

Parallel 'Revolutions': Afghanistan's Mujahidin and Taliban Orientalised

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The Afghan Mujahidin movement, made up of disparate factions led from Pakistan and Iran by exiled leaders, resisted Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and successfully removed the Afghan communist regime from power in 1992. The Taliban movement, since their removal from power in 2001, have led a sustained resistance campaign against the US-led Western occupation of Afghanistan. Both movements are based in rural Afghanistan, are ideologically Islamist, and call for the restoration of Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty while refusing to recognise the legitimacy of, respectively, the Soviet-backed PDPA government and the American-backed Kabul government. Yet, Mujahidin are widely hailed as a native revolutionary movement while Taliban, despite their claim to 'revolutionary movement' status, are discredited as 'alien', fringe, fundamentalist (accused of terrorism), and agents of Pakistani intelligence agency ISI. This paper attempts to compare and contrast the two movements, which share a symbiotic relationship with Pakistan and have directly shaped each other, by deconstructing their motives, indigeneity, and international networks of support. I argue that the Taliban and Mujahidin share commonalities both in their composition, political disposition (ideological and tactical), and international support networks – particularly dependence on Pakistan which has provided both movements safe havens, arms and logistical support, and diplomatic backing. Drawing from postcolonial literature, the paper argues both movements, heterogeneous and ambivalently defined, are orientalised in the Western canon so the 'other', Mujahidin or Taliban, are either valorised or demonised in a 'war of opinion' fought over which narrative is dominant. This reflects a shift in the colonialist agenda of the U.S. and its allies which is underlined by the morphing of the American Cold War mentality into the 'war on terror' mentality.

Key words – orientalism, 'war on terror', revolutionary movements, Mujahidin, Taliban, Pakistan.