

7.1.2. Past conflicts (1979-2001)

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: November 2021

The ‘Saur’ Revolution and the Khalq Regime (1978-1979)

The year 1978 was a turning point in Afghan history. On 27 April 1978, the Khalq faction of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), led by Nur Mohammed Taraki, and supported by military officers, overthrew the government of President Muhammad Daud Khan, and executed him and most of his family members. This event is known as the Saur Revolution [[Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.1, p. 13].

Following the coup, Taraki became the new president and Hafizullah Amin the deputy prime minister. The Khalqi government’s non-Islamist ideology and its use of violence against opponents and some ethnic minorities led to armed resistance in the countryside. Arrests, torture, and executions caused many Afghans to flee the country. These events led to the creation of the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. The armed uprising was uncoordinated, but widespread [[Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.1, p. 13].

President Taraki cracked down on *Parcham* (the other faction of PDPA opposed to Khalq), detaining or killing hundreds of its members and supporters. An intelligence agency, the Department for the Protection of Afghanistan’s Interests (AGSA), was established by Taraki, mainly in charge of carrying out arrests and executions. In September 1979, Taraki was overthrown by his deputy Amin and murdered. Following Amin’s seizure of power, the Workers Intelligence Agency (Kargari Istikhbarti Muassisaas, KAM), was established in September 1979 and the State Intelligence Agency (Khedamat-e Ettela’at-e Dawlati, KHAD) was established with the help of KGB soon after Babrak Karmal’s coup in December 1979 [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, pp. 26-27].

Between 1978 and 1979, Khalq jailed and executed almost 5 000 people. Victims were allegedly tortured, including beatings and electrical shocks during the interrogation inside the prison. While in power, the PDPA used torture and forced disappearance, and deliberately killed civilians. On 15 March 1979, during an uprising by rebels against the PDPA government in Herat province, Afghan pilots carried out airstrikes on the city to recapture it, which resulted in the killing of up to 25 000 people. During the same period, the Afghan government assigned insurgent assassination squads to conduct house-to-house searches in Herat city [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 27].

The Soviet Afghan War (1979-1989)

On 25 December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and on 27 December of the same year, Soviet special forces attacked Taj Beg palace in Kabul, killed President Hafizullah Amin and his family members, and designated Babrak Karmal as the new President. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups. The resistance became a *jihad* against ‘infidel invaders’ and ‘the puppet government’, uniting different armed

factions, called the ‘*mujahideen*’. Typical *mujahideen* military operations were focused on hit-and-run tactics and ambushes, including shelling government targets, sabotage of infrastructure, assassinations, and rocket attacks on both civilian and military targets. The common *mujahideen* practice of taking shelter in and launching attacks from villages placed civilians directly in the crossfire [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 28; [Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.1, p. 13].

The Afghan government and Soviet troops were in control of the cities while the rural and mountainous areas were inflamed by the insurgency. Soviet and government forces employed brutal tactics considered as direct violations of international law. Common tactics included launching airstrikes on civilian areas, laying mines in rural areas to cut off resistance transport and supply routes, and conducting violent raids on villages suspected of harbouring *mujahideen*. Suspected ‘collaborators’ were detained and often tortured and/or disappeared [[Security 2020](#), 1.1.1, pp. 19-20; [Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.1, p. 13].

In May 1986, Dr Najibullah, head of KHAD, became general secretary of the PDPA and replaced Karmal in November 1986 as President of the Revolutionary Council. In 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 28; [Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.1, p. 14].

The conflict between the Afghan Government and the Mujahideen Forces (1989-1992) and the Afghan Civil War (1992-1996)

Dr Najibullah managed to stay in control, largely depending on local commanders and their militias. The pressure from the burning insurgency caused the collapse of Najibullah’s government in April 1992. After the collapse of Dr. Najibullah’s regime in 1992, a period referred to as ‘Civil war’ saw different *mujahideen* groups making alliances, largely based on region and ethnicity. Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north, Hazaras in the centre, and Pashtuns in the east and south, formed competing factions. *Mujahideen* factions were composed of *Jamiat-e Islami*, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani; *Shura-e Nazar* (The Council of the North), led by Ahmad Shah Massoud; *Hezb-e Islami* (founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar); *Hezb-e Islami* under the command of Yunus Khalis; *Ittihad-e Islami* under the command of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf); *Hezb-e-Wahdat* created in 1989 as a union of Shia-Hazara parties and *Harakat-e-Inqilab-e Islami-Afghanistan* led by Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammad [[Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.2, pp. 14-15; [Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 28].

Between April 1992 and March 1993, the battle for Kabul between *mujahideen* factions and militias took place. It was characterised by severe human rights violations, including executions, imprisonment, sexual violence, abduction of women, and forced marriages. Rape of women and girls was used by militia leaders as a weapon of war or ‘rewarding’ militants. Around 25 000 people were killed. From April 1992, *Hezb-e Islami* raided Kabul with rocket attacks destroying hundreds of homes and killing between 1 800 and 2 500 people. *Ittihad* and *Jamiat* troops, in retaliation, launched rockets on civilian residential areas while trying to target *Hezb-e Islami* positions in the south. During the same period, *Wahdat* and *Ittihad* committed severe human rights violations while fighting each other, including the abduction of Hazara people by *Ittihad* and the abduction of Pashtun, Tajiks and other non-Hazaras by *Wahdat*. For instance, Shafi Diwana (Shafi the mad), a senior commander of *Wahdat* tortured and killed prisoners in Qala Khana in Kabul. *Wahdat* also reportedly held thousands of prisoners in Dasht-e Barchi area in Kabul most of whom reportedly disappeared. During the civil war, troops belonging to *Junbesh-e Mili*, led by Dostum and stationed in Naqlia base, allegedly committed ‘rape, murder and looting’, notably in 1993 [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, pp. 28-29].

The Taliban Regime (1996-2001)

Conflict between *mujahideen* factions led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban. The founders of the Taliban were religious clerics who came together under the leadership of Mullah Mohamad Omar and agreed on taking action in relation to the significant discontent about the Rabbani government, the roadblocks, insecurity, and abuses caused by the militias and commanders. Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founder of Haqqani Network, allied with the Taliban in the mid-1990s, and served as Taliban's Minister for Tribal and Border Affairs. The Taliban governed Afghanistan with a religious ideology based on Salafism and *Pashtunwali* [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 29; [Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.3, p. 15].

During the chaos of the civil war, the Taliban took control of Kandahar City in 1994. In 1996, they conquered Kabul after taking Jalalabad and Herat. After entering Kabul, the group killed President Najibullah and his brother and hanged them in Ariana circle in the city. They carried out 'public executions and amputations of one hand and one foot for theft'. They killed thousands of people, including the deliberate and systematic killing of Hazara civilians after the group captured Mazar-e Sharif on 8 August 1998. They captured Bamyan province in May 1999, where the group destroyed two giant Buddhas statues in March 2001. By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan territory [[Security June 2021](#), 1.1.1, p. 29; [Taliban strategies – Recruitment](#), 1.2, p. 15].