

Russia Invades Afghanistan (1979)

In the summer of 1973, Mohammed Daoud, the former Afghan Prime Minister, launched a successful coup against the King of Afghanistan. Although Daoud himself was more nationalist than socialist, his coup was dependent on pro-Soviet military and political factions. Since 1955 Moscow had provided military training and materiel to Afghanistan; by 1973, a third of active troops had trained on Soviet soil.

Additionally, Daoud enjoyed the support of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), founded in 1965 upon Marxist ideology and allegiance to Moscow. After Daoud himself was murdered, Hafizullah Amin, would come to control the government, pushing it closer to Moscow and Communist ideology.

Amin lead a communist based government - a belief that rejects religion. Thousands of Muslim leaders had been arrested and many more had fled the capital and gone to the mountains to escape Amin's police.

Thousands of Afghanistan Muslims joined the Mujahideen - a guerilla force on a holy mission for Allah. They wanted the overthrow of the Amin government. The Mujahideen declared war - on the supporters of Amin. This was also extended to the Russians who were now in Afghanistan. The Russians claimed that they had been invited in by the Amin government and that they were not invading the country. They claimed that their task was to support a legitimate government and that the Mujahideen were no more than terrorists.

The Mujahideen proved to be a formidable opponent. They were equipped by the United States and had a knowledge of the mountains around Kabul and the weather conditions that would be encountered there. The Russians resorted to using napalm, poison gas and helicopter gun ships against the Mujahideen - but they experienced exactly the same military scenario the Americans had in Vietnam.

America put a ban on the export of grain to Russia, ended the SALT talks taking place then and boycotted the Olympic Games due to be held in Moscow in 1980. They also provided support to the Mujahideen, hoping the Soviet Union would experience their only Vietnam.

Mikhail Gorbachev took Russia out of the Afghanistan fiasco when he realised what many Russian leaders had been too scared to admit in public - that Russia could not win the war and the cost of maintaining such a vast force in Afghanistan was crippling Russia's already weak economy.

By the end of the 1980's, the Mujahideen was at war with itself in Afghanistan with hard line Taliban fighters taking a stronger grip over the whole nation and imposing very strict Muslim law on the Afghan population.