

# Cold War Gallery Set # 11



**A mujahedeen, a captain in the Afghan army**

Source: <http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/08/the-soviet-war-in-afghanistan-1979-1989/100786/>

## Why did this conflict begin?

In April 1978, Afghanistan's government was overthrown by military officers who supported communism. The new government forged close relationships with the Soviet Union, but was greatly disliked by the devout Muslim and largely anticommunist population. **Insurgencies** [rebellions] rose against the new communist government. The insurgents or rebels were known as the **mujahedeen**. There was internal fighting and coups that threatened the stability of the new communist government. In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to protect the communist government. Nearly 100,000 Soviet soldiers took control of major cities in Afghanistan. The mujahedeen quickly resisted and the Soviet forces attempted to destroy the insurgents. They bombed and depopulated civilian areas where the mujahedeen and its supporters were located. The Soviet strategies to subdue the mujahedeen led to mass migration from the countryside into neighboring countries. Millions of Afghan people fled to Pakistan and Iran.

Motivated by a policy of **containment**, the United States and its European allies supported the mujahedeen against the Soviets. The United States provided aid to the Afghan people. The United States and allies also provided weapons, military training, and funding to the mujahedeen. The mujahedeen were able to fight back against the Soviet forces using shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the United States.

The toll in Soviet casualties, economic resources, and loss of political support of Soviet leaders at home forced the Soviet Union to consider an exit strategy. By 1988, the Soviet Union signed an accord with the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and agreed to withdraw its troops. By Feb. 15, 1989, Afghanistan returned to nonaligned status.

## War in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan hit the world's headlines in 1979. Thousands of Afghanistan Muslims joined the Mujahdeen. They declared a jihad - a holy war - on the supporters of the communist government. This extended to the Russians who were in Afghanistan trying to maintain the power of the government.
- The Mujahdeen were equipped with old rifles but had knowledge of the mountains and the area. The Russians resorted to using napalm, poison gas and helicopter gun ships against the Mujahdeen. By 1982, the Mujahdeen was winning despite fighting the might of the world's second most powerful military power. The war in Afghanistan showed the world just how poor the Russian military was.