

Operation Cyclone

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Operation Cyclone was the code name for the United States Central Intelligence Agency program to arm, train, and finance the Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, 1979 to 1989. The program leaned heavily towards supporting militant Islamic groups that were favored by neighboring Pakistan, rather than other, less ideological Afghan resistance groups that had also been fighting the Marxist-oriented Democratic Republic of Afghanistan regime since before the Soviet intervention.^[1] Operation Cyclone was one of the longest and most expensive covert CIA operations ever undertaken;^[2] funding began with \$20–30 million per year in 1980 and rose to \$630 million per year in 1987.^[3]

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Jimmy Carter standing with Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Background

Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, stated that the U.S. effort to aid the mujahideen was preceded by an effort to draw the Soviets into a costly and distracting Vietnam War-like conflict. In a 1998 interview^[4] with the French news magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Brzezinski recalled: "We didn't push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would... That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Soviets into the Afghan trap... The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter, "We now have the opportunity of giving to the Soviet Union its Vietnam War."^{[5][6]}

The program

On July 3, 1979, U.S. President Carter signed a presidential finding authorizing funding for anticommunist guerrillas in Afghanistan.^[3] Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December Operation_Storm-333 and installation of a more pro-Soviet



president, Babrak Karmal, Carter announced, "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the greatest threat to peace since the Second World War".^[7].

To execute this policy, President Reagan deployed CIA Special Activities Division paramilitary officers to train and equip the Mujahideen forces against the Red Army. Although the CIA and Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson have received the most attention for their roles, the key architect of the strategy was Michael G. Vickers, a young CIA paramilitary officer working for Gust Avrakotos, the CIA's regional head.^{[8][9]} Reagan's Covert Action program assisted in ending the Soviet's occupation in Afghanistan.^{[10][11]} A Pentagon senior official, Michael Pillsbury, successfully advocated providing Stinger missiles to the Afghan resistance, according to recent books and academic articles.^[12]



A mujahideen resistance fighter shoots an SA-7, 1988.

The program relied heavily on using the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as an intermediary for funds distribution, passing of weapons, military training and financial support to Afghan resistance groups.^[13] Along with funding from similar programs from Britain's MI6 and SAS, Saudi Arabia, and the People's Republic of China,^[14] the ISI armed and trained over 100,000 insurgents between 1978 and 1992. They encouraged the volunteers from the Arab states to join the Afghan resistance in its struggle against the Soviet troops based in Afghanistan.^[13]

Nonetheless, despite its heavy reliance on the Pakistanis, the U.S. also sent its own military trainers and advisors to mujaheddin bases in Pakistan, where they instructed Afghan fighters in the use of U.S.-supplied equipment as well as guerilla warfare in general. Civilian personnel from the U.S. Department of State and the CIA also frequently visited the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area during this time.

The U.S.-built Stinger anti-aircraft missile, supplied to the mujahideen in very large numbers, struck a decisive blow to the Soviet war effort as it allowed the lightly-armed Afghans to effectively defend against Soviet helicopter landings in strategic areas. The Stingers were so renowned and deadly that, in the 1990s, the U.S. conducted a "buy-back" program to keep unused missiles from falling into the hands of anti-American terrorists. This program may have been covertly renewed following the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001, out of fear that remaining Stingers could be used against U.S. forces in the country.^[15]

Soviet troops completely pulled out of Afghanistan on February 15, 1989, having suffered over 14,000 killed and missing and over 50,000 wounded.

Funding

See also: Reagan Doctrine

The U.S. offered two packages of economic assistance and military sales to support Pakistan's role in the war against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The first six-year assistance package (1981–87) amounted to US\$3.2 billion, equally divided between economic assistance and military sales. The U.S. also sold 40 F-16 aircraft to Pakistan during 1983–87 at a cost of \$1.2 billion outside the assistance package. The second six-year assistance package (1987–93) amounted to \$4.2 billion. Out of this, \$2.28 billion were allocated for economic assistance in the form of grants or loan that carried the interest rate of 2–3 per cent. The rest of the allocation (\$1.74 billion) was in the form of credit for military purchases.^[13] Sale of non-U.S. arms to Pakistan for

destination to Afghanistan was facilitated by Israel.^{[16][17]} Somewhere between \$3–\$20 billion in U.S. funds were funneled into the country to train and equip Afghan resistance groups with weapons,^[citation needed] including Stinger man-portable air-defense systems.

The program funding was increased yearly due to lobbying by prominent U.S. politicians and government officials, such as Charles Wilson, Gordon Humphrey, Fred Ikle, and William Casey. Under the Reagan administration, U.S. support for the Afghan mujahideen evolved into a centerpiece of U.S. foreign policy, called the Reagan Doctrine, in which the U.S. provided military and other support to anti-communist resistance movements in Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua, and elsewhere.

Aftermath

When the Soviet forces crossed into Afghanistan in December 1979, some believed the Soviets were attempting to expand their borders southward in order to gain a foothold in the region. The Soviet Union had long lacked a warm water port, and their movement south seemed to position them for further expansion toward Pakistan in the East, and Iran to the West. American politicians, Republicans and Democrats alike, feared the Soviets were positioning themselves for a takeover of Middle Eastern oil. Others believed that the Soviet Union was afraid Iran's Islamic Revolution and Afghanistan's Islamization would spread to the millions of Muslims in the USSR.

After the invasion, Carter announced what became known as the Carter Doctrine: that the U.S. would not allow any other outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf. He terminated the Russian Wheat Deal, which was intended to establish trade with USSR and lessen Cold War tensions. He also prohibited Americans from participating in the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, and reinstated registration for the draft for young males.

The U.S. shifted its interest from Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet troops. American funding of Afghan resistance leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his Hezbi Islami party was cut off immediately.^[18] The U.S. also reduced its assistance for Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

In October 1990, U.S. President George H. W. Bush refused to certify that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device, triggering the imposition of sanctions against Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment (1985) in the Foreign Assistance Act. This disrupted the second assistance package offered in 1987 and discontinued economic assistance and military sales to Pakistan with the exception of the economic assistance already on its way to Pakistan. Military sales and training program were abandoned as well and some of the Pakistani military officers under training in the U.S. were asked to return home.^[13]

Criticism

The U.S. government has been criticized for allowing Pakistan to channel

The U.S. government has been criticized for allowing Pakistan to channel a disproportionate amount of its funding to controversial Afghan resistance leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar,^[19] who Pakistani officials believed was "their man".^[20] Hekmatyar has been criticized for killing other *mujahideen* and attacking civilian populations, including shelling Kabul with American-supplied weapons, causing 2,000 casualties. Hekmatyar was said to be friendly with Osama bin Laden, founder of al-Qaeda, who was running an operation for assisting "Afghan Arab" volunteers fighting in Afghanistan, called Maktab al-Khadamat. Alarmed by his behavior, Pakistan leader General Zia warned Hekmatyar, "It was Pakistan that made him an Afghan leader and it is Pakistan who can equally destroy him if he continues to misbehave."^[21]



Many critics assert that funding the mujahideen played a role in causing the September 11 attacks.

In the late 1980s, Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, concerned about the growing strength of the Islamist movement, told President George H. W. Bush, "You are creating a Frankenstein."^[22]

The U.S. says that all of its funds went to native Afghan rebels and denies that any of its funds were used to supply Osama bin Laden or foreign Arab mujahideen. Nonetheless, U.S. support for the native Afghan mujahideen contributed to the radical Islamization of Afghanistan as well as the weakening and near-disintegration of the Afghan state, which ultimately led to the Taliban takeover of most of the country in 1996.

Moreover, U.S. support for the mujahideen enabled and prolonged their resistance to the Soviet presence, ultimately resulting in thousands of battle-hardened, radicalized, non-Afghan veterans returning to their home countries and forming the core of what is now referred to as Al Qaeda or "global jihad". (It is estimated that 35,000 foreign Muslims from 43 Islamic countries participated in the war). Additionally, the close relationships and cooperation established during the 1980s between the mujahideen and Pakistan's intelligence and military services, as well as the presence of mujahideen training bases on Pakistani soil, ultimately led to the infiltration of the Pakistani security services by militant Islamic elements as well as the de facto takeover of northwest Pakistan by pro-Taliban rebels.

Critics of U.S. foreign policy consider Operation Cyclone to be substantially responsible for setting in motion the events that led to the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. It is also probable that some Taliban presently fighting the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan were in fact trained, equipped, or funded by the U.S. or its allies during the 1980s, at which time they were more commonly referred to as "freedom fighters".^{[23][24][25][26]}

See also

- Ahmad Shah Massoud
- Allegations of CIA assistance to Osama bin Laden
- Afghan Civil War
- Afghan training camp
- Badaber Uprising
- CIA activity in Afghanistan under William J. Casey 1981-1987
- CIA Activities by Region: Near East, North Africa, South and Southwest Asia (see: Afghanistan 1978)
- Celebratory gunfire
- Charles Wilson (Texas politician)
- *Charlie Wilson's War*

- Gary Schroen
- Gust Avrakotos
- Howard Hart
- Joanne Herring
- Michael Pillsbury
- Michael G. Vickers
- Milton Bearden
- Soviet war in Afghanistan

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