

# **TERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN: A STORY OF THE CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to brief the reader about the evolution of the political climate in Afghanistan which has been fragmented due to continuous war. This is put forth from a Soviet point of view. The main points of examination are the reasons for Soviet invasion and the ideology of the Taliban. More recently, as of 2021, as the world stood by and watched, the self-proclaimed warriors of Jihad and protectors of Islam took over Kabul. In the entire process, one pertinent question that stands out is: should the world be allowed to recognize the Taliban as legitimate rulers of Afghanistan instead of branding them as terrorists?

**Keywords:** Political Economy, Terrorism, Marxism, Leninism, KGB, Taliban, Sharia 2

## **Introduction**

The most basic principles of terrorism are at complete odds with the fundamentals of Marxism. Marx does not deny the violence that is inevitable during tumultuous changes from one economic system to another. However, acts of hijacking planes, kidnapping and killing selected targets (read tyrants) by small groups of people has no place in Marxian ideology of a class struggle. Marx showed time and again that the reasons for upheaval were born out of oppression, discrimination, the division of society into classes with the majority being exploited by a small privileged minority. An economic system, he argues, cannot be replaced by attacks or creating fear in the minds of people, but through a long-drawn-out class struggle.

Marx and Engels first give the readers an insight into their thoughts on terrorism during the rise of the Fenians, who were dedicated to the pursuit of Irish independence from Britain, by force if necessary. Their movement however, was highly divided and acrimonious, with the final straw being the ‘democratic decision’ to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922.

Two aspects of Marxist observation can be examined during their revolutionary days. One is an understanding that socialists do not put conditions on their support for movements of

national resistance to imperialist oppression. The second is an understanding of the limitations of such movements the idea that a select few can produce change through conspiratorial methods inevitably isolates them from the mass of the population and dooms them ultimately to failure (Jenkins, Marxism and Terrorism, 2006).

Leon Trotsky also noted in his writings that terrorism carried out individually was not supported by Marxists as they believe its actions were belittling the concept of class struggle. Essentially, he advocated for the 'We're all in this together' concept over individualism. Only class struggles can successfully replace one system with another. As a case in point, he says, the more 'effective' the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organization and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy.

With these explanations in mind, the author turns to Afghanistan, the ground for ideological birthing, clashes and deaths. The country was a very different place before 1979. Burqas were optional, modern construction took place alongside traditional buildings and overall, a prosperous society. Afghanistan was courted by both the USSR and the USA during the Cold War era, though officially it was a neutral state.

In the winter of 1979, the Soviets officially invaded Afghanistan. In response, USA sent its own troops and ammunition to counter the Soviet influence in the region. What followed was a Soviet retreat ten years later. The world failed to realize that it was just the beginning. The Americans did not think that they would be stationed in the Asian country for the next thirty years.

The aim of this paper is straightforward, albeit complex. An interpretation of the various occurrences from the 21st century point of view. It presents a brief sketch on the following: A history of Soviet ideologies and how terrorism was incorporated into their thinking. It will then proceed to talk about the reasons for Soviet invasion and explore the ideologies of the Taliban and the controversies surrounding its legitimacy as a government: are people of a nation ruled best by themselves? There seems to be a bit of a moral dilemma here as the implications of this statement are realized. Indians believed in this statement, as did many other British colonies, around seventy years ago. Would it be rational to apply the same logic here? Or are

statements to be interpreted as per our convenience given the situation at hand?

### **Lenin and Early Views on Terrorism**

Leninism evolved from Marxism and was particularly influenced by his own personality and the experiences that shaped the latter half of imperial Russia. The idea that force was to be met with force was a common belief shared by all Marxists, but in Lenin's case it meant bloody violence—employing revolutionary violence to counter reactionary violence by autocrats. That is, violence overcoming violence. A Russian Marxism came into being with specific emphasis on political violence as a result of Tsarist policies. Here, the two words guerilla warfare and terrorism are often confused with each other. While Boaz Ganor identifies Lenin and his followers as advocates of guerilla warfare, Lenin's interpretation is not clear and often the two words are used interchangeably. Guerilla units and their military strategies mirror what Lenin calls mass terror and hence is more applicable as of now. In 1901, Lenin declared that he had never denounced terror as a means of struggle and that it is perfectly suitable at crucial junctures in war. According to him, two conditions were critical for its proper functioning. One, the existence of a 'central body' directing all ops, and two, strong local revolutionary organizations (neither of which existed). However it wasn't presented as a necessary requirement. Lenin was still more comfortable with politically educating the masses who could then be brought together to topple the autocratic government and at best terror could play a subsidiary role in the process. Even during the heights of revolutionary uprising in Russia, Lenin asked his workers to exercise moderation and not go to extremes, for he felt that it would only squander the forces.

### **Stalin and State-Sponsored Terrorism**

Through his infamous "dekulakization" campaign at the beginning of the 1930s, Stalin unleashed terror against the peasantry. The 1930s horror was planned out in phases. The reprieve of 1934 came after the purges of 1933. The purges started up again in late 1934 and continued through late 1935. The Great Terror of 1936–1938 began in early 1936, followed by a brief lull that peaked in 1937. The terror of Stalin affected both the masses and the elite, terrorizing both the party membership as well as peasants and workers on the one hand, and top officials in the military and governmental systems on the other. Stalin wanted to build a brand-new political apparatus that was only focused on furthering his agenda.

Up until the Moscow trials smashed it to pieces in 1936, the old guard had managed to hold on. Stalin was seen as the final bulwark against the arbitrary nature of the terror. Between 1929 and 1953, the Soviet Union's communist government was the most ideal example of state terrorism. No other nation had ever experienced the systematic imposition of terror by a police state infrastructure.

### **Cold War Era**

*"The USSR developed two tools that changed the world: airplane hijackings and state-sponsorship of terror."*

The Soviet Union and its supporters openly backed terrorism as a strategy to trouble and weaken its rivals politically. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the numerous leftist German terrorist cells received funding, equipment, and "networking" chances from the East German Stasi and KGB. The Red Brigades in Italy, the Red Army Faction in Germany, and the 2nd June Movement all shared Marxist ideologies as well as a hatred of the United States, were Palestinian sympathizers, and opposition to the generation that had supported the Nazis and Fascists and included some of its still-powerful members. They made solid bases for a fifth column during the Cold War. It was not simply Europe: Soviet resources, money, training, and direction were distributed all over the world, either directly through the KGB or via the organization of important allies, including the Rumanian Securitate and the Cuban General Intelligence Directorate. It would not be wrong to say that Russia is the birthplace of modern terrorism.

### **The United States Philosophy: Pre-Cold War**

The US was no stranger to terrorism. It had supported terror movements in Italy during the Years of Lead in the 1960s, as a strategy of tension, a policy wherein violent struggle is encouraged rather than suppressed. General Gianadelio Maletti, commander of the counterintelligence division of the Italian military intelligence service between 1971 and 1975, claimed that his men in the vicinity of Venice discovered a right-wing terrorist cell that had been supplied with military explosives from Germany and claimed that US intelligence services instigated and abetted right-wing terrorism in Italy during the 1970s. The neo-fascist—groups according to inquiries made—La Fenice, Avanguardia nazionale, and Ordine nuovo were "troops" of "clandestine armed forces," under the command of elements of the "state apparatus associated to the CIA.

Throughout history, the USA has acted only in its best interests and furthered any agenda that is anti-communist. It supported right wing groups as its antagonists in Italy were communist organizations aiming to establish a Marxian global order. This was one of the major motivations for it to intervene in Afghanistan fearing it would become another puppet state of the Soviet Union.

### **Afghanistan before 1979: A Brief Sketch of The Unsteady Political Climate**

After defeating the British in the third Afghan-British war in 1921, Afghanistan was a monarchy under the rule of Amir Amullah Khan. He introduced a series of socio-economic reforms to revamp the afghan economy and catch up to the rest of the world. However, his attempts to limit the power of the Loya.

Jirga, the national council, was met with protests. He was forced to abdicate and leave the country. Zahir Shah was made the king in 1933. He ruled for the next thirty years, bringing much needed stability and peace to the country whilst introducing modernization reforms. The king's cousin and pro-Soviet Gen. Mohammed Daoud Khan-the country's Prime Minister turned to the communist country for financial and military support. He also implemented a number of social reforms, one of which was the expansion of women's rights in public. Around this time, the Afghan Communist party was founded in secret and headed principally by Babrak Karmal and Nur Mohammad Taraki. In 1973, Daoud Khan overthrew Zahir Shah in a coup and declared himself President. The Republic of Afghanistan was born with firm ties to the USSR. However, he was killed in a communist coup in 1978. Babrak Karmal was appointed Deputy Prime Minister, while Nur Mohammad Taraki assumed power as president. They declared their independence from Soviet sway and made it clear that their programmes were grounded in Afghan nationalism, Islamic ideals, and socioeconomic justice. Taraki and the Soviet Union established a friendship pact.

From here on things started moving downhill. There was an intense power struggle between Taraki and Hafizullah Amin and the former was killed in the fighting in 1979. Simultaneously, Khan's social reforms angered orthodox Islamic and ethnic leaders, who started an armed uprising in the countryside. To oppose the government supported by the Soviet Union, the guerrilla group Mujahadeen was established in June 1978. The final blow was dealt when American ambassador Adolph Dubbs was killed and the US cut off its assistance to Afghanistan in late 1979.

The series of events that ultimately led to the Soviet invasion give us a hazy picture of the ideologies in circulation at the time. Given the mostly successful USSR policies, recently freed colonies and countries wanted to follow a similar path to establish a working-class society with equal wealth, resources and rights for everyone. Muslim fundamentalists wanted to stick to Islamic ideals tempered by Afghan specific conditions.

### **A Possible Interpretation of Events**

#### *Soviet invasion: a perceived threat to ideology?*

There were many theories doing the rounds when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, which continued even after the war. New documents declassified recently by the CIA shed some light on probable reasons for invasion. Georgy Kornienko served as Andrei Gromyko's top deputy for a long time, and was expected to succeed him. However, Gorbachev chose Eduard Shevardnadze as his replacement in 1985 and effectively pushed Kornienko back into the shadows. His memoirs, which were released in 1992, provide a stunning insider's perspective of Gromyko's thinking and of the Soviet decision-making process towards Afghanistan in 1979. They identify October 1979 as the turning point of USSR's penultimate decision.

At that time, the Soviet was led by Andropov, the USSR KGB head and later the premier of the Soviet Union, and Minister of Defense Ustinov, often described as "the most Stalinist of all the Commissars", having been groomed by Stalin to maintain the established system. It was ultimately Ustinov who gave the go ahead. His decision to send in Afghan troops, a complete U-turn from his former principle of expediency, was justified based on American action in the Persian Gulf (in the fall of 1979) and a possible Iranian invasion doing the rounds. His exact words were, "If the United States can allow itself such things tens of thousands of kilometers away in the immediate proximity of the USSR borders, then why should we be afraid to defend our position in Afghanistan." At that time the said country in question was going through tumultuous changes and was in a vulnerable position as mentioned in the previous section. The Soviets were apprehensive of an American invasion in their own backyard coupled with a highly possible introduction of Western ideologies in a nation that had so far been carefully groomed by them.

#### *Terrorism Propagated By KGB*

The KGB was the main security agency for the Soviet Union. Its main objective was to suppress dissent within Russia and the satellite republics of the Soviet Union by first identifying and then silencing dissidents who were advocating anti-Communist political and/or religious views.

KGB agents frequently utilized extraordinarily aggressive methods to complete their job. With a few notable exceptions, the KGB avoided getting directly involved in terrorist operations, but it was nonetheless crucial in directing help toward these organizations and providing the Soviet leadership with intelligence on their actions.

Formerly classified KGB documents on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan show the concerted attempts of a major power to control events in a vassal state and how badly they failed to do so. The 178-page study demonstrates that, even before the Communist takeover in 1978 and the Soviet occupation in 1979, the KGB had a significant presence in Afghanistan. There were hundreds of active agents in the nation, and they played a part not only in Afghanistan but also in other nations like Pakistan and Iran. Prince Muhammad Daud's administration (1973–1988) collaborated extensively with the Soviet Union, and some of Daud's ministers had relationships with the KGB. Despite receiving advance notice of the plot against Daud, the Soviet Union was not involved in the Afghan Communists' takeover of Daud's government in April 1978. The KGB lavishly expended funds to quickly establish local Afghan communist intelligence services, the KHAD being the most infamous for its use of torture and assassination. The data demonstrate that CIA-supported Mujahideen organizations, their training grounds, and their headquarters were significantly penetrated by KGB-trained spies. It illustrates the frequently at odds diplomatic, military, KGB, and party adviser rivalry among the various Soviet entities functioning in Afghanistan.

The stories of Operation "Raduga", the KGB's high-risk plan to eject three Afghan cabinet ministers from the country in September 1979, are just some of the numerous new information on KGB operations in Afghanistan and other nations. Throughout the 1980s, the KGB conducted a large number of covert military "false flag" operations within Afghanistan. In these, Soviet-trained Afghan guerrilla troops pretended to be anti-Soviet Mujahideen rebels supported by the CIA in order to stir up trouble and flush out real rebels for a counterattack. According to Mitrokhin, 86 armed, KGB-trained "false gangs" were in operation throughout Afghanistan by January 1983. The ongoing Mujahideen infighting in the 1980s also receives new insight as a result of these revelations. Some of the clashes between Mujahideen factions in the 1980s, which laid the groundwork for the devastating civil war in the 1990s, may have been intentionally carried out by paid KGB agents.

### *US and the Mujahideen Response*

“Although the purpose of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan is of a political nature, its economic impact of its involvement has created an adverse economic by product....there is danger of hyperinflation.....more people will either leave Afghanistan or be forced to support the present regime....” (Declassified documents, Defense Intelligence Agency, USA, May 1983). It would not be wrong to say that the US, apart from ‘freeing the people of Afghanistan and showing them the light of the world’, heavily exploited the Islamic rebels. They were, at moments in time, proud of what they had created which drove the Soviets out. The aftermath of their over eagerness ended in another war after 9/11 when they received a reality check. The involvement of the United States in the cold war era will not be explored in this paper as it majorly focuses on the aftermath. What we do know is that the US covertly backed the local Islamic rebels who were opposed to a soviet based regime.

### **Examining the Islamist Fundamentals**

#### *The Taliban*

"The CIA made a historic mistake in encouraging Islamic groups from all over the world to come to Afghanistan."

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the Taliban movement’s foundations were laid. The Soviets were in Afghanistan to help a communist government that was backed by a small group of largely urban citizens. However, the vast majority of Afghans resided in rural areas, where tribal and ethnic groupings held sway and life was centered around traditional Islamic beliefs.

Following the evacuation of Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan, the Taliban, or "students" in the Pashto language, first appeared in northern Pakistan at the beginning of the 1990s. Rural Afghans organized into Mujahideen groups and expelled the Soviets. But after that, they started fighting among themselves. A group of Islamic instructors and pupils known as the Taliban formed from that disarray. The majority Pashtun movement is thought to have originated in Saudi Arabia-funded religious institutes that promoted a harsh version of Sunni Islam. They swept the nation, eliminating Mujahideen organizations and establishing tightlaw and order. Their belief broadly lies in the Sharia law of Islam a highly controversial subject for many decades now.

## **Sharia Political Economy: The Fundamentals**

Ibn Khaldun's (15th century's) framework provides a summary of the interdisciplinary dynamic model for Islamic socio-economic system:

*“The strength of the sovereign (al-mulk) does not become consumed except by implementation of the Shari’ah;  
The Shari’ah cannot be implemented except by a sovereign (al-mulk);  
The sovereign cannot gain strength except through the people (al-rijal);  
The people cannot be sustained except by wealth (al-mal);  
Wealth cannot be acquired except through development (al-., imaran);  
Development cannot be attained except through justice (al-., adl);  
Justice is the criterion (al-mizan) by which God will evaluate mankind; and the sovereign is charged with the responsibility of actualising justice”*

(Chapra, 2000: 147-8).

According to Nouredine Kirchene and Abbas Mirakhor many Muslim nations that gained independence after being colonised opted for a Leninist-Marxist system and missed out on decades of economic growth.

Except for those areas where Islam forbids it, a general Islamic economic model welcomes science and uses economic theory (e.g., interest rates, gambling, violation of property rights, etc.). But it also possesses traits that give it dimensions that are not mentioned in conventional economic theory. It is founded on concepts that acknowledge: the total supremacy of Allah; the idea that a person is more than just a physical entity; the idea that everything originates from Allah and returns to Allah; and in an Islamic economic model, there is no notion of "mother nature."

The Sharia did not leave much room for economics. Wherever the issues of prosperity of the community or welfare of the common person were discussed, this was part of the same tradition of exhortatory writings to the ruler about the value of a sound currency, about fairness in dealings and about the risks of punitive taxation. Otherwise it was assumed that people were ordained to conduct their business affairs and transactions within the bounds of the Sharia and its detailed norms concerning the permissible and the lawful in economic conduct and behaviour [p. 209 *The Crisis of Islamic Civilisation* by Ali Allawi, Yale University Press 2009].

Some basic pillars of the economy that the Taliban claims to adhere to are given below:

*The role of zakat:*

Islamic finance has long been viewed as the financial activity where social equality is strengthened via the imposition of zakat in the Quran and Sunnah. The verses in the Quran that discuss interest are always preceded by or followed by verses that call for zakat. Therefore, when social equality is guaranteed by zakat, the need for lenders to charge interest and the desperate circumstances in which the impoverished must accept it will vanish. Islamic finance is predominantly directed toward wealth development and investment, with considerably less emphasis on consumption.

*Capital:*

The Quran makes clear the concept of capital. Productional capital, working capital, and financial capital are concepts. The traditional view of growth acknowledged the need of capital formation for economic expansion. Economic expansion and the accumulation of capital can be easily correlated.

*Labor markets:*

Eliminating labour market distortions with the aim of maximising employment and promoting exports is one of the key goals of an Islamic economic model. In order to balance labour markets, it seeks to establish ideal wage flexibility.

*The role of the state:*

The state is in charge of upholding law and order, transferring income to the underprivileged, creating justice, offering public services, and making investments in economic development.

Apart from these, this form of economic system also makes space for legal jurisprudence, investment in human capital and social infrastructure, et al.

The authors express disappointment at the inability of the Muslim countries to follow proper Sharia law, to quote, an Islamic economic model rests on Allah's Sharia; it aims at operationalizing the Sharia laws into economic life. Built on interest free finance, balanced fiscal policy, and redistributive zakat, an Islamic economic model could offer a robust

macroeconomic framework for a sustained and balanced economic growth.

### **Analysis and Concluding Remarks**

The entire assimilation of ideologies and historical facts in the previous sections indicate time and again that history need not necessarily be this unfortunate. There were many instances where each stakeholder could have restrained himself envisioning the struggle in the long run and for the sake of the innocent citizens of Afghanistan. Would Marx have approved? The fact that Lenin treated terrorism as a probable alternative to crush dissent and achieve political objectives shows a clear demarcation of thinking that was furthered by Stalin in the most violent manner possible. KGB in turn was influenced by a form of Russian Marxism that in the author's opinion was the most brutal form of Marxism in its time. In the end a lot of questions remain unanswered and remain open only to speculation.

There is plenty of research out there justifying or criticizing the USA's involvement in Afghanistan and hence it is not dealt with in this paper. Instead, after examining the kind of ideologies that have been doing the rounds in Afghanistan and using common sense, the question to be asked is whether people of a nation are best left to rule themselves?

Consider a world where the USSR did not invade and Taraki continued to rule. He was known to have adopted a groundwork for deeper relations with the US which initially gave way to skepticism in the Soviet camp. As history goes, Amin deposed Taraki and claimed the title of President. This is from where history can go two ways. Mujahideen take formation and rebel against the Afghan government with the main motive being to establish a society of Islamic order. Many things could have happened. Amin could have crushed the revolt or could have lost to them; a possible power sharing is also not ruled out. What climate of political economy would have existed?

The world is a diverse place with many cultures, traditions and beliefs and it is on these that the modes of production have, in a way, been dependent on. Be it the fall of the Roman Empire which led to emergence of feudalism or the forceful imposition of communism in USSR which ultimately led to revolt. Life is a full cycle. Likewise, Marx sticks to his principle of emergence and deaths of political systems which will ultimately—according to his interpretation of the world—lead to socialism—a heaven on earth.

But what the world witnessed in Afghanistan was a series of trial and error trying to determine which rule suited its people the best. Albeit done for political purposes, it serves us a mild taste

of what is to come—if there exists a belief in the ultimate revolt against the existing political, social and economic order which would lead to the establishment of communism. Should the Taliban be designated as a terrorist government? After all, they fought for their own land and rights to be restored to their own people instead of being a vassal state to any super power. There are many factors to be considered here. The Sharia law highlighted above has come to be associated with the oppression of women. Apart from that, there are also many contradictory interpretations of the law itself. What we see today (and way back in 1996) prima facie is the suppression of the rights of one gender, essentially half the workforce of the nation, whereas the Islamic economic system in its most basic framework advocates for equal employment and abhors idleness. Female Muslim activists in other parts of the world use the Sharia to advocate for equal rights. For example, girls should be allowed to play sports as denying that right goes against the principle of ‘giving rights to human beings’ contained in the sharia. These women believe in an inherent feminism present in the sharia. It is just a matter of interpretation. One other factor that is to be considered along with the Taliban rule is that what does it mean for its diametrically opposite neighbour (in all aspects)—India?

In line with their desire to demonstrate greater autonomy away from Pakistan, the Taliban have been working to strengthen their ties with India in order to take advantage of that country’s growing normative and material capacity. Since their return, the Taliban have also made clear that they want to strengthen their ties with India on the diplomatic and business fronts. One example of this is their support for the Chabahar Port project in Iran, which will serve as a hub for connectivity and trade throughout the area. It is noted that India has also reciprocated to a certain extent by offering aid and reopening its embassy in Kabul, albeit with just a technical personnel in place. In June of this year, India sent its first official mission to Afghanistan, after the Taliban takeover, opening the door to direct contact with senior Taliban leaders. This slight improvement of relations in the region signals there’s hope for the future. While the rest of the world, with the possible exception of China and Russia are yet to formally acknowledge the legitimacy of the Afghan government, the fact of the matter is that their versions of a prosperous society are rested on their holy books, a belief which is vastly different from the ideals and ideas that have been consciously allowed to flourish consciously away from religion as far as the West is concerned.

The Islamic political economy essentially calls for an overall prosperous society though it does not explicitly advocate for a proletariat system. What it does believe are equal opportunities

in employment and the ability of the people to live meaningful lives. It is an amalgamation of both the communist and capitalist societies which prima facie seems to be appealing. Much like capitalism which is covered by the veil of liberty, this political system is covered by simple yet effective ideas. The more it is given due recognition, the more problems arise—the problems in interpretation being a case in point as explored in the previous paragraphs. Wresting control from the Americans sent a signal that nobody except their own people could rule their country. The moral dilemma of whether to support or not to support arises here.

The Taliban seem to know what they're doing, at least that is how it is projected to the rest of the world. It would be better if they manage to inculcate the Sharia law with the evolving times instead of going back to the primitive ages. Although the picture seems bleak, ten years from now, the question to be put on the table is whether Afghanistan is in a better position today than it was twenty years ago? Is it better off as an independent state (in both writings and action) instead of aligning itself with one super power? It is too early to speculate now. The Taliban were paraded in the media as fanatic Muslims out to destroy every other non-Muslim—a tradition ever since its inception—and which has seeped deeply into our minds. That does not go on to say that the author supports the Taliban either.

Adopting a moderate view, a rational ground wherein both sides are heard is the solution to this never-ending saga. There are many perpetrators, oppressors and victims in this story. The oppressors today may have been victims yesterday and vice versa. After all, one man's revolution is another man's terrorism.

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