rural Afghan’s only source of seed financing and marketing of produce, effectively inhibiting the agrarian industry. The secondary reason that this concept is impractical is that it goes against the tribal codes held by many of Afghanistan’s ethnic groups, such as Pashtunwali for the Pashtun population, which influences how individuals acquire, own, and transfer land. Second, the land reform program failed because the concept of dividing land so that each person gets an equal area was impractical in Afghanistan, where access to water is much more important than the actual land. Lastly, the land reform program failed because most of the rural population viewed it as contrary to Islamic ethical precepts. This was because the program did not provide for compensation and government did not carry it out in a systematic or equitable way.

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56 Barfield, Afghanistan, 230.
In the end, the socialists’ land reform program was both unsuccessful and unpopular. The PDPA reformists had expected that the program would gain widespread rural support for the government, a previously untapped segment of the population. However, much of the armed rural rebellion that broke out in 1978 was because of this land reform, which was exactly the opposite of what the socialist government had intended. Because they rushed into the program without any prior research, the PDPA provoked a resistance movement in the Afghan countryside, with which it would have to spend the next decade fighting.

**Secularization.** In addition to enacting the failed land reform program, the PDPA also began a campaign of secularizing all aspects of Afghan life following its coup in 1978. The two secularizing reforms that created the most opposition for the PDPA were the secularization of all public activities and the compulsory literacy campaign. The secularization of Afghans’ public life included changing the systems of traditional marriage practices and the secularization of all business practices, both of which infuriated the Afghan population, especially in the rural portions of the country. Furthermore, though the literacy campaign had good intentions, this compulsory secular education of all Afghan citizens created a huge opposition to the socialist government because it involved the debunking of Muslim beliefs in schools and mandated that women, in addition to men, receive an education. Had the PDPA implemented these

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reforms cautiously and over a longer period, the PDPA may have seen some success with these changes. However, because the PDPA sought to enact quick, sweeping reforms, the Afghan population felt threatened by these radical changes that the government forced upon them, just as with the land reform program. Additionally, similar to the results of the land reform program, these secularizing reforms only served to strengthen the population’s support for the opposition, especially in the country’s rural areas where the majority of the population saw these reforms as a threat to their way of life.63

Once again, had the PDPA examined Afghanistan’s history, they might have learned that Amanullah Khan attempted to implement nearly identical secularizing reforms following the Third Anglo-Afghan War, 60 years prior. Similar to the PDPA, Amanullah embarked on an ambitious campaign to secularize the country’s government, grant women equal rights, and enforce compulsory education. The reforms ended disastrously, provoking a rebellion among the Afghan population. Following the burning of the royal palace in Jalalabad, Amanullah fled into exile in Italy to save his own life.64 In order to ensure a greater chance of success for these radical reforms, the PDPA should have, at minimum, examined Amanullah’s experience and determined the factors that led to his exile.

In addition to causing a religious backlash, these secularizing reforms also brought about the unintended consequence of delegitimizing the PDPA’s laws and authority in the eyes of the Afghan people. This was a result of the Afghan population’s

belief that a non-Muslim government held no true legal authority. This held especially true in rural Afghanistan, where, prior to these reforms, the judicial arm of the government was deeply intertwined with Muslim ideology. Lastly, because of this view of the government’s reforms being in direct contradiction to their Islamic beliefs, much of the population began to identify the government as being kafir. Meaning a person or group who hides, denies, or pays no attention to the Islamic version of truth, this identification actively encouraged devout Muslims to oppose the government. In addition to these secularizing reforms delegitimizing the government in the eyes of the Afghan people, these programs were actively fueling the average rural Afghan citizen to fight back against an unjust government.

**Violence as a tool.** From its inception in 1978 to its collapse in 1992, the socialist government in Afghanistan was extremely quick to suppress dissonance with violence. This excessive use of violence in order to impose its will had a two-fold effect for the Afghan government. First, it alienated the public as the PDPA brutally murdered anyone who it did not trust. Furthermore, the PDPA’s proclivity towards violence, as well as the massive number of arrests, caused the international community to raise questions about the regime’s legitimacy. Despite the negative effects of the government’s flippant use of violence, the PDPA used violent coercion as a way to achieve their goals throughout their time in power.

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67 Ibid., 126.
Beginning with the coup in 1979, the PDPA was quick to resort to violence in order to protect itself against people or groups that it perceived as threats. For example, following the coup, the PDPA carried out a nearly unprecedented level of bloodshed, including the former-president Daoud, his family, his ministers, Islamists, religious leaders, minority groups, and even members of the PDPA.\textsuperscript{69} According to some estimates, as many as 50,000 Afghans died in the PDPA’s first year in power.\textsuperscript{70} Additionally, in its first several years in power, the PDPA frequently used coercion to implement its less-popular reforms.\textsuperscript{71} From the mid-1980s on, the Republic of Afghanistan frequently conducted reprisals against the rural civilian population. For example, if someone hiding in a particular village shot at an Afghan army unit, the army could declare the entire village as hostile and use any force it deemed necessary.\textsuperscript{72} This tendency to use violence to impose its will drove the Afghan population to increase its support for the mujahedin resistance forces throughout the Soviet-Afghan War. Moreover, the memory of this violence pushed the Afghan population to seek the removal of the socialist regime.

\textit{The Emergence of the Mujahedin}

In order to understand how these societal changes led to the eventual downfall of the Afghan government, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind the development

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 228.
\textsuperscript{70} Loyn, \textit{In Afghanistan}, 160.
\textsuperscript{72} Rubin, \textit{The Fragmentation of Afghanistan}, 149.
of the extensive opposition movement that the government faced. Fueled by the population’s disdain for the policies that the PDPA carried out in 1978 and 1979, the opposition movement would persist through the Soviet military intervention and beyond, despite a reversal of many of the government’s more controversial policies. \(^{73}\) Furthermore, the movement’s appearance changed drastically in the first several years following the coup by the PDPA. However, throughout its existence, the resistance movement held one main goal: the removal of the socialist government and its Soviet support from Afghanistan. \(^{74}\)

The first uprisings took place in 1978, following the coup by the PDPA. However, these were disorganized uprisings, usually led by local leaders in the Afghan countryside. In the early years following the PDPA’s takeover of Kabul, these small revolts won several minor victories, but did not succeed in establishing a large-scale opposition movement because of an overall lack of communication between the local groups. \(^{75}\) Additionally, local and ethnic leaders used this period of instability to further their personal ambitions. The best example of this is the Hazara ethnic groups who capitalized on the government’s disorientation to reclaim the lands and autonomy that Abdul Rahman took from them nearly a century earlier. \(^{76}\) Although the Hazara ethnic group makes up about 15% of the Afghan population, they have been the subject of discrimination throughout Afghan history because of their racial and religious

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 179-181.  
\(^{74}\) Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, 190.  
\(^{75}\) United States. Central Intelligence Agency. *Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents*. Publication Date Omitted (classified). Even though the date is redacted, the report was definitely filed sometime between April 1978 and September 1979 because it describes “President Taraki’s regime”, which only occurred for a little over a year, before his assassination.  
differences. Possessing strong Mongoloid features and being predominantly Shia has led the Hazara ethnic groups to be pushed to the background by the rest of the Afghan population in matters of land, social life, and politics. Therefore, when they saw that the government was preoccupied with other matters, they seized the opportunity to regain some of what they had lost. Similar to the Hazara uprising, the majority of the resistance groups at this time were local, domestic groups. However, the forces that would turn the opposition into a national movement would come from outside of Afghanistan.

As the PDPA’s attempts at societal change continued to embolden the Afghan population’s support for local resistance movements, groups of Afghans in Pakistan and Iran began constructing a more unified resistance movement. The emergence of the mujahedeen resistance groups in Pakistan and Iran is largely because of the sheer number of Afghan refugees located in these two countries. Following the coup and subsequent societal changes by the PDPA, hundreds of thousands of Afghans fled the country. One of the larger groups that supported the Afghan resistance movement from Pakistan consisted of Islamists and Islamic religious leaders who had fled Afghanistan because of a fear of imprisonment or death at the hands of the socialist government. Initially, the Islamists assisted the resistance by providing a safe haven from which Afghan rebels could launch cross-border attacks on government forces. However, after some time and with the assistance of Pakistan, these fundamentalist groups began seeking the consolidation of the opposition’s power, as well as rallying the Afghan population against

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77 Barfield, Afghanistan, 26-27.
78 Loyn, In Afghanistan, 139.
the government. Their solution came in the form of declaring a jihad, a concept that was not foreign to Afghans.

As early as 1979, opposition groups in Pakistan began using the terms “jihad” and “mujahedin” to describe their fight against the socialist government in Kabul.80 The idea of declaring a jihad was particularly appealing to opposition leaders because of its use by Afghan religious leaders throughout Afghanistan’s history. Additionally, it was not difficult to convince the Afghan population that they were part of a religious war. During their first years in power, the PDPA had not only declared Afghanistan a secular state, but had also summarily executed large numbers of Islamic religious leaders.81 Furthermore, following the deployment of Soviet troops to Afghanistan, the concept of an Afghan jihad garnered foreign support in the form of both foreign fighters and additional financial support.82 Henceforth, the opposition forces called themselves “mujahedin,” meaning those who are engaged in a jihad, further cementing the religious undertones of the conflict.

From the early 1980s on, the abilities of the mujahedin improved drastically.83 In addition to an increase in financial backing from international sources, the mujahedin perfected their tactics. The mujahedin quickly realized that engaging the Soviet forces in the open was ill advised. Instead, they adopted tactics such as hit and runs, ambushes, and booby traps.84 Even though these tactics never allowed the mujahedin to seize territory from Soviet control, they were sufficient to inflict casualties and affect the Soviet

81 Edwards, Before Taliban, 177.; Loyn, In Afghanistan, 139.
82 Barfield, Afghanistan, 243.
83 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 190-191.
84 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 141.
soldiers’ morale. Additionally, despite the fact that the Afghan government had reversed its policies of secularization in the early 1980s, the mujahedins continued to receive support from both international donors and the Afghan population through 1992 under the pretext of jihad.

As the mujahedins surrounded Kabul in April 1992, President Najibullah submitted his resignation. This ended the socialist government in Afghanistan. In the vacuum of power left by Najibullah, the remaining socialist leaders attempted to establish some semblance of a socialist government by setting up a power-sharing agreement between the remaining political parties.\(^{85}\) However, as the mujahedins entered the capital, this power-sharing agreement collapsed as the various factions began fighting over power in Afghanistan’s major cities, beginning a new phase of civil war in Afghanistan that would continue until the Taliban took power in 1996.\(^{86}\) The societal issues that the PDPA had initiated in 1978 caused an opposition movement that had persisted throughout the Soviet-Afghan War. Not only did the mujahedins succeed in both surviving and outlasting the Afghan government, they maintained significant pressure on the Najibullah regime, exacerbating the issues the administration faced.

*Plagued by Internal Dissensions*

In addition to the opposition that the Afghan government encountered from the population and the mujahedins, internal issues also undermined its ability to govern Afghanistan effectively. Throughout its time in power, from 1978 to 1992, factionalism

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within the Republic of Afghanistan resulted in leaders who were more concerned with
gaining power or resources over other factions than actually solving the problems of the
Afghan population. Typically, arguments and disagreements between various factions of
an administration are commonplace throughout the world, often leading to an overall
better system of government. However, the problem arises when these disagreements
affect the government’s ability to provide adequate governance to its citizens. In
Afghanistan, the PDPA took this one-step further, with disagreements within the socialist
government often turning violent. By the time the Soviet Union withdrew its forces in
1989, the PDPA’s two factions, Parcham and Khalq, had executed hundreds of each
other’s members in various purges and uprisings. At one point, between 1980 and 1981,
the number of such assassinations between the two factions reached as high as 12 a night
in Kabul. 87 This violence was not limited to fighting between the two factions, with
intra-faction rivalries often arising. The most predominant example of this was in late
1979 when the Afghan Prime Minister, Hafizullah Amin, brutally assassinated the PDPA
General Secretary, Nur Muhammad Taraki. 88 Since both men were members of the Khalq
faction, this started a dangerous precedent of intra-faction violence. These violent purges
and uprisings prevented the Afghan government from adequately addressing the needs of
the Afghan population since whoever was in power was too worried about a rival
overthrowing them to be bothered with actual governance. From 1978 up to 1992, the

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87 “Kabul Response to Bush-Bhutto Talks Viewed,” Hong Kong AFP (Kabul), June 12, 1989.; also in
Amstutz, Afghanistan, 80.
88 Tomsen, The Wars of Afghanistan, 158-159.
Soviet Union tried desperately, and in the end unsuccessfully, to bring about reconciliation between the factions of the PDPA.89

The beginning of factionalism in the PDPA dates back to the split in the party that occurred in 1967 when Babrak Karmal and a number of his allies left the PDPA to form their own Parcham party. There were many reasons for this split, but the principal reasons are cultural and ethnic.90 While Karmal and the other Parchamis were predominantly from Kabul and spoke Dari, a variety of Persian, the remainder of the PDPA, now called Khalqis, came from the rural areas of Afghanistan and spoke Pashtu.91 In essence, the split in the PDPA occurred because these two ethnic and cultural groups viewed political issues with a significant degree of difference, leading to intense disagreements. Reuniting briefly in 1977 as a single political party, tensions between the Khalq and Parcham factions flared up again following their installation of a socialist government in Kabul in 1979.

Throughout the Soviet-Afghan War, these two factions would continue to fight each other for power. Each new leader would purge all of the members of the opposing faction from the Afghan government and military apparatuses.92 The result was extremely detrimental in regards to both the Republic of Afghanistan’s ability to govern and its ability to sustain a military conflict with the mujahedin. The socialist government found it extremely difficult to govern Afghanistan because, after watching the Khalqis purge and execute the Parcham faction’s leadership in 1979, few Afghans possessed the

89 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 77.
90 Edwards, Before Taliban, 288.
91 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 80.
92 Kalinovsky, A Long Goodbye, 8.
desire to involve themselves in Afghanistan’s violent politics.93 Afghan politics were complicated even further when the Soviet Union assisted in the assassination of Amin, the Khalqi head of state, and installation of Babrak Karmal as the new, Parchami leader of Afghanistan in late 1979.94 Even though the Khalq faction represented the majority of the PDPA, the Soviet Union put its full support behind the Parchami leadership, believing that they were more levelheaded than the volatile Khalqis.95 As the war went on, this Soviet installation of the Parchamis at the top levels of government continued to be a source of tension between the two factions.

These purges also inhibited the Afghan army from waging an effective war against the mujahedin opposition forces.96 In 1979, under the orders of the Khalqi Hafizullah Amin, the government purged all high-ranking military officials belonging to the Parcham faction, through either execution or exile. Again, in 1980, under the direction of the Parchami Babrak Karmal, the Afghan government purged all Khalqi military officers in the same way.97 By the early 1980s, this practice of continuous purges of the Afghan military’s officer corps resulted in an extremely bottom-heavy army, with few leaders who possessed any sort of experience.98 The purge of the Khalqis from the Afghan army was particularly devastating since the majority of the members of the Afghan army were part of the Khalq faction.99 In 1979, the Afghan army was comprised

94 Khan, Untying the Afghan Knot, 57-59.
95 Tomsen, The Wars of Afghanistan, 129.
96 Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Afghanistan: 4 Years of Occupation," Department of State Bulletin 84, no. 73 (January 1984): 78.
97 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 136.
98 Barfield, Afghanistan, 230.
99 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 81.; also in Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 60.
of between 50,000 and 70,000 members. However, in 1983, following four years of purges, the Afghan army had between 40,000 and 50,000 members. Although, following 1983, Karmal limited the use of purges in the government and military, tensions remained high between the two factions. By the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, the Parchamis and Khalqis were battling each other nearly as hard as they were fighting the mujahedeen opposition forces.

When the Soviet Union pulled its military forces out of Afghanistan, Najibullah attempted to restructure certain aspects of the socialist government in order to win back the support of the Afghan population. The largest of these initiatives was Najibullah’s program of National Reconciliation, which intended to reach out to moderate political and religious leaders, outside of the PDPA, in order to build a more comprehensive government. However, unwilling to give up control of the Afghan government, a new round of Khalq-Parcham animosity began. Because Najibullah was a Pashtun and a Parchami, the Khalq faction had always been distrustful of him, seeing him as a traitor to his fellow Pashtuns. Despite rising tensions, nothing of substance occurred between Najibullah and the Khalqis until 1990.

In 1990, the Khalqi Afghan Minister of Defense, Shahnawaz Tanai, contacted Moscow in order to express his concern that Najibullah’s only interest was forwarding the position of the Parcham faction, as opposed to the interests of the Afghan government. Furthermore, he urged General Makhmut Gareev, Kabul’s Soviet liason, to

101 Bureau of Intelligence and Research, "Afghanistan: 4 Years of Occupation," 77.
102 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 142.
replace Najibullah with someone more suited to the presidency. When Moscow did not address his concerns, Tanai organized a coup d’état in February 1990, which failed miserably. Instead of removing Najibullah from power, the failed coup only served to rekindle the Afghan government’s factionalism. The events that followed were reminiscent of the Khalq-Parcham animosities of 1979 and 1980. By mid-1990, the majority of the Afghan leadership had given up any form of governing and devoted themselves full time to infighting. In retaliation for Tanai’s February coup, Najibullah ordered the arrest of over a hundred Khalqi army officers who he believed were loyal to Tanai. Although General Gareev urged him to be more inclusive of the Khalqis in his administration, Najibullah continued to distance himself, choosing to ignore Tanai instead.

On March 7, 1990, the same day as the trial for the Khalqi officers, Tanai launched a second, much larger coup. As the Afghan army repelled his forces, Tanai could see his coup failing yet again. Ultimately, this failure forced him to flee to Pakistan, seeking assistance from the Pashtun government. Even though Najibullah remained in power, the coup took a huge toll on the Afghan population in Kabul, destroying entire neighborhoods across the city. Once more, instead of governing its citizens, the leaders of the Republic of Afghanistan were too worried about preserving their own power in the face of internal dissensions.

104 Ibid., 184.
105 Gareev, Moja Poslednjaja Vojna, 132.
106 Tomsen, The Wars of Afghanistan, 361.
107 Kalinovsky, A Long Goodbye, 184.
Following Tanai’s coup, Najibullah attempted to reconcile the differences both within the PDPA and with the administration and the Afghan population. For example, in an attempt to make political reparations, Najibullah fired his prime minister and ten other ministers, replacing them with Khalqis and non-party members to show that he did not want a Parcham monopoly on power.\textsuperscript{109} However, because these reforms came after so many purges and years of infighting, most Afghans saw them as hollow, coming too late to make a difference. Additionally, as foreign aid from the Soviet Union dried up in late 1991, Najibullah began to lose the support of the remainder of the Afghan population, regardless of his attempts at reconciliation. By the time the Najibullah administration began trying to govern the Afghan population in late 1991 and early 1992, it faced the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Faced with a crumbling regime, Najibullah resigned, leading to the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan in April 1992.\textsuperscript{110}

The Collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991

A variety of factors resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, each playing its own small part in the eventual breakup of the union of states that had persisted powerfully for 69 years. Among these factors were the rise in nationalism among the socialist republics, economic crisis as a result of Gorbachev’s reforms, and the fragmentation of the party elite, shown in an attempted coup d’état by members of the

\textsuperscript{110} Edwards, \textit{Before Taliban}, 288.
Soviet government trying to oust Gorbachev from the presidency.\textsuperscript{111} The breakup of one of the world’s economic, political, and military superpowers had far-reaching consequences, especially in Afghanistan, where the relatively new communist government was heavily reliant upon aid coming in from the Soviet Union.

The breakup of the Soviet Union made the situation much more difficult for the Afghan government for several reasons, but two main factors stand out. First, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Afghan government lost its largest source of funding and economic aid. Though some economic aid from Russia continued, all of the former Soviet economies were too preoccupied with trying to ensure their own economies did not collapse to supply Afghanistan with the funding it desperately needed to supply itself with food, as well as the materials it needed to fight the mujahedin.\textsuperscript{112} Second, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan lost all military support from the former-Soviet republics. Having repeatedly voiced his opposition to the Soviet Union’s support of the Najibullah administration, Boris Yeltsin discontinued the sale of military supplies and fuel to Afghanistan almost immediately upon his appointment as president.\textsuperscript{113} These two factors, both on their own and in conjunction with each other, gravely destabilized the Republic of Afghanistan as it lost its largest supporter.

\textsuperscript{111} Nick Bisley, \textit{The End of the Cold War and the Causes of Soviet Collapse} (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 21.
\textsuperscript{112} Rubin, \textit{The Fragmentation of Afghanistan}, 149.
\textsuperscript{113} Braithwaite, \textit{Afgantsy}, 299.
As the Soviet Union began to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan, Gorbachev’s administration was already making decisions on how to best support the Afghan government after the withdrawal. Though several of his advisers and generals insisted that the Soviet Union continue to support Afghanistan with an in-country military contingent, Gorbachev was adamant that the Soviet Union would provide purely economic support, with Najibullah’s administration being responsible for all military matters. This idea made sense to the Soviet leadership given that the Soviet Union had provided the Republic of Afghanistan, and the DRA before it, economic assistance since the coup in 1979. Since the Afghan government continued to spend money fighting against the mujahedin opposition, the Soviet Union had to increase this economic assistance from 1979 to 1989 in order to keep the government functioning. Although, in the short-term, the Afghan government needed economic assistance in order to keep functioning, the way that the Soviet Union managed its economic aid to Afghanistan created a situation of economic dependence that was not sustainable for an independent Republic of Afghanistan. The loss of this economic lifeline and the ensuing economic crisis contributed to the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan because the government could no longer provide its citizens with basic amenities, such as food, thereby discrediting the administration in the eyes of its citizens.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Afghan economy was extremely dependent on trade and economic aid from the Soviet Union. Between 1989 and 1990, trade with the Soviet Union amounted to about two-thirds of Afghanistan’s overall foreign trade. 117 Furthermore, Afghanistan’s major cities relied heavily on food shipments coming from the Soviet Union. By late 1989, the Soviet Union was supplying over 250,000 tons of wheat per year into Afghanistan, enough to feed the entire city of Kabul.118 These shipments continued as late as October 1991, providing Afghans with critical food and fuel supplies.119 However, due to the majority of Afghanistan’s economic contracts being either with or through the Soviet Union, Afghans did not receive the goods from these contracts when the union dissolved. For example, Afghan merchants who contracted through the Soviet Union to buy wheat from Germany and Hungary never received their goods.120 To make matters worse, on January 1, 1992, Yeltsin halted all shipments of food and fuel to Afghanistan, further exacerbating the situation.121 This resulted in an economic situation with which the Najibullah administration could not cope. Cut off from their primary source of essential goods and income, the Republic of Afghanistan possessed few options as it faced famine and freezing temperatures during the winter of early 2012.

118 Ibid., 149.
The Republic of Afghanistan should not solely bear the blame for its dependence on Soviet economic assistance. Many of the economic aid projects that the Soviet Union carried out in Afghanistan had the effect of tying Afghanistan’s foreign trade even more closely to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{122} For example, the Soviet Union spent considerable money on developing Afghanistan’s natural gas facilities following the revolution by the PDPA in 1978. Of the total amount of gas that these Soviet-funded facilities produced, Afghanistan sold 95\% of it straight back to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{123} Furthermore, for this natural gas, the Soviet Union paid Afghanistan a price that was roughly equivalent to 20\% of the world market price.\textsuperscript{124} Additionally, the Soviet Union invested a significant amount of economic aid in exploring Afghanistan’s mineral resources. This began in the 1950’s, when the Soviet Union offered its services to the Afghan government in order to carry out a geological exploration. Using this information, in the early 1980’s, the Soviet Union offered to build mines to assist the Afghan economy. However, instead of the Republic of Afghanistan selling these minerals at their own discretion, Soviet workers imported most of the extracted minerals directly to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{125} This process of tying Afghanistan’s resource trade directly to the Soviet Union occurred throughout the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and lasted until the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan in early 1992.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 256.
\item Khan, \textit{Untying the Afghan Knot}, 62.
\item Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 259.
\item Rubin, \textit{The Fragmentation of Afghanistan}, 139; Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 258.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
As a last resort to improve Afghanistan’s economy, Najibullah began sanctioning the printing of additional Afghan currency as early as 1987, when he first took office.\textsuperscript{126} Though this solution allowed the Republic of Afghanistan to pay off some of its debts in the short-term, it had the unintended result of generating hyperinflation, and thus, devaluing the Afghan currency.\textsuperscript{127} Because Najibullah continued to print additional currency all the way through the collapse of his administration, this inflation continued to rise, making the Afghan currency close to worthless. Table 1 demonstrates the sheer amount of currency that Najibullah’s administration introduced into the Afghan economy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Currency in Circulation (in billion afghans)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>32.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>38.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>46.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>53.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>58.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>64.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>71.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>152</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>223</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, in each year following Najibullah’s appointment to the presidency, the amount of currency in circulation increased exponentially. The 26.6 billion Afghan afghans that were in circulation when the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan had grown to 455 billion afghans when the socialist government collapsed.

The effects of this hyperinflation became prevalent across the Afghan population in late 1991 and early 1992. Deprived of goods, the Afghan government had only currency with which to compensate its employees. In March 1992, one month before the government’s collapse, the average government worker earned a monthly stipend of about 10,000 afghans, which is roughly equivalent to $6.90 a month. Because they no longer had access to food, electricity, running water, or heat, Afghanistan’s urban population, which had historically been supportive of the government, was growing increasingly unhappy with the Najibullah administration.129 As an attempt to import additional food into the country, the Najibullah administration established contracts with private companies. However, as shown by an interview with Afghanistan’s Food Minister, Anwar Dost, these companies severely overcharged the Afghan government, only worsening the country’s financial issues.130 Faced with dwindling support from both the urban and rural populations, Najibullah began to see his regime begin to crumble, even before the mujahedin entered Kabul. The population simply did not want to support a government that could not provide the bare necessities required to survive.

This loss of financial support also led to an exacerbation of the security situation for the Afghan government. In the years following the Soviet withdrawal, the Najibullah

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129 Gargan, "Winter, Too, Is Hell. Afghans Teeter on Abyss."
130 Anil Penna, "Minister Interviewed on Food Supply Situation," Hong Kong AFP (Kabul), October 3, 1991.
administration became increasingly dependent upon private militias to supplement the Afghan military’s security forces.\textsuperscript{131} From 1989 to 1991, Najibullah used these militias very effectively, utilizing Soviet financial aid to propitiate them, supplemented by the inordinate amount of currency he was printing. However, these militias were not the ideological mujahedin or government groups, but warlords and mercenaries who cared solely about money and power.\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, when Soviet financial aid ceased in 1992 and Najibullah could no longer afford the loyalty of these groups, they began to look elsewhere for profit.

Many militia groups began looking to the mujahedin groups, which Pakistan was still supplying with goods and money. The best example of this was the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum. Dostum rose from impoverished roots to become one of Najibullah’s most powerful militia commanders, with over 40,000 men under his command.\textsuperscript{133} Under the payroll of the Najibullah administration, Dostum’s Uzbek militia won several battles against the mujahedin and was critical in the defense of Kandahar and Helmand following the withdrawal of Soviet troops.\textsuperscript{134} However, just like the other militia leaders, Dostum’s primary motivation was money and power. Therefore, when he began to see Najibullah’s money dry up in late 1991, he positioned himself to benefit from Afghanistan’s changing political situation. Dostum consolidated his power in northern Afghanistan among the ethnic Uzbek population and began making peace deals with mujahedin leaders. In early 1992, Dostum rebelled against the Afghan government,

\textsuperscript{131} Barfield, \textit{Afghanistan}, 246-247.
\textsuperscript{132} Edwards, \textit{Before Taliban}, 288.
\textsuperscript{133} Barfield, \textit{Afghanistan}, 247.
\textsuperscript{134} Loyn, \textit{In Afghanistan}, 167.
severing all ties with Najibullah. Furthermore, he had his militia take control of Kabul’s airport, the Afghan government’s last lifeline for receiving supplies from the outside world. Najibullah’s dependence on militias, who had no true loyalty to his administration, ultimately expedited his downfall when he lost the economic backing of the Soviet Union.

The Loss of Military Support and Equipment

For a conflict that was supposed to be cheap, quick, and easy, the cost of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was staggering. When the Soviet military completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, they had lost over 14,000 lives and spent over $70 billion. Although the Soviet Union allocated a significant amount of this $70 billion dollars to Afghanistan’s economic development, Soviet leaders spent vast majority of this money on military expenditures. In addition to the Soviet military spending this money on its own military forces in Afghanistan, these expenditures also included military aid to the Republic of Afghanistan’s armed forces. As the Soviet-Afghan War continued, the Soviet Union provided the Najibullah administration with an ever-increasing amount of military equipment in order to fight the mujahedin opposition forces, further increasing the Republic of Afghanistan’s dependence on the Soviet Union.

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136 Dostum would continue changing sides repeatedly over the next twenty years. If he saw that a particular group was about to be overthrown, he would cut ties and join the more powerful side. He did this with Najibullah, the mujahedin, the Taliban, and, most recently, with the United States. He is suspected of being heavily involved in black market business, including opium trafficking. As of 2014, Dostum is the Vice President of Afghanistan.
to sustain this conflict. During the first four years of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union provided the socialist Afghan government with a little over $1.8 billion in military equipment.\textsuperscript{138} This number includes ammunition, rifles, aircraft, armored and unarmored vehicles, in addition to the building of military buildings and defenses.\textsuperscript{139} From 1987 through 1991, the last two years before and the two years after the Soviet military’s withdrawal, this military assistance had grown exponentially to over $13.2 billion.\textsuperscript{140} Therefore, regardless of Afghanistan’s economic dependence on the Soviet Union, in the years leading up to the 1992 collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan, the Najibullah administration had grown nearly completely dependent on Soviet military assistance in its fight with the mujahedin.\textsuperscript{141} With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the cessation of military assistance following shortly thereafter on January 1, 1992, the Najibullah administration possessed only its stockpiled Soviet military equipment to continue its fight against the mujahedin.\textsuperscript{142}

This dependence on Soviet military assistance was due, in large part, to how the Soviet military’s mission changed over the course of a decade of war. Originally, before the full-scale military intervention in 1979, Soviet leaders believed that they could bolster

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 142. These amounts exclude foodstuffs, medical equipment, petroleum products, and other supplies.
\textsuperscript{141} Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 296.
the Afghan army through a purely advisory role. By 1978, following the coup by the PDPA, Soviet military advisers were widespread among various Afghan army units, attempting to instruct them on how to conduct military operations against the emerging opposition groups.\textsuperscript{143} However, the shift in Soviet leaders’ thinking came during the fall of 1978 for two primary reasons. First, opposition uprisings began occurring throughout Afghanistan in late 1978.\textsuperscript{144} Second, Hafizullah Amin, the prime minister of the DRA executed Nur Muhammad Taraki, the head of the government, in order to take control of the country.\textsuperscript{145} Though the DRA eventually quelled the uprisings, the Soviet political leaders decided that they could no longer hold off on a more direct military approach to the situation, fearing that the socialist government would spin out of control.\textsuperscript{146} On Christmas Eve 1979, Soviet military forces in Afghanistan went from a purely advisory role to directly engaging with opposition forces, changing the role that the Afghan military would play for the remainder of the conflict.

Following the Soviet military intervention in late 1979, the Soviet military assumed the primary role in military operations against the mujahedin. This was largely because the Soviet military leaders had little confidence in the Afghan military’s ability to sustain a conflict with the mujahedin opposition forces.\textsuperscript{147} One reason for this is that once the Soviet military arrived in Afghanistan, the Afghan army seemed to strive to take on a supporting role in the conflict. Several accounts from Soviet military forces show that the Afghan army refused to carry out missions unless the Soviet military was present.

\textsuperscript{143} Kalinovsky, \textit{A Long Goodbye}, 19.
\textsuperscript{144} Central Intelligence Agency. \textit{Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents}. 13.
\textsuperscript{145} Grau, \textit{The Bear Went Over the Mountain}, xviii.
\textsuperscript{146} Braithwaite, \textit{Afgantsy}, 75.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 137.
Moreover, the more the Soviet military took a proactive role in the conflict, the more the Afghan army seemed to shy into the background.\textsuperscript{148} Even the Soviet leadership in Moscow began to take note of this trend, causing them to begin questioning the Soviets’ purpose in being in Afghanistan. In a Politburo meeting, one official remarked, “What do we see here, though: there are fifteen thousand mujahedin, but where is the army supporting the regime? It does not want to fight. . . . So why would we put our boys in harm’s way again for a hopeless cause?”\textsuperscript{149} Not only was the ineffectiveness of the Afghan army shifting the primary combat role to the Soviets, it was forcing the Soviet leadership to rethink their role in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the large amount of distrust that existed between the Afghan military forces and the Soviet soldiers perpetuated this transfer of responsibility to Soviet forces. One example of this distrust comes from an interview with a Soviet officer, who was recalling a combat operation his unit carried out just outside of Kabul in 1985. The Soviet officer, Major Solonin, describes that he did not inform the Afghan troops that his unit was working with of his operation until it was over, because “we wanted to safeguard the fact that we were conducting an ambush and prevent the leakage of information.”\textsuperscript{150} In addition to Afghan forces frequently leaking information, this Soviet distrust of Afghan troops could also come from several instances of Afghan forces mutinying against their Soviet military advisers. In one such example, which occurred in

\textsuperscript{148} Kalinovsky, \textit{A Long Goodbye}, 28.
\textsuperscript{150} Grau, \textit{The Bear Went Over the Mountain}, 171. Interview with Major I. V. Solonin, commander of a Soviet airborne battalion, who served in Afghanistan from 1985 to 1987.
March 1979 in the city of Herat, a group of Afghan military officers led a mutiny that killed up to 20 Soviet military advisers embedded with their unit, in addition to murdering the local Afghan officials and the Soviet advisers’ families. These occurrences began as early as March 1979, nine months before the Soviet military intervention, and continued through late 1988. Throughout the Soviet-Afghan War, these confrontations further shifted military responsibility to the Soviet military by continuously sowing seeds of distrust between the Afghan army from the Soviet forces.

In the latter part of the 1980’s, the situation in Afghanistan had not changed. In a 1988 report to the Afghanistan Commission of the Soviet Central Committee, Soviet military advisers stationed with Afghan military units described the Afghan troops’ fighting ability as inadequately low. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union began its withdrawal on May 15, 1988. However, in spite of nearly a decade of development by the Soviet Union, the Afghan army was still incapable of fighting a conflict independently.

As the first Soviet troops started leaving Afghanistan, even Najibullah began to understand that his country’s military could not sustain its conflict with the mujahedin. In a June 13, 1988 conversation with Gorbachev, Najibullah formally requested for the first time that Soviet troops remain in Afghanistan in order to assist with military operations. Unfortunately for Najibullah, this would be the first of many times that Gorbachev would

152 "AFP: Mutiny 'Foiled' at Jalalabad Garrison," Hong Kong AFP (Islamabad), December 6, 1988.
turn him down, stating that Soviet troops would only engage with the mujahedin if they were attacked during the process of withdrawal. When the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in February 1989, it was abundantly clear that the Afghan army was going to face substantial difficulties in combating the mujahedin opposition forces.

However, one of the primary reasons that the Afghan army was able to sustain a conflict with the mujahedin for three years after the Soviet withdrawal was the constant stream of foreign aid coming from the Soviet Union. In addition to the high levels of economic assistance coming into Afghanistan between 1989 and 1992, a significant amount of the supply shipments that the Soviet Union delivered to the Afghan government were weapons and other military aid. In the final months before the Soviet withdrawal, the Soviet Union began pumping an unprecedented amount of military hardware into Afghanistan in order to give Najibullah as much of an advantage as possible over the mujahedin resistance. These included over 600 armored vehicles, hundreds of SCUD (surface-to-surface) missiles, artillery, aircraft and thousands of tons of weapons and munitions. Though the mujahedin opposition forces were receiving a steady stream of money from international sources, the military equipment that the Republic of Afghanistan now possessed dwarfed any financial assistance that Pakistan or

155 Mikhail Gorbachev and Mohammed Najibullah, "Record of a Conversation of M. S. Gorbachev with President of Afghanistan, General Secretary of the CC PDPA Najibullah" (Moscow, June 13, 1988). Provided by Anatolii Cherniaev and translated by Gary Goldberg for the Cold War International History Project at the Wilson Center. Najibullah requests Soviet ground forces for offensive operations; Eduard Shevardnadze and Mohammed Najibullah, "Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Najibullah and Other Afghan Leaders on 13-14 January 1989 (Excerpt)" (Moscow, January 14, 1989). Taken from Aleksandr A. Ljahovskij, Tragedija i Doblest' Afgana (Moskva: GPI, 1995), 485-487. Najibullah requests Soviet air support to protect Northwest Corridor.

the United States could offer the mujahedin. This is evident during the several uprisings that took place during 1990. The superior weaponry of the Afghan army forcibly put down both the March 1990 mutiny in Kabul, utilizing air and missile strikes against the opposition forces.157 Furthermore, between 1989 and late 1991, the Afghan army was able to win several critical battles against the mujahedin, such as the defense of the key city of Jalalabad in April-June 1990.158 Because this superior weaponry, such as aircraft and SCUD missiles, allowed them to sit back and win easy victories over a disorganized mujahedin force, the Afghan army soon became complacent. At the highest levels of the Najibullah administration, a blind faith developed in these powerful, long-distance weapons, cultivating a belief that these weapons were the answer to all of the Afghan army’s military problems.159 When Yeltsin announced that Afghanistan would no longer receive military equipment from Russian beginning on January 1, 1992, this loss of their supply of advanced weaponry was undoubtedly a crushing blow to the morale of the Afghan army. Deprived of additional ammunition and fuel supplies, the Afghan army was now on the same level as the mujahedin in terms of weaponry. As the mujahedin captured the remaining major Afghan cities and closed in on Kabul, desertion within the Afghan army grew at a drastic rate.160 In early 1992, both the Najibullah administration and the Afghan army fractured under a divided leadership, effectively ending the

157 Mahmut Gareev, *Moja Poslednjaja Vojna (Afganistan Bez Sovetskikh Vojsk)* (Moskva: INSAN, 1996), 193. Translated from Russian. General Gareev was the last Soviet senior military advisor to Afghanistan. He served after the departure of the 40th Army. His accounts provide some of the most detailed information of what occurred in Afghanistan between the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Najibullah administration.
Republic of Afghanistan. Deprived of both the assistance of Soviet troops and supplies of Soviet weaponry, the Afghan army could not sustain its conflict with the mujahedín.

International Influence

The loss of both economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union had an undeniable effect in the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent cessation of Russian aid to Afghanistan, the Najibullah administration could no longer suppress its domestic issues, either by military or economic means. However, it is equally important to examine the resistance forces that were opposing the Afghan government. Ever since the coup d’État by the PDPA in 1979, the socialist government in Kabul faced resistance groups. From 1978-1983, between 150 and 200 different opposition groups emerged throughout Afghanistan, as well as in Peshawar, Pakistan and Tehran, Iran.\(^{161}\) At first, the groups located within Afghanistan were plentiful, but poorly organized. They mainly resorted to operating independently across Afghanistan’s countryside, instigating rebellions in their native areas.\(^{162}\) However, by 1982, these groups began to organize themselves into coalitions, eventually settling into seven main groups, and all operating under the title: mujahedín.\(^{163}\) Though these groups were able to cause problems for the Afghan government through small-scale, hit-and-run attacks, they began struggling as the Soviet Union stepped up its counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. Not only were the

\(^{161}\) Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, 89.


mujahedin unable to counter the Soviet military’s airpower effectively, but they were also having issues with infighting. Each of the remaining mujahedin groups was attempting to eliminate their rivals to obtain additional power and control.\textsuperscript{164} Even though they were able to pester the Afghan and Soviet armies successfully, it became clear in the early years of the Soviet-Afghan War that the mujahedin were going to require assistance in order to sustain a conflict against the might of the Soviet military. For the mujahedin, access to foreign-supplied equipment was critical for mounting an effective resistance.\textsuperscript{165}

As the mujahedin struggled against the Soviet military, several countries from around the world saw an opportunity to further their own political goals by supporting the mujahedin in their fight against the Soviet Union. Although the mujahedin received support from a large variety of countries throughout the period of 1979 through 1992, their main source of funding and support came from Pakistan, Iran, and the United States.\textsuperscript{166} Ethnic, historical, and political reasons enticed each of these three countries to aid the mujahedin against the Soviet Union. This aid to the mujahedin, which came both overtly and covertly, formally began around 1980, starting in the tens of millions of dollars per year. By the late 1980s, this number had grown to billions of dollars per year.\textsuperscript{167} International aid came in many different forms, including weapons and munitions to engage the Soviet forces in military operations, humanitarian support to groups stationed outside of Afghanistan, and financial aid to build up the resistance groups’

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{165} Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 197.
\textsuperscript{167} Rubin, \textit{The Fragmentation of Afghanistan}, 179.
infrastructure.\textsuperscript{168} Even though the mujahedin could use this aid to purchase weapons, there was not a significant influx of foreign weaponry into the conflict until 1982.\textsuperscript{169} This flood of aid to the mujahedin opposition groups allowed them to sustain a fight against the Soviet military. Following the withdrawal of Soviet military forces in 1989, the mujahedin’s resistance continued. Although foreign aid decreased slightly between 1990 and 1992, especially overtly, these countries continued to provide a substantial amount of aid to the mujahedin all the way until the collapse of the Najibullah administration, contributing significantly to the government’s collapse. Without this influx of foreign aid, the mujahedin could not have sustained their opposition movement against the Republic of Afghanistan.

\textit{Pakistan as an Intermediary}

Pakistan’s interests in the internal politics of Afghanistan revolve around the shared ethnic and historical ties that Pakistan shares with the Pashtun population of Afghanistan. Historically, the Pashtun populations of both Afghanistan and Pakistan have been very close, only separated by an imaginary line, called the Durand line, drawn down the middle of the ethnic group’s population by the British in 1893.\textsuperscript{170} The British created this border during the Great Game in order to act as a buffer between British controlled territory and the expanding influence of Russia in the region. Known as the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), this border has been a continuous source of instability since

\textsuperscript{168} Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 201-202.  
\textsuperscript{170} Loyn, \textit{In Afghanistan}, 21.
its formation in the late 1800s. Pakistan and Afghanistan have historically sought to control the Pashtun population located along the NWFP. These tensions flared again in the early 1970s, when the Afghan government of Mohammed Daoud Khan revived the campaign to regain control of the NWFP.\(^{171}\) Around the same time, Pakistan began funding and training Afghan opposition leaders, believing that this would allow them to exert their influence covertly against Daoud’s Afghan government. Four years before the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan had already begun training and funding Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Massoud, who would both go on to become two of the primary leaders of the mujahedin opposition forces.\(^{172}\)

Furthermore, Pakistan considered its own national security when it decided to assist the mujahedin opposition forces during the Soviet-Afghan War. Specifically, Pakistan’s leadership worried about the Soviet Union’s next move if it succeeded in stabilizing the political situation in Afghanistan.\(^{173}\) Pakistan’s fears were valid because, if the Soviet Union succeeded and brought Afghanistan into the Soviet Union, it would trap Pakistan between two major rivals. On one border, it would have a hostile superpower and on its other border would be its historic rival India. Additionally, relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union were rocky because Islamabad joined several American security alliances. Furthermore, Moscow supported India in its 1971 war with Pakistan and emerged as its major source of modern weapons and defense technology.\(^{174}\)

\(^{172}\) Loyn, \textit{In Afghanistan}, 137.
Additionally, if Moscow succeeded in Afghanistan, Pakistan was worried about maintaining its control of the NWFP. Pakistan was concerned how far the Soviet Union would go in encouraging and supporting an allied Afghanistan to assert its historical claim over the Pakistani territories in Northwest Frontier Province. Aside from its historical interest in Afghanistan’s affairs, these security factors, whether real or perceived, combined to create a very compelling case for Pakistan’s leadership to support the mujahedin.

Pakistan’s influence in the Soviet-Afghan War was immense. Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) assisted the mujahedin in nearly all aspects of their resistance. Pakistan’s government also allowed resistance fighters safe passage to and from Pakistan, creating a sort of “sanctuary” in Pakistan, which was critical to the onset of the insurgency. By 1985, each of the seven main mujahedin groups had a headquarters in Peshawar, Pakistan, where Pakistani authorities allowed them to train, regroup, and recruit. Despite the importance of having a set location where the mujahedin could carry out these activities, this was not where Pakistan had the biggest impact on the Soviet-Afghan War.

During the Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan’s most significant contribution was as an intermediary between the mujahedin opposition forces and foreign donors, specifically the United States. As an intermediary, Pakistan allowed foreign powers to play an indirect role in the mujahedin’s war against the Soviet Union. If these foreign powers had

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177 Jones, "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency," 31.; also in Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 127.  
178 Kalinovsky, A Long Goodbye, 112.
tried to supply military aid directly to the mujahedin, it may have led to a larger conflict between these powers and the Soviet Union. However, by the early 1980s, Pakistan had set up a framework through which it could efficiently deliver foreign weapons and supplies directly to the mujahedin.\textsuperscript{179} Although the United States was the primary source of foreign weapons, China, Egypt, Israel, and other Arab countries also channeled weapons to the mujahedin through Pakistan.\textsuperscript{180} Upon receiving these weapons and supplies, Pakistani officials would then decide to which resistance groups they should allocate this foreign aid, giving Pakistan substantial power over the mujahedin.\textsuperscript{181} This allowed Pakistan to pursue its own political goals discreetly, while acting as a friendly intermediary between the two parties. Despite its personal agenda, Pakistan played a critical role in guaranteeing a steady flow of foreign weapons to the opposition forces.\textsuperscript{182} Pakistan sustained this supply of weapons throughout the Soviet-Afghan War and continued to supply the mujahedin through 1992, despite the withdrawal of Soviet military forces from Afghanistan.

Although the Soviet military had left Afghanistan, Pakistan continued to supply the mujahedin opposition in their fight with the Najibullah administration following 1989. In addition to continuing to operate training centers on Pakistani soil and supply weapons to the opposition forces, Pakistan actively transported fighters over the Afghan

\textsuperscript{181} Khalilzad, \textit{Prospects for the Afghan Interim Government}, 1.
\textsuperscript{182} Amstutz, \textit{Afghanistan}, 204.
border from Pakistan. Pakistan’s influence in the conflict was a huge concern for Najibullah, who contacted various world powers, pleading for them to intervene and cut off Pakistani aid to the mujahedin. Najibullah even attempted to make an alliance with India, Pakistan’s largest rival, in order to combat Pakistani “interference and aggression.” However, each foreign power Najibullah contacted ignored his pleas as Pakistan continued to supply the mujahedin all the way through to 1992, which allowed the mujahedin to keep constant pressure on the Najibullah administration as the former-Soviet states distanced themselves from Afghanistan. In 1992, as Russia cut off Najibullah’s last bit of foreign aid, the mujahedin entered Kabul. Largely due to their sustained assistance to the mujahedin, Pakistan finally achieved its decade-long goal of deposing the socialist government in Kabul.

Iran’s Efforts to Cater to Both Sides

Historically, Iran possessed mixed feelings about Afghanistan. Since Iran’s population is predominately Shiite Muslims, they have been wary of what they perceive as the heretical Islamic tenets held by Afghanistan’s various Sunni sects. On the other
hand, many Afghans generally viewed Iranians as arrogant, effete, and submissive. However, Iran maintains good relations with Afghanistan’s Hazara and Tajik populations since these two groups have Persian roots and are overwhelmingly Shia. Due to this cultural and religious connection, Iran took a special interest in these Afghan minorities throughout history, becoming increasingly involved in Afghan affairs when it felt that Afghanistan’s domestic policies threatened these Shia minorities.

During the first several years of the Soviet-Afghan War, Iran did little of substance to assist the resistance movements in Afghanistan. It provided a vitriolic condemnation of the Soviet military intervention, but failed to back its words up with deeds. However, as Shiite resistance groups began to form a group of about two million refugees who fled to Iran, the Iranian government started understanding that it needed to provide some sort of aid to these groups. Originally, this aid started out as simply offering sanctuary in the form of a gathering space and staging area. By 1982, Iran’s policy became more forward, initiating a policy of conditional-aid where it would arm any group who pledged support to Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme religious leader of Iran. Although the majority of the mujahedin groups, who were predominantly Sunni Muslims, rejected this offer, several Shia mujahedin groups eagerly accepted. This is largely because the predominately-Sunni government of Pakistan frequently ignored

these Shia resistance groups. Like Pakistan, Iran was one of the few foreign powers who supplied the resistance forces past the Soviet military withdrawal. Furthermore, Iran was a crucial source of foreign aid for the Shia mujahedin groups who, throughout the Soviet-Afghan War, struggled to obtain aid from any other source.

Once the Soviet military pulled out of Afghanistan, Iran’s foreign policy in the conflict between the mujahedin and the Republic of Afghanistan became somewhat confusing. Following 1989, Iran perpetually assisted both sides of the conflict. On one occasion, an Iranian Foreign Minister would remark that Iran would continue to support the mujahedin until they removed Najibullah from power. Conversely, in the same year, Iran began supplying humanitarian and economic aid to Najibullah. Similarly, while continuing its pursuit of the end of the Najibullah administration, Iran worked fervently to improve its ties with the Soviet Union, even offering to stop supplying the Shia mujahedin groups. Regardless of Iran’s convoluted foreign policy agenda, the events of 1992 clearly demonstrated their success in supplying the Shia mujahedin groups. As the Republic of Afghanistan collapsed, one of the main resistance groups to enter Kabul was the Hezb-i-Wahadat, a coalition of Shia resistance fighters that Iran created in 1989.

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192 Amstutz, Afghanistan, 214.
194 Rubin, The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, 252.
195 Kalinovsky, A Long Goodbye, 195.
196 Loyn, In Afghanistan, 170.
The United States as the Financier

When compared to the 1980s and 2000s, very little interaction existed between the United States and Afghanistan prior to the Soviet-Afghan War in 1979. At various points in history, the two countries attempted to establish stronger economic and diplomatic ties, but most of these plans fell through with little to no result. For example, in the 1950s, American geologists began talking with the Afghan government about conducting a geological survey in order to discover the extent of Afghanistan’s mineral deposits. However, negotiations stalled on both sides and the contract ended up going to the Soviet Union. The United States did provide Afghanistan with a moderate amount of economic aid. In 1977, the total economic assistance the United States put towards Afghanistan equaled a little over $21 million. Following the coup d’état by the PDPA and the Soviet military intervention, the United States had completely cut off all economic assistance to Afghanistan. It was at this point that the United States truly began its interest in Afghanistan’s affairs.

There were several reasons that the United States began to take an interest in Afghan affairs following 1979. First, the United States saw the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan as a direct threat to its national security interests. The United States feared that, if the Soviet Union succeeded in Afghanistan, it would continue south

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in order to take control of the world’s oil supplies.\textsuperscript{200} Second, the United States was eager to counter the Soviet Union’s program whereby it could spread its influence to Third World countries, such as Afghanistan, through economic development.\textsuperscript{201} Lastly, the United States was still feeling the embarrassment of the failed Vietnam War. The conflict in Afghanistan was an opportunity to inflict its revenge upon the Soviet Union for the Soviets’ support of the North Vietnamese against the American military.

Though covert aid to the mujahedin opposition forces began as early as 1979, the United States did not begin significant contributions to the opposition forces until the first half of the 1980s. In the first two years of the Soviet-Afghan War, under the Carter administration, the United States’ funding to the mujahedin was limited to between $30-40 million per year. However, from 1982 onward, the sums allocated for aid continued to increase.\textsuperscript{202} Following 1985, the American aid program expanded massively, increasing the number of weapons supplied to the mujahedin by a factor of ten.\textsuperscript{203} The United States’ contribution to the Soviet-Afghan War remained purely financial, paying huge sums of money to Pakistan so that the Pakistani authorities could funnel weapons to the mujahedin opposition forces fighting in Afghanistan.

Despite various agreements with the Soviet Union to cease funding to both sides of the conflict, the United States continued to fund the mujahedin in the years leading up

\textsuperscript{201} Tomsen, The Wars of Afghanistan, 94.
\textsuperscript{203} Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 114.
to and following the Soviet military withdrawal. Although many in the United States lost interest in Afghanistan after the Soviet Union pulled out its military forces, there remained a significant presence in the American government to continue aid to the mujahedin until they removed Najibullah from power. In an article published in The New York Times, two American Congressmen stated explicitly that maintaining pressure on Najibullah was critical, and that, above all, the ultimate goal was the “ouster of the regime of Mr. Najibullah.” American aid to the mujahedin continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. By the time the project ceased at the end of 1991, the Americans had given up to $9 billion of assistance to the rebels. In the end, the American aid to the mujahedin in the form of sophisticated weaponry from Pakistan, allowed the resistance fighters to maintain constant pressure on the socialist government in Kabul. A mere fourteen years after the coup by the PDPA, the mounting pressure of the mujahedin forced Najibullah to resign as his administration crumbled around him.

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205 Hyde and Wilson, "More, Not Less Aid to Afghan Rebels."
206 Braithwaite, Afgantsy, 114.
Conclusion

In the opening months of 1992, the Republic of Afghanistan could no longer ignore the issues affecting the Afghan population. For the preceding fourteen years, the socialist government successfully suppressed the country’s underlying societal problems through a combination of economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union. However, the Afghan population did not soon forget the radical reforms that the PDPA imposed in the years following the 1978 coup. In particular, the programs of secularization and land reform resulted in an opposition that endured a war against the might of the Soviet military. Nor did the Afghan population forget the unrestrained levels of violence that the government used in order to implement their unpopular reforms. This violence, which began in 1978 and lasted through the 1980s, drove otherwise insouciant Afghans to actively oppose the government and further emboldened the Afghans who were already seeking the removal of the PDPA.

Using resources provided by the Soviet Union, the Republic of Afghanistan was able to placate much of the urban population, while halting the major advances of the mujahedin opposition forces. From 1979 to 1989, the largest form of Soviet assistance was actual Soviet troops on the ground in Afghanistan. Following 1989, this aid turned into economic assistance and a steady supply of Soviet military equipment. It even appeared that the situation in Afghanistan had somewhat stabilized by 1991, with the
Najibullah administration holding steady against the opposition forces. Unfortunately for the Republic of Afghanistan, when the Soviet Union dissolved in late 1991, so did the inflow of money and military equipment. No longer able to provide the goods and services that placated the urban population or defend against the mujahedin with superior Soviet weaponry, the Republic of Afghanistan began to feel the pressure of the opposition forces.

Despite the efforts of the Soviet Union and Afghan government, the persistent funding that Pakistan, Iran, and the United States channeled into the mujahedin groups allowed the Afghan resistance to sustain itself through a decade-long conflict. This foreign aid allowed the armed opposition in Afghanistan to continue to exist until after 1991, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union deprived the government of its vital Soviet resources. In the end, the Afghan government’s focus was on the infighting occurring within the PDPA in early 1992, instead of paying attention to the deteriorating situation surrounding the administration. Finally, seeing no hope for the recovery of his administration, Najibullah formally resigned in April 1992, effectively ending the Republic of Afghanistan.

Throughout the course of this research, three very interesting questions arose that, so far, lack an adequate answer. First, could the Soviet Union have done anything to better stabilize the situation in Afghanistan prior to the Soviet withdrawal in 1989? In the late 1980s, it was no secret that the Gorbachev administration was eager to remove the Soviet Union from the Afghanistan situation. However, in his article “Breaking Contact without Leaving Chaos”, Lester Grau argues that the Soviet Union did a nearly perfect
job of withdrawing from Afghanistan. When considering the situation from a military perspective, which is how Grau examines the period surrounding the Soviet withdrawal, this argument holds true. This is because, by 1989, there was very little additional assistance that the Soviet military could have offered in the form of actual troops in Afghanistan. However, the main factor that the Soviet Union did not address prior to leaving Afghanistan was to attempt to resolve the underlying societal problems that were driving the Afghan resistance. It is possible that, had the Soviet Union truly pushed Najibullah to pursue a plan of mutual reconciliation between the opposition groups and the government, the two parties could have established some type of mutually sustainable arrangement.

The second question is somewhat related to the first, but focuses instead on the possible outcomes had the Soviet Union not dissolved in 1991. If Soviet economic and military aid had not ceased, could the Republic of Afghanistan have sustained its pre-1992 status indefinitely? In this hypothetical scenario, it is likely that the Afghan government could have persisted for several years past 1992 by using a continuous supply of economic and military means that the Soviet Union would provide. However, there are two large holes in this scenario. First, it assumes that the Soviet Union would actually want to keep providing aid to Afghanistan. Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, the Soviet Union began to diminish its foreign support of the Afghan government. Second, and most importantly, allowing the Afghan government to continue to suppress the Afghan population’s disapproval would have done absolutely

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nothing to solve the underlying issues that were plaguing Afghan society. This economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union would be unsustainable for the Afghan government because it would merely cover up the problem, instead of addressing and fixing it. Furthermore, had the Soviet Union continued to support the socialist government, the United States and Pakistan would have unquestionably continued to support the mujahedin. This would ensure that the resistance would continue to survive and would consistently put pressure on the Afghan government.

The third question that arose during this research asks, could the progressive reforms and ideas that the PDPA put forward ever succeed in Afghanistan without causing widespread opposition? This question is particularly interesting because of the perceived success of many of the Soviet Union’s reform programs in Central Asia. Many of these programs were nearly identical to the reforms introduced by the PDPA in Afghanistan in 1978 and 1979, especially the land reform program. One of the main reasons that these reform programs failed in Afghanistan was because of the quickness with which the PDPA instituted them. Additionally, when the PDPA responded to the Afghan population’s apprehension about their reforms with violence, it further discredited the programs in the eyes of many Afghans. It is possible that much more of the Afghan population would have been willing to try out these new programs if the PDPA had carefully introduced these reforms over a longer period and been lenient with those Afghans who did not desire to participate in these programs.

As the United States prepares to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan, American political and military leaders must pay careful attention to ensuring that history
does not repeat itself yet again in Afghanistan. Although the current situation in Afghanistan is different in many ways from the scene that the Soviet military left in 1989, it is still possible to draw many parallels between the two governments. Had the Soviet Union invested more time in stabilizing the internal situation of the PDPA or propagating a meaningful campaign of national and ethnic reconciliation, it is possible that the Afghan government could have survived its conflict with the mujahedin. Nevertheless, one of the most important lessons that the collapse of the Republic of Afghanistan can teach today’s world leaders is that the suppression of societal issues through foreign military and economic aid is not a sustainable arrangement. Instead of covering these issues up with money and violence, governments in these situations must bring these problems to the surface so that all parties can understand and address the issues at hand.
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