

What is the  
relationship between  
the cold war and the  
'war on terror' in  
afghanis...



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**What is the relationship between the Cold War and the ‘ War on Terror’ in Afghanistan? How far can one be said to be the continuation of the other?****Introduction**

The Cold War period lasted for nearly 45 years, from 1945 to 1991. It began at the end of the Second World War and with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The war was the stage for the West’s struggle against communist ideas and changes. This long wearing conflict brought to pass an increase in production and trade of arms and an appearance of a new world order formed by America. The main principle of the cold war can be seen as the East-West competition in ideas, arms and spheres of influence. (REF)

After Afghan terrorists dramatically attacked the United States on September 11, 2001; America declared a war on terror and flew its troops into Afghanistan in pursuit of avenging their nation and capturing al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Again America found itself in opposition to the East, nevertheless this time a different region. And Again the East was fighting against this new world order and America’s quest for world domination in a globalising world.

The aim of the essay is to explore the relationship between the cold war and the ‘ war on terror’ in Afghanistan and to find similarities in political patterns and warfare, in order to answer the question.

**Main Body****– History****Main question – Relationship**

The cold war marked the struggle between America and the USSR after the Second World War. The war influenced international affairs majorly. It influenced the way conflicts were handled, the way countries were divided up and the increasing growth in weaponry production. The United States of America as well as the USSR had weapons of mass destructions in nuclear form, which formed a global threat for all humanity. However, both superpowers were aware of the exceeding dangers of their nuclear weapons. Therefore they would not fight an open war against each other. However they fought wars by proxy, supporting other countries to fight each other on their behalf. An example of this is the Vietnam War. While the Soviets supported the communist north of Vietnam, the United States supplied the anti-communist south with weapons and fighters. Therefore it was not just a war between North and South Vietnam but a proxy war between the Soviet Union and America. America perceived the USSR as anti-democratic and as oppressor of civil liberties. However one can argue that capitalist America was opposing the USSR because they were spreading communist ideas and they were anti-capitalist and therefore an obstacle to global domination. (REF) The USSR perceived America as severe threat to their communist borders. Both parties lived in a form of paranoia about one another, with feelings of suspicions and distrust and this lack of understanding of politics and cultures lead to a dangerous course, which was the cold war.

In the late 1970's Afghanistan was experiencing political difficulties.

Hazifullah Amin, the prime minister had a plan to change Afghan politics and society and to do away with Muslim traditions in order to introduce a more western system. This did not please most Afghans who valued their Muslim

traditions. Therefore they joined the mujahideen, a guerrilla group who opposed Amin's regime and Soviet intervention. It is interesting to know that the Taliban are a faction derived from a group of mujahideen. (REF) The Soviets fought a hopeless war against the group in the unfamiliar territories of the mountains. Though the Russians were a superpower they did not prevail against the guerrillas, who they deemed terrorists. The mujahideen eventually overthrew the Afghan government and drove out the Russians. Furthermore, it is believed that the mujahideen had sponsors as well as access to American missiles. As such it can be argued that America used the guerrilla group as proxy against communist Russia.

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, many years after the cold war, a different yet similar type of threat engages the United States. Terrorism nowadays is part of constant political debate. America was wounded deeply on 9/11 which lead the nation to fight on open ended war against terrorism and to invade Afghanistan. The nation believed, as former US president George W. Bush said that the al-Qaeda and Taliban were evil doers who continued the course of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism. (Ref) Bush himself here draws a parallel to the Cold war. Further he states that "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists". (CNN) Terrorism was an evil that had to be fought and neutralised. Afghanistan needed to be freed from its extremism and it needed a reasonable system with liberal democracies and western values. Again there was a divide between the west and the east and between freedom and oppression. And again on both sides there was the readiness to immediately use powerful military force. However one important difference between both wars is that during the cold war,

though wars were fought by proxy, the opposing nations still had civilised meetings and debates in order to find a peaceful solution. The war on terror however, did or does not leave room or time for negotiation. Whether the perception of the threat was exaggerated or the response appropriate has been debated since day one of the invasion. However America should not have been so quick to invade Afghanistan. There are many reasons for this argument, firstly because Afghanistan as a country did not attack the United States but it was the work of a small group of people in Afghanistan. (REF) Secondly America should have aimed to meet with leaders of the Afghan government to discuss a cooperation in order to capture terrorists groups and to tackle the problem internally. If this would have failed, the States would look for other alternatives and if all cooperation failed, then threaten the country with an invasion. America was wounded, it was hurt, ashamed and scared and yes it was angry and demanded action, yet the action it took was not the right one. It has been over eight years since the invasion of the Middle East and not much has been achieved.

As the Cold war can be describes as a war of ideas, so can the war on terror be describes as a war of ideas and values. The Cold war was a competition and struggle for power. It lasted for decades but the states involved did negotiate and did meet in discussion to find possible solutions to the conflict. In contrast, the war on terror does not accept negotiations between the west and the terrorists. Though there are cooperation between many states worldwide to combat terrorism, there is no real communication between the states who matter, namely between the West and the East. However during both wars America dealt with a perceived threat and fear of the foreign.

There emerged a new national security state with internal surveillance and increased security measures. (REF) Nowadays more and more intelligent surveillance technology is being developed. However these inventions might not always be ethical and they do pose a threat to civil liberties. In the case of the newly manufactured 3D full body scanners at airports, which are so detailed that it becomes possible to perfectly see a person naked, people and groups have been outraged. The state faces a difficult decision between increased security and the protection of people's privacy. (The Guardian)

However, the terrorist threat of al-Qaeda also can be seen as different from the danger of the USSR. While the al-Qaeda is a relatively small group, the Soviet Union is an enormously large state, with a great amount of nuclear weapons, forces and allies. While the first was about a struggle for power, the later is a struggle against the influence of western capitalism and mistreatments. Nevertheless both the Soviet Union and the al-Qaeda were and are fighting against capitalist ideas. This is not to suggest that Russia has terrorist features. But it is to identify the relationship between the two conflicts. Thus it can be said that there is a continuation of the fight against capitalism and therefore a continuation of the conflict between the West and the East. Also this conflict is a fight against globalisation. As capitalism thrives on an ever shrinking and interconnected world, with open borders and free markets which globalisation facilitates.