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Title: Mustafa's History of the Afghan Jihad

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Synopsis

An essay chronicling the history of the anti-communist Islamic jihad in Afghanistan written by an individual named Mustafa. The work covers the key political figures and groups and explains their roles in the development of the conflict. Key themes include organization of the anti-communist jihad, problems with attracting foreign financial assistance and American involvement in the war.

Key Themes

The essay covers the history of the anti-communist jihad in Afghanistan beginning during the reign of King Zahir Shah and continuing through the reigns of presidents Daub Khan, Muhammad Turaqi, ending during the Soviet period. The roles of Muhammad Younis Khalis and Abdul Rasool Sayyaf and their attempts to gain financial support from foreign donors are the main topics of the work. The American role in the conflict receives significant attention.

According to the text, the resistance in Afghanistan during the reign of President Turaqi was characterized by discord among the various Islamic groups, which prevented any coordinated action against the communists. In fact, the only consensus that was reached was to gather money and support from various Islamic countries until the opposition could become strong enough to fight the Afghan communist army. In the author's opinion the state of paralysis among the anti-communist mujahidin would have lasted indefinitely had it not been for the initiative and vision of Muhammad Younis Khalis, who effectively started the jihad in Afghanistan by declaring war on the Afghan communist government through a fatwa and then initiating hostilities from the mountains of Nangarhar province with the few men and weapons he could muster.

The early stages of the jihad are characterized by the Communists' tenuous hold on power due to the threat of an Islamic revolution. To counter this threat the communist government accepted aid from the Soviet Union in the form of weapons and military advisors. This support, with which the mujahidin could not compete, presented Muhammad Younis Khalis and other leaders of the jihad with one of their main challenges: attracting financial support sufficient to counter the Soviet influence.

Khalis and the other leaders saw great potential for assistance from oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States though little money was actually received. Despite their failure in attracting Saudi oil money they were marginally successful in attracting money from Iran and support in the form of non-military supplies from Pakistan. However, in the end the mujahidin were unable to receive aid in sufficient amounts to counter the Soviet influence.

The main reason for Khalis' failure to raise sufficient funds, according to the author, was his relative obscurity among foreign donors. In addition to Khalis' lack of exposure the author cites several other reasons for insufficient levels of foreign aid, mainly uninformed donation and American involvement in the conflict. Specifically, had the donor's known who they were donating to they would not have given money to corrupt anti-Arab Afghan groups.

The later entry of the United States into the conflict also exacerbated the problem of concentrating foreign assistance in the hands of jihad groups favored by Khalis. Specifically, the author argues that

the United States supported leaders such as Birhan Ad-Din Rabbani and Qalb ad Din Hekmyetar, two of the most extreme anti-Arab Afghan leaders who eventually worked to pressure Arab mujahidin out of Afghanistan once they gained enough power.

Abdul Rasool Sayyaf is the other jihad leader who receives considerable attention in the essay. His rise to power in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan began when a group of Islamic countries convened a conference to study possible reactions to the invasion. Though the conference did not produce any substantial resolutions or support for the Afghan rebels Sayyaf emerged as the leader of the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan, an umbrella organization uniting a number of factions for the purpose of effectively working with foreign governments.

In the author's opinion, Sayyaf's greatest contribution was his successful fundraising for the jihad. Upon taking the reigns of the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan, Sayyaf and other leaders embarked on a fundraising trip to Dubai and other parts of the United Arab Emirates. Sayyaf is said to have been widely successful in his mission due to his ability to speak fluent Arabic and his knowledge of Arab culture.

While Sayyaf's Arabic skills were invaluable, his overall fundraising philosophy was also an extremely important element of his success. According to the author, Sayyaf's underlying rejected the idea of the "Afghan jihad" as a national undertaking in the Western political understanding. Rather, Sayyaf adhered to the idea that all Muslim people are united in one nation and are required to support their Muslim brothers. Therefore, the jihad in Afghanistan was considered a pan-Islamic undertaking in which all Muslims must lend their support.

Consequently, Sayyaf's delegation made every effort to appeal to the Islamic people rather than seek support from governments. Further, they avoided public events and locations which would have appeared ostentatious and aloof of their targeted donors, the common people. In doing so they sought to emphasize the value of individual monetary and physical contributions of average Muslims to the jihad.

In the essay Sayyaf's fundraising approach is contrasted to that taken by the Palestinian Authority (PA) when it was raising support against Israel in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Specifically, Sayyaf successfully appealed to the Muslim masses, in the end facilitating the mujahidin defeat of the Soviet Union, while the PA worked to establish ties with Arab governments but never gained significant support and never defeated Israel.

In addition to chronicling the roles of key individuals, the author provides insight into the mujahidin perspectives on American involvement in the conflict including American motivation and the extent of American influence. Throughout the text the United States is portrayed as a manipulator of events in Afghanistan. The author notes that the Soviet invasion occurred during an American transition of presidential power. Consequently, no action could be taken by Islamic countries until America diverted its attention from internal politics and granted permission to take action. In effect, the United States played the role of puppet master in Afghanistan, orchestrating events and manipulating the actors. Further evidence of American manipulation is the captured American intelligence from the Tehran embassy, revealing America's prior knowledge of Soviet intentions to invade Afghanistan. The fact that this was known to the United States proves complicity and manipulation of events.

The main reason for American involvement in the conflict, according to the essay, was the desire to improve its image in the Islamic world in relation to the Soviet Union. Specifically, the author reasons

that the United States saw an easy opportunity to improve its image after the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran and being branded "The Great Satan" during the Iranian Revolution. By giving the Soviets free reign to invade and occupy Afghanistan the Soviet world image would suffer. At the same time, by helping the Afghans against the Soviets the America saw a vehicle for improving its own image in the Islamic world.

Interestingly, many mujahidin accepted American support despite America's anti-Islamic image among the mujahidin. One reason for this acceptance stems from the Sunni-Shi'a division within Islam. The author points out that at the time of the conflict many Sunni Muslims believed Shi'a Islam to be more dangerous than the Christians or the Jews. Given America's anti-Iran stance and support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War they felt that they could justify acceptance of American support in Afghanistan.

In addition to the themes of fundraising and the American role in the conflict the essay touches upon a range of other topics in varying detail. These topics include corruption and mismanagement of funds within the network of Islamic charitable organizations, the Soviet use of the scorched earth policy in reaction to mounting guerilla opposition and the level of support for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Additionally, the author discusses factors influencing the anti-communist jihad such as defections by Islamists in the Afghan army to the mujahidin and the support received from Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian Islamic Jihad.