

FINANCING THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAM: THE US-SAUDI INVOLVEMENT IN  
ARMING THE MUJAHIDEEN

Master's Thesis

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## Introduction

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to overthrow its government and prevent Communism from losing power in the country. Resistance came from the Mujahideen, Islamic fighters in Afghanistan that organised in different militias to combat the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. These fighters were backed by several countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United States (U.S.). Saudi Arabia was becoming a great power in the Middle East and Islamic World. The conflict revitalised the Cold War, bringing the period of détente to an end. This thesis analyses U.S. support for the Afghan resistance, focusing on the U.S. relationship with Saudi Arabia. The relationship between the US, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia will be connected to the Mujahideen as a part of the resistance forces that came from Saudi Arabia or were of Saudi Arabian origin such as Osama Bin Laden. The following question will be central: *To what extent were U.S.-Saudi relations an important factor in determining which groups within the Mujahideen received support from the U.S. government between 1979 and 1989?* My thesis statement is that the U.S. was influenced by the Saudis to grant more support to the more religious groups in the Mujahideen. Wahhabism played a significant role for the Saudi Arabians. Wahhabism is a strict form of Islam in which the government enforces and observes the religious norms of the public. According to the Saudi leadership and clergy, Wahhabism is the form of Islam that aims to bring the "right" kind of Islam to the world via writings, missionary work, and conquest (jihad).<sup>1</sup>

Secondary scholarship on U.S. support for the Mujahideen primarily focuses on the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) and U.S. officials. The state of the field on the subject is mostly focused on one aspect of the support to the Mujahideen, for example, books on the C.I.A.'s involvement and the cooperation between the U.S. and Pakistani government

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<sup>1</sup> David Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), chap. 1.

and intelligence services. The connection between the U.S.-Saudi Arabia relationship and the support for the Mujahideen is understudied. My thesis aims to contribute to this body of scholarship by pointing out the relevance of U.S.-Saudi relations in arming the Mujahideen.

This thesis approaches the topic from the discipline of history and draws on scholarship from International Relations. This is a qualitative study utilizing a substantive body of primary material. First, I draw upon interviews to analyse the subject, including interviews with U.S. foreign policymakers as well as members of Congress and a C.I.A. director. These documents provide insight into U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia, as those who were interviewed were closely involved. The transcribed interviews provide information that helps to see a broader theme within U.S. foreign policy regarding Afghanistan and U.S.-Saudi relations. By analysing these interviews, the complex nature of U.S.-Saudi relations is shown as they provide insight into the U.S.-Saudi relations from the U.S. point of view. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) is the archive that provides interviews with U.S. diplomats and ambassadors. Sources from the ADST were used to provide documents on U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, as they have a large collection of 2500 oral history documents on U.S. diplomacy. These documents include primary sources in the form of interviews with U.S. ambassadors and books, which analyse the development of U.S. diplomacy and its importance.

In addition to the interview transcriptions, the primary sources I will use consist of secret cable communications from the C.I.A. and reports written by C.I.A. agents. Databases such as the Digital National Security Archive, hereafter DNSA provide declassified U.S. government documents and primary source material for the thesis. The DNSA has a collection of documents that covers documents on U.S. foreign policy during specific events from 1945 to the present. The Afghanistan collection consists of more than 2000 documents which mostly are declassified U.S. government documents that contain chronologies, glossaries,

bibliographies, and scholarly overviews. These documents are mostly from the U.S. Department of State and U.S. embassies of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is important to mention the limitations of this study. An important limitation is the fact that I am not able to read Arabic. This limits the research, as articles written in Arabic will not be used to support this study. I will rely on U.S. sources and other sources that are written in English. Thus, this study will look at the U.S. point of view of U.S.-Saudi relations and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The sources that are used in this study mostly come from the Leiden University Library and its academic online databases. Hence, there is a risk that some U.S. sources, that are not available online or in the library, will not be used in this study. Because, the U.S. government and the C.I.A. have not released all documents on the U.S.-Saudi relations and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at this time, this study might, therefore, miss some information.

This study will consist of three chapters. The first chapter consists of a literature review analysing what scholars have written on U.S.-Saudi relations and the support for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. This chapter shows the academic debate on U.S.-Saudi relations as well as gaps in the literature. The second chapter consists of a historical overview of U.S.-Saudi relations before and during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This chapter analyses the state of U.S.-Saudi relations and its importance for the containment of communism in Afghanistan. The analysis provides information on how Afghanistan was of importance for the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The argument in this chapter is that both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had a large role in the operation in Afghanistan, which gave them the power to adjust the operation to their standards. The third chapter consists of an analysis of the importance of U.S.-Saudi relations for the support of the Mujahideen. This chapter will focus on the extent to which the U.S.-Saudi relations have determined what religious groups within the Mujahideen have been supported. Based on the information coming from this and the second chapter, the research

questions will be answered. The third chapter provides the argument that Saudi Arabia had the most influence on what groups received support from the U.S, compared to the other allies within the operation. The effect of Saudi influence on U.S. policymakers to support the more religious groups within the Mujahideen is argued to have long-lasting effects for the future of Afghanistan and the U.S.

## Chapter 1: The Cold War in the Middle East

President Carter and his administration had implemented foreign policies that resulted in a relatively peaceful period in the late 1970s. One of Carter's policies, which was a continuation of one of Nixon's policies, was that of détente. This was a result of U.S. involvement in Vietnam as the operation there forced the U.S. to retreat. The experience from Vietnam resulted in U.S. foreign policy being less focused on conflict and more focused on mending relations between the communist and capitalist world. This period is of great importance to explain how the U.S. involved itself in Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s. This chapter elaborates on the academic debates that focus on the Cold War, U.S.-Saudi relations during the Cold War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The debate on the late Cold War and especially on the U.S. role is important for this research as this is the base for the events that happened in Afghanistan. Odd Arne Westad argues that the Cold War had been of great importance to different sciences, as the Cold War shaped the times we live in now.<sup>2</sup> He argues that the Americans and Soviets had political ideologies that were opposite of each other; this difference in ideologies led to two systems, which could not coexist, dominating the world.<sup>3</sup> Scholars such as Westad and Lightbody argue that although there were possibilities to avoid the Cold War, it was inevitably going to happen due to both countries.<sup>4</sup> Lightbody argues that the origin of the Cold War has been a complicated subject, but the Soviets and especially Stalin have been the greatest contributors to the start of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> Rashid Khalidi points out that the Cold War in the Middle East came forth from suspicions on both sides of the Cold War opponents.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the debate surrounding the origins

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<sup>2</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>4</sup> Bradley Lightbody, *The Cold War* (London: Routledge, 1999), 4-7.

<sup>5</sup> Lightbody, *The Cold War*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 40-41.

of the Cold War has been focused on the history of the U.S. and Soviet Union political ideologies. Most scholars agree with the argument that the Soviet Union has laid the basis for the forty-six years of conflict that followed the Second World War. The late Cold War had some conflicts, in countries such as Iran and Afghanistan. Westad points out that the 1970s showed an increase in conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was one of these conflicts in the late Cold War, being one of the last conflicts between the Soviet Union and the U.S. The origins and analysis of the late Cold War in the Middle East and Central Asia have been analysed and form a debate on their own.

The conflict between both ideologies was also visible in the part of the world that was the so-called Third World, former colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>8</sup> As such, the Middle East was an area of conflict during the Cold War. This is supported by the article of Khalidi, as he argues that the Middle East is an area of the world that got involved rather quickly in the Cold War.<sup>9</sup> Khalidi focuses on the U.S. and Soviet Union, as they tried to gain political influence in countries that are of strategic importance in the Middle East, namely Iran and Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Before looking into the Cold War in the Middle East, it is important to note that scholars, such as Khalidi, acknowledge that the base for the Cold War in the Middle East was laid during the Second World War. During this period, the Middle East became a strategically important area due to its access to oil and its strategic location between Europe and Asia.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. and Soviet Union tried to spread their sphere of influence over the world and the Middle East was a place where countries were still independent of both countries. Turner points out that countries within the Middle East were pulled into the Cold War around 1952.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 288-289.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-43.

<sup>12</sup> John Turner, "Great Powers as Client States in a Middle East Cold War," *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 125-126.

The Middle East was close to the countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia that were drawn into the Soviet sphere of influence. Khalidi argues that the U.S. saw this increasing threat of the Soviet sphere of influence as a great threat to the balance of power during the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> Countries in the Middle East such as Iran and Egypt became targets for the U.S. and Soviet Union for their natural resources and strategic worth to trade and the economy of the region.<sup>14</sup> Most scholars acknowledge that the importance of oil played a role as well, as oil became of great importance to the growing U.S. and Soviet economies. The Middle East, as Khalidi points out, is an area of importance to both Cold War powers, but areas such as Asia are of greater importance at the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. gained influence over Iran and Jordan whilst the Soviet Union aligned with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. The U.S. also gained a strong new ally in the Middle East and that was the newly founded oil-rich kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Middle East was partially divided in the U.S. and Soviet side, whilst other countries were neutral or more focused on internal conflict. Israel received American and Soviet support after it gained independence in 1948. Khalidi makes clear that the first years after the Second World War are relatively peaceful with both the U.S. and Soviet Union being aligned against British dominance in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Khalidi argues that the United Nations plays a significant role in the Middle East in the first ten years after the Second World. The United Nations become the diplomatic tool for the U.S. and Soviet Union to guide the post-war years in the Middle East by influencing processes such as the partitioning of Palestine.<sup>17</sup> The cooperation between both Second World War superpowers happened when both countries would gain something from their cooperation, as happened in Israel. The U.S. would stand on the same side as the Soviet Union unless the result of their cooperation would mean that a

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<sup>13</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 82-84.

<sup>14</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 119-121.

<sup>15</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 82-83.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

country would become increasingly communist. If a country would tend to fall prey to Communism and the United Nations could not be influenced to prevent this, the U.S. would seek out other means to intervene according to Westad and Khalidi.<sup>18</sup>

An example whereby the U.S. acted against a country whilst avoiding the United Nations and its Security Council, is Iran. To prevent Iran from becoming increasingly communist and further nationalising its oil companies, the U.S. intervened in Iran by having the C.I.A. and British agents turning the public and the army against the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. Westad argues that this moment marks the change in U.S. foreign policy towards Third World countries in Africa and Asia.<sup>19</sup> Scholars such as Khalidi and Westad point out that the U.S. focuses on the containment of Communism with the use of U.S. foreign policy and covert operations. The United Nations' power was bypassed by the U.S. by making use of its influence over other countries and its use of strategic alliances in Third World regions to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining more territory and strategic resources.

Scholars have argued that the Cold War is a conflict between two superpowers and their ideologies that manifests themselves in conflicts and covert operations that mostly target countries in the Third World. This research focuses on one of the conflicts in the Cold War that happened because of one of the two superpowers trying to extend its reach within the Third World. The academic debate surrounding the topic of the Cold War is broad and interesting when looking at how it shaped events in the twenty-first century, such as 9/11. The Cold War is the basis for this research in which the U.S.-Saudi relations play a large role to show the importance of Saudi Arabia as an ally to the U.S. over countries such as Israel. The following paragraphs will focus on the academic debate on U.S.-Saudi relations, which will link into the

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<sup>18</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 119-123. Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 87-88.

<sup>19</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 119-123.

importance of this relation for the last academic debate of this research, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the U.S. reaction to the invasion.

To investigate the U.S.-Saudi relation and the debate surrounding it, it is useful to investigate the reason why the U.S. needed allies in the Cold War against the Soviets. The academic debate on the Cold War revolves around topics such as the difference in the ideologies of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Weiner argues that this difference in ideology has been put forward by President Truman, who has made clear in his 1947 address to Congress that the U.S. had to fight the enemies that used communist motives to threaten democracies in the world.<sup>20</sup> This laid the basis for the fight against communism in Europe and Third World countries. Westad points out that the Communist victory in China further increases the U.S. its efforts to contain communism.<sup>21</sup> The U.S. needed allies to contain communism around the world. In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia was turning into a useful ally for the Cold War that was taking place on the Arabian Peninsula.

Saudi Arabia had formed its kingdom after the First World War and became increasingly rich as an American company struck oil in the 1930s. Parker points out that the first Saudi king, Abd al Aziz, transformed his country into a powerful nation with the help of oil revenue and American support to modernize the country.<sup>22</sup> Saudi Arabia was dependant on the U.S. for the modernisation and security within its country. Scholars such as Parker and Bronson agree on the fact that during the 1930s, Saudi Arabia chose the U.S. above Great Britain and France, as the U.S. was seen as a country that was not interested in colonizing the world.<sup>23</sup> The French and British colonial backgrounds were perceived as a threat to the new

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<sup>20</sup> Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 118-119.

<sup>22</sup> Chad H. Parker, *Making the Desert Modern: Americans, Arabs, and Oil on the Saudi Frontier, 1933-1973* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 15-17.

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 33. Parker, *Making Desert Modern*, 17-18.

kingdom's ability to self-govern, according to Bronson.<sup>24</sup> Parker argues that the U.S. agreed to help the new kingdom modernize in exchange for beneficial oil exports to the U.S., which had an increasing need for oil.<sup>25</sup> Oil became of great importance for the U.S. industry and army. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia started their alliance with the trade-off that the U.S. would help Saudi Arabia modernize in exchange for oil.

Whilst the Second World War raged on in Europe and the Pacific, Saudi Arabia remained neutral almost to the end of the war. Bronson, however, argues that the Saudi king had helped the allies multiple times during the war without directly getting involved in the war.<sup>26</sup> In 1945, President Roosevelt and the Saudi king met to discuss matters of the future, which resulted in U.S. compliance to Saudi demands of self-governance and the situation in Palestine between the Jews and Arabs. Bronson argues that this meeting was the start of political relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, which improved the relations that existed between both countries.<sup>27</sup> Saudi Arabia was a useful ally for the U.S. as the kingdom tried to influence other countries to follow their religion and join their cause to make Saudi Arabia the hegemon in the Middle East. The Saudis practised a purist form of Islam called Wahhabism.

Scholars such as Commins, Khalidi and Labévière argue that the Saudi government uses religious institutions around the world to spread Wahhabism, which results in a spread of Saudi dominance against other Arab regimes.<sup>28</sup> Commins and Khalidi agree that the Saudi officials regard Wahhabism as a puritanical form of Islam, which forms the Saudi ideology that it spreads across the Islamic world.<sup>29</sup> The Saudis used their religion to combat the rise of Arab

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<sup>24</sup> Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> Parker, *Making Desert Modern*, 16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 36-37.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Labévière, *Dollars for Terror: The United States and Islam* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2000), 244-245. Commins, *Islam Saudi Arabia*, chap. 3. Rashid Khalidi, "The Superpowers and the Cold War in the Middle East," in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies*, edited by David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 124-125.

<sup>29</sup> Commins, *Islam Saudi Arabia*, chap. 3. Khalidi, *Superpowers Middle East*, 125.

nations and their ideologies. One of these nations that emerged as a rising nation was Egypt under President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Hahn points out that Nasser acted with a form of neutrality towards the Soviet Union whilst he condemned the British in the Middle East by supporting anti-colonial riots in Middle Eastern countries.<sup>30</sup> Nasser's policies did not revolve around religion; he focused on pan-Arab nationalism. Khalidi argues that the rise of Arab nationalism in the Middle East helps the Soviet Union to gain allies whilst the U.S. and its Middle Eastern allies are facing more problems in the Middle East during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>31</sup>

The academic debate looks at the U.S. and Saudi Arabia as the countries which try to stop the rise of Arab nationalism as it brings forth leftist regimes that rather align with the Soviets than with the U.S. However, the role of the Saudis is seen as the counter to the rise of Arab nationalism with the use of Wahhabism and its religious institutions. The Saudis tried to counter the threat of the atheist Soviet Union from gaining power by playing into the religious history of the Middle East and its holy cities - Mecca and Medina. Thus, the academic debate on the Cold War in the Middle East and the U.S.-Saudi relations is linked to the importance of religion versus nationalism.

Religion played a significant role for the U.S. to find allies during the Cold War. Bronson argues that religious countries are more likely to join the U.S. side of the Cold War due to the atheist threat that communism posed to the world.<sup>32</sup> Saudi officials also saw communism as an atheist threat to their country and the Middle East. Gregory Gause III argues that U.S.-Saudi relations have had their ups and downs; the relations have mostly not been based on Wahhabism, but rather on regional security and Cold War politics together with the

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Hahn, "National Security Concerns in US Policy Toward Egypt, 1949–1956," in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies*, edited by David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 68-70.

<sup>31</sup> Khalidi, *Superpowers Middle East*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Bronson, *Thicker than Oil*, 26.

U.S. demand for oil.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Khalidi points out that Wahhabism plays a significant role for the Saudis to counter the rising influence of other, mostly leftist, countries in the Middle East.<sup>34</sup> Khalidi manages to show how the Saudi government helped the U.S. with the use of Islam as an ideological strength to defy the leftist Arab nationalists.<sup>35</sup> Commins further elaborates on the argument that Saudis used Islam to counter Arab nationalism. He argues that Saudi Arabia becomes a haven for Muslims who have fled their countries due to the rise of leftist and secular regimes, which persecute them due to their religious ideals clashing with the new regime.<sup>36</sup> Thus, religion and especially Islam are argued to be important factors for the U.S. to gain allies as well as stop the Soviets from gaining allies in the Middle East.

U.S.-Saudi relations during the 1950s and 60s were focused on the economic and military development of Saudi Arabia and the use of religion to stop the rise of Soviet-favoured regimes. The success of the religious approach to counter the leftist and nationalist movements is a debate on its own. Commins points out that, due to the religious refugees in Saudi Arabia, the influence of Islam was greater than that of Arab nationalism because Saudi schoolbooks have been focused on teaching the threat of leftist and nationalist ideologies being a threat to Islam. These religious refugees have gained positions within the Saudi Arabian government and society, which helps them to voice their disapproval of the regimes from which they have fled.<sup>37</sup> In Saudi Arabia, the hostility towards leftist and secular regimes increased as the Muslim refugees, especially the Muslim Brotherhood followers, became more present in the country. The U.S. had allied itself with one of the most anti-communist countries in the Middle East, but their alliance was not all positive.

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<sup>33</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, "Official Wahhabism and the Sanctioning of Saudi-US Relations," in *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State*, edited by Mohammed Ayoob and Hassan Kosebalaban, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 144.

<sup>34</sup> Khalidi, *Superpowers Middle East*, 124-125.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>36</sup> Commins, *Islam Saudi Arabia*, chap. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia improved during the 1950s and 1960s, but the U.S. backing of Israel was a problem for U.S.-Saudi relations. Khalidi argues that the Saudis have backed the Palestinian Arabs since the British have been occupying Palestine.<sup>38</sup> The U.S. and Soviet Union were against British plans for the destiny of Palestine; both countries supported the partitioning of Palestine that led to the creation of the state of Israel. Khalidi puts the Cold War in the Middle East and the conflicts Israel has had with its Arab neighbours until 1967, on separate tracks of events.<sup>39</sup> Khalidi made this divide as the U.S. and Soviet Union were mostly on the same side during the conflicts with Israel until 1967. Quant argues that the U.S. is in an awkward position in the Middle East as Israel receives Soviet support which threatens the containment of communism, but on the other hand the U.S. its Arab allies want to end the existence of the state of Israel.<sup>40</sup> Saudi officials focused on the bad situation Palestinian Arabs were in, whilst the U.S. protected the Israeli domestic and international policies to protect the Israelis against its Arab neighbours. This difference in U.S. and Saudi policies concerning Israel became apparent during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Gerges points out that the U.S. is seen as pro-Israel throughout the whole conflict, but the Soviet Union's lack of help to the Arab forces led to an Arab defeat and an increase in Israeli power in the Middle East.<sup>41</sup> The U.S. its pro-Israel policies in the Middle East have been and remained a problem in U.S.-Saudi relations since Saudi Arabia was a supporter of Palestine Arabs and an enemy of Israel.

The U.S. had built alliances in the Middle East with several countries such as Saudi Arabia. The base of the alliance with Saudi Arabia changed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Israel and Iran became the two most important allies of the U.S. in the

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<sup>38</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 85-87.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-88.

<sup>40</sup> William B. Quandt, "How American Middle East Policy Is Made," in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics and Ideologies*, edited by David W. Lesch and Mark L. Haas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 7-10.

<sup>41</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, "The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: US Actions and Arab Perception," in *The Middle East and the United States: History, Politics, and Ideologies*, edited by David Lesch and Mark Haas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 140-146.

Middle East when focusing on keeping order in the region, according to Gerges.<sup>42</sup> U.S.-Saudi relations were relevant for the arms sales to the Saudis and the help to modernize the country in exchange for oil. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s were turbulent years for the U.S.-Saudi relations due to the U.S. alliance with Israel and its attempts to become allies with Nasser's Egypt. Saudi Arabia became the dominant power in the Middle East in terms of influence over the region. Bronson argues that the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War has led to the decline of Egypt's influence over the Middle East, whilst positioning Saudi Arabia above Egypt due to an increase in countries looking to political Islam instead of Arab nationalism.<sup>43</sup> Saudi Arabia was developing into a powerful country that focused on gaining dominance over its neighbours and fellow Arabs, an action needed as the trust had declined in the U.S. for its role during the Arab-Israeli war. The 1970s and 80s were better decades for U.S.-Saudi relations as they had to direct their attention towards the Communist threat in the Middle East and Central Asia.

The debate on U.S.-Saudi relations is a focus of this research as it is of importance to show how both countries can support each other whilst also following their political agendas. The next and last debate on which this research will focus is the debate on the U.S.-Saudi commitment to keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East and Central Asia during the 1970s and 80s.

The focus of American politics during the first half of the 1970s was on the Vietnam War as the war was nearing its end. However, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War was also an important conflict for Cold War studies as both the U.S. and Soviet Union were involved. Bronson argues that Nixon's policies are more focused on the Soviets and the war in Vietnam than on the Middle East and Saudi Arabia.<sup>44</sup> Saudi Arabia was not neglected by the U.S., but the focus was

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<sup>42</sup> Gerges, *Arab-Israeli War*, 145-146.

<sup>43</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 102-104.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-11.

on other areas and different policies such as the future of nuclear arms. Nonetheless, scholars such as Bronson and Khalidi offer some insight into U.S.-Saudi relations throughout the 1970s. This decade was of importance for the further focus of this research because the state of the 1980s U.S.-Saudi relations was defined by the events that occur in the 1970s.

Saudi oil was a big part of the U.S.-Saudi relation. Oil was a resource that was used by U.S. industries such as the energy and military industries. Besides, Saudi oil served the purpose of influencing the global oil market, which helped the U.S. to influence Soviet oil exports. Oil was a useful resource to put pressure on the U.S. Fortunately for the Saudis, U.S. dependence on oil increased throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. Bronson points out that U.S. domestic oil supplies were running out at the start of the 1970s, which led to a growing dependence on foreign oil supplies.<sup>45</sup> Global oil demand increased, which meant an increase in the price of crude oil. The high oil price helped the Saudi government to gain large amounts of money for the oil exports, further strengthening the power of the kingdom. Bronson argues that Saudi Arabia was becoming more dominant in the Middle East as the oil revenue was used to support other regimes and better relations with countries in the region such as Egypt.<sup>46</sup> The increase of Saudi dominance over the Middle East meant an increase in Saudi support for Arabs and especially for Arabs that were being dominated such as the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. U.S. support for Israel had been a problem for the U.S.-Saudi relations and the Yom Kippur War of 1973 tested U.S.-Saudi relations.

The unyielding U.S. support for Israel resulted in an oil embargo for the U.S. issued by Saudi Arabia and other Arab states. Bronson argues that Saudi Arabia took the lead in going further than a simple reduction of oil exports to the U.S. by choosing to issue an embargo for

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<sup>45</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil.*, 111-112.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-115.

oil exports to the U.S. and its allies that backed Israel.<sup>47</sup> Saudi Arabia managed to force the U.S. into making sure that the Israeli officials made progress to disengage in warfare with Syria and Egypt. The oil embargo caused a political and economic crisis for the U.S. as it had to severely increase its spending for oil whilst seeing the balance of power in the Middle East shift to Saudi Arabia. The embargo was lifted in 1974, but U.S.-Saudi relations were hostile as both sides disapproved of the actions taken in the Yom Kippur War and during the embargo. However, Bronson points out that U.S.-Saudi relations were flexible and the dent that was put into the relations by the embargo was deep, but in the following years, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia worked together better than before.<sup>48</sup>

Even though the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had their differences in the past on issues about issues related to Israel and oil, their political agendas stood above these issues. The debate on U.S.-Saudi relations before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was mostly focused on the U.S. aiding the modernization of Saudi Arabia to re-strengthen relations and to make sure that the anti-Communist agenda remained a high priority for their relations. Saudi Arabia gained much from the U.S. efforts to help the country modernize and facilitate anti-Communist operations across the world. The Saudis helped Muslims in need across the world with funds, but the Saudis went further with their help by using political Islam to increase its dominance worldwide, according to Commins.<sup>49</sup> This increase in Saudi influence over the Muslim world set the stage for Saudi support to the Muslims that lived in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion of 1979.

This thesis aims to add more to the Cold War debate with a focus on the importance of Cold War politics for the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The containment of communism and the

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<sup>47</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 117-120.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>49</sup> Commins, *Islam Saudi Arabia*, chap 7.

importance of U.S. alliances in the Middle East are more important to the U.S. than the struggles with Middle Eastern adversaries. The U.S.-Saudi relations are focused on adding to the academic debate on the influence of Saudi Arabia and its religion. American foreign policies are taken into account as these policies show the U.S. view of the conflict and their standing towards Saudi Arabia's plans for the region of Afghanistan and the Middle East.

## Chapter 2: The History of the aid for the Mujahideen in Afghanistan

This chapter brings forth the basis of the U.S. operation in Afghanistan and the importance of U.S. allies. Saudi Arabia influenced U.S. support for the Mujahideen to make sure that Saudi-aligned groups became the best equipped and most influential within the Mujahideen. This chapter is divided into two sections that focus on two subjects that fit within the frame of this research. These two sub-chapters are historical and focus on U.S. relations and the importance of its allies. The first sub-chapter is focused on U.S. relations with its allies that aid the operation in Afghanistan. U.S. allies played a significant role in the start of the U.S. operation in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion, as they allowed the U.S. to start an operation against the Soviets without direct U.S. involvement. In the second sub-chapter, the importance of U.S.-Saudi relations for the continuation of the operation is shown. For the U.S. to keep the operation going, the dependence on Saudi Arabia increased, which meant an increase in Saudi influence on the Mujahideen, the force of the operation. Therefore, this chapter adds to the thesis as it provides a historical background to U.S. relations with its allies as well as U.S. efforts to ensure a successful operation in Afghanistan.

### **Chapter 2.1: Afghanistan and U.S.-Saudi relations**

The end of December 1979 has been marked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviets intervened to restore order in the country and prevent its communist government from falling apart. Soviet Special Forces assassinated the Afghani prime minister Amin and installed its puppet government, led by Babrak Kamal. For the U.S. this meant that their foreign policy of containment had failed in Afghanistan, as a foreign government was able to intervene in the country. On the other hand, Afghanistan was a possibility for the U.S. to give the Soviet Union their own Vietnam. The mountainous terrain of Afghanistan was very well suited for guerrilla warfare, which was based on raids and ambushes on the heavy Soviet convoys. The U.S.

support for the Mujahideen was based on defeating the Soviets and communism. The Reagan administration and U.S. ambassadors made sure that the operation was intensified with the help of U.S. allies such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Next to this statement, there are some key points in this chapter. Reagan's impact on the intensification of the operation is the first focus of this chapter. This is followed by the work of ambassadors that worked to fulfil Washington's demands to keep allies invested in the operation. The focus throughout this sub-chapter is on how the U.S. made sure that their allies were directly involved in the operation, whilst the U.S. could work from the background. The U.S. needed its allies to provide the Mujahideen with training and funds to keep the U.S. from getting directly involved in the operation.

President Carter reacted to the Soviet invasion by condemning the invasion. Besides diplomatic actions, U.S. officials started to look for ways to support the Mujahideen, as they were the most prominent, yet fragmented, rebel groups. Via its South Asian and Middle Eastern allies, the financial aid and supplies were directed towards the Mujahideen. President Carter had to restore U.S. ties with Pakistan whilst putting his human rights agenda in the background. Thus, both countries agreed on how to support the Mujahideen; Saudi Arabia backed the plan with financial support. In Afghanistan, however, the support for the Mujahideen was mild and their weapon supplies were underwhelming and outdated. Luckily for the Mujahideen, a new president was elected in the U.S. and his approach to the Soviet war in Afghanistan was different from his predecessor.<sup>50</sup>

Ronald Reagan became president of the U.S. in 1981. He was focused on dealing with the Soviet Union and communism by supporting guerrillas in Soviet-ruled countries.<sup>51</sup> Afghanistan was one of the countries in which the Reagan administration used the support for

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<sup>50</sup> Hanhimäki, *Fall of Détente*, 141-142.

<sup>51</sup> Mark P. Lagon, "The International System and the Reagan Doctrine: Can Realism Explain Aid to 'Freedom Fighters?'" *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (1992): 39-70.

the guerrilla Mujahideen to deal with the Soviet Union. Where President Carter focused more on covert actions and diplomacy, President Reagan was more focused on action with the U.S. scaling up aid for the Mujahideen and calling the Soviet Union out for their actions. Reagan went on to closely ally the U.S. to Pakistan via an economic and military aid program. With the Saudis, Reagan focused on assuring a lasting alliance between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. President Carter's human rights-based foreign policy was abandoned by Reagan to ensure the downfall of the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> Around the world, U.S.-backed guerrillas were taking up arms against communist governments. The governments of Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan were facing growing insurgencies and civil wars. This stretched the Soviet military and financial aid. Reagan was trying to get the Soviet Union to intervene in these countries, which would slowly deplete Soviet finances, breaking down the Soviet economy.<sup>53</sup>

Reagan was determined to end the Cold War. His objectives were to ensure the fall of the Soviet Union and to rid the world of communism. One way of completing these objectives was by making sure that U.S. Congress approved the U.S. aid to the Mujahideen. This enabled the Mujahideen to put up a fight against the Soviet invaders in Afghanistan. If the Mujahideen succeeded in defeating the Soviets, the end of the Soviet Union would become a reality. Therefore, the American support for the Mujahideen was focused on creating an effective force against the Soviet troops. President Carter had started some support for the Mujahideen, but during Reagan's presidency, U.S. support intensified. U.S. support for the Mujahideen was focused on providing all the groups with arms and financial support. The support was not unconditional, as there were limits on the amount of money and the different kinds of weapons. These groups ranged from moderate Islamic tribes that were focused on freeing Afghanistan

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<sup>52</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 331-332.

<sup>53</sup> Deepak Tripathi, *Breeding Ground: Afghanistan and the Origins of Islamist Terrorism* (Dulles: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 68-69.

from its foreign occupants to fundamentalist Islamic groups that were focused on waging holy war (jihad) against all those who were not following their form of Islam.<sup>54</sup> The Pakistani intelligence service had made sure that as soon as the training and support for Mujahideen forces started, the groups that would contribute the most to the spread of Pakistani influence, were the main focus of support for the Pakistani government. Mujahideen groups with a Pashtun background were prioritized over other groups. This was done to ensure future Pakistani influence over Afghanistan if these Pashtun groups would take over the government in Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup>

The Saudi Arabian motivation for supporting the Mujahideen was largely based on religious motives. Afghanistan had been an Islamic country before the communist took power and the Soviets invaded. Saudi support was aimed at the Islamic fighters as well as at Islamic foreign volunteers to join the jihad in Afghanistan. The Saudi government also succeeded in getting Saudi voluntary soldiers to join the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>56</sup> Besides Islamic motives, the Saudis had anti-communist motives. The Soviets were intervening in countries in the Middle East, which threatened the hegemony the Saudis were trying to create over the region. Thus, the Saudi's had several reasons to join any coalition against the Soviet Union. The U.S. made use of the Saudis' determination to counter communism by getting them to join the support program for the Mujahideen.<sup>57</sup> The Saudis joined in and helped to finance the Mujahideen via the Pakistani intelligence service. The U.S. now had its financial support from Saudi Arabia and its military and training support from Pakistan. However, both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had their agenda regarding who in the Mujahideen could count on support.

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<sup>54</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 80.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>56</sup> Labévière, *Dollars for Terror*, 149-150.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153.

Reagan made himself an important actor in the anti-Soviet program in Afghanistan. He openly called out the Soviets for their acts of violence in Afghanistan. Domestically, Reagan tried to get the public behind his policies to end the Cold War and defeat the communists.<sup>58</sup> However, Reagan met resistance from the public and in Congress with arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the Strategic Defense Initiative. Reagan had an impact on U.S. foreign relations, this is exemplified by the fact that during his first term, at times, the U.S. turned a blind eye to human rights abuses by anti-communist leaders.

During Reagan's first term as president of the U.S., American support for anti-communist dictators was restored to the levels before Carter. Reagan did not focus much on human rights abuses by allied countries during his first term. Hence, his support for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan was based on their anti-communist stance, without a focus on human rights. As such, Reagan's first term in office changed foreign policies back to the containment levels of people such as Nixon with a focus on anti-communist allies.<sup>59</sup> Reagan's impact on U.S. foreign policy was partially a restoration of U.S. international power after the events of 1979. The U.S. had lost allies such as Iran and Nicaragua, due to regime changes that came forth out of revolutions. U.S. diplomats were taken hostage in Tehran, because of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Next to these events, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> These events were a blow to the U.S. fight against communism because it had lost some of its power over these regions. As Reagan came into office in 1981, he tried to restore U.S. power in these regions.

Reagan and the C.I.A. chose their allies based on how well they were able to help the Mujahideen in defeating the Soviets. The U.S. was directing the operation with the help of its allies. Pakistan was involved in training and arming the Mujahideen, whilst Saudi Arabia

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<sup>58</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Chester Pach, "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 79-81.

<sup>60</sup> Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 1-2.

provided funding for the fighters. These U.S. allies were fighting the Cold War for the U.S to avoid direct U.S. involvement in the operation.<sup>61</sup> The threat of a new Vietnam scenario occurring, was a serious threat for U.S. policymaking because the American public was more aware of what their national government did abroad, due to an increase in media coverage. This forced U.S. policymakers to look at covert ways of continuing the Cold War with the Soviets. One of these ways was the use of U.S. ambassadors in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to make sure that relations were friendly. Without the support of the Pakistani military trainers and Saudi financial supporters, the operation would fail. The American government was able to keep its distance from several problems concerning the Mujahideen, but the lack of advanced weaponry remained a problem. The Pakistani President, Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, and head of General Intelligence from Saudi Arabia, Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud, solved problems between two main Mujahideen groups of Pakistani origin.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately for the U.S., this step back from its involvement in the Mujahideen gave the Saudi and Pakistani services even more power over the operations.

The U.S. was mostly in control over the types of arms that were supplied to the Mujahideen. American officials contacted arms suppliers in Egypt to supply arms for the Afghani rebels. The U.S. was planning for arms to be delivered to Pakistan. The only role Saudi Arabia and Pakistan played in this process was for the Saudis the role of financial support and the Pakistanis for supplying the arms directly to the Mujahideen.<sup>63</sup> This arms operation was mostly directed by the CIA, President Reagan managed to control how the operation was conducted. Reagan and Congress held a grip on the operation in Afghanistan by limiting the

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<sup>61</sup> Westad, *Global Cold War*, 339.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>63</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 68-69.

budget and support to \$60 million a year, the same amount as Carter had provided for the operation in 1979.<sup>64</sup>

American ambassadors, such as Walter Culter, had the task to focus on the improvement of bilateral relationships between the U.S. and the countries they were stationed in, such as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The mutual interests were of great importance and, therefore, ambassadors focused on this topic to ensure a continuation of support for the U.S. Cold War in Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> The Saudis were an important ally to the U.S. for more reasons than their financial support for the Mujahideen. Saudi Arabia had grown to be an important supplier of oil to the world market. Large oil quantities were won on Saudi soil and the U.S. was a big buyer of Saudi oil. The Soviet Union produced oil as well, which gave them large financial benefits. For Reagan and his administration, Saudi oil played a key role in defeating the Soviets.<sup>66</sup> Reagan took a new approach than Carter regarding Saudi oil. The Saudis became wealthier and used their money for several operations. Reagan's administration managed to get Saudi funding for different operations around the world in favour of the U.S.<sup>67</sup>

Next to this, Saudi oil was pouring into the world oil market, which decreased oil prices. This gave the U.S. a chance to strengthen its economy due to the low oil price. On the other hand, the lowering oil price meant less oil income for the Soviets which put a strain on their economy. Less oil income meant more strain on the Soviet economy due to its increased spending on the military. With the participation of Saudi Arabia in the oil market and the

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<sup>64</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 68-69.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Stuart Kennedy, Interview with Walter L. Cutler, Personal Interview, Location Unknown, September 15, 1989, 77-80.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald J. Granieri, "Beyond Cap the Foil: Caspar Weinberger and the Reagan-era Defense Buildup," in *Reagan and the World: Leadership and National Security, 1981-1989*, edited by Bradley Lynn Coleman and Kyle Longley (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 70.

<sup>67</sup> Bronsson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 168.

decreasing oil price, the U.S. and its allies were able to directly influence the life of people living in the Soviet Union.<sup>68</sup>

U.S. ambassadors were tasked with keeping U.S. allies invested in the operation. U.S. ambassadors spoke of providing aid and technical assistance to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to keep the countries flourishing and helpful towards the operations against the Soviets. Whilst ambassadors were tasked with keeping the relations friendly and supportive, the intelligence services were tasked with continuing the operations in Afghanistan. The ambassadors did what was asked to ensure that the U.S. remained on good terms with its allies. The support for the Mujahideen and the operation to make the Soviets fail in Afghanistan was covert, which meant that the C.I.A. was tasked with keeping the Saudi and Pakistani support for the operation going. Thus, the ambassadors worked to maintain a healthy bilateral relation from which the C.I.A. could profit. Saudi Arabia received technological aid from the U.S. to further its growth and oil expansion.<sup>69</sup> In return, the Saudis provided financial support for U.S. covert operations. The same goes for Pakistan: the U.S. provided arms to Pakistan to better supply its army. In return, The Pakistanis built camps to train Mujahideen, which helped the U.S. to maintain a constant threat for the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup>

The use of ambassadors was of importance for U.S.-Soviet relations during Reagan's presidency. One way in which the ambassadors were used, was to convince other countries to fight the war for the U.S. Pakistan and the Mujahideen were the U.S. their proxy against the Soviets and their proxy Afghan government. There was no direct conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. On a diplomatic level, both countries were still adversaries, but there were talks about arms control and the non-proliferation of nuclear arms. Reagan had directed his

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<sup>68</sup> Granieri, *Beyond Cap Foil*, 69-70.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>70</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 68-69.

foreign policy towards ending communism and the Soviet Union. However, Reagan tried to improve ties with the Soviets to decrease tension between both countries.<sup>71</sup> Although Reagan was a harsh opponent of communism, he did try to better ties between the U.S. and communist countries. The ambassadors were a useful part of the U.S. strategy to have their allies do most of the work. They carried out what Reagan and his administration had asked them to do.

The U.S. ambassadors and Reagan tried to gain allies to help them fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. One of these allies was an unusual one, as the U.S. did not have the best relations with communist countries. The People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) was one of the most important countries with which the U.S. bettered its relations.<sup>72</sup> The P.R.C. had been on good terms with the U.S. since the Nixon presidency. President Carter normalized terms with the P.R.C. and continued good relations with them. Reagan took advantage of his predecessors' ties with the P.R.C. He made a deal with the Chinese leadership to undermine the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by providing Chinese arms paid by the U.S., to arm the Mujahideen.<sup>73</sup> The P.R.C. was the supplier of arms and transported them as well. As such, diplomatic relations improved between the U.S. and the P.R.C. This positively affected the war in Afghanistan for the Mujahideen, as they received more arms from foreign supporters. The U.S. now had the P.R.C., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan on their side to continue the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Although the P.R.C. did not physically fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, their aid still fitted within the Reagan Doctrine. The U.S. had succeeded in turning a communist country against the Soviet Union, which improved relations between the P.R.C. and the U.S.

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<sup>71</sup> James Graham Wilson, "Ronald Reagan's Engagement and the Cold War," in *Reagan and the World: Leadership and National Security, 1981-1989*, edited by Bradley Lynn Coleman and Kyle Longley (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Schaller, "Ronald Reagan and the puzzles of "so-called communist China" and Vietnam," in *Reagan and the World: Leadership and National Security, 1981-1989*, edited by Bradley Lynn Coleman and Kyle Longley (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 200-201.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

The U.S. was not directly involved with its army in Afghanistan as it had been in Vietnam, as they put the focus on maintaining diplomatic relations to wage a proxy war. Most of the operation was done covertly, which helped the U.S. to stay in the background publicly. American politicians that were concerned with the operation in Afghanistan concerned themselves with making other countries help the Mujahideen. Charles "Charlie" Nesbitt Wilson (D-TX), for example, was one of those politicians that did some of the work for the U.S. He was a Texan Congressman in the House of Representatives and member of the Foreign Relations Committee. He went on a political trip to Pakistan to see what was going on with the Mujahideen's resistance coordinated from Pakistan. Wilson visited Mujahideen training camps in Pakistan, he made an effort to persuade Pakistani officials into continuing their support for the Mujahideen. This would help Pakistan to prove itself as a trustworthy ally to the U.S. Wilson met President ul-Haq and arranged for weapon sales to Pakistan.<sup>74</sup> Wilson made the U.S. support for the Mujahideen one of the important subjects for his committee. The commission made sure that support for the Mujahideen continued and was upscaled as the years passed. Next to this, Wilson made it a personal priority to get other countries to help the armament of the Mujahideen. Countries such as Israel and Egypt, sworn enemies throughout the Cold War, were encouraged by Wilson to work together on a covert level.<sup>75</sup> The Israeli Military Industry was tasked with inventing a weapon that could take down Soviet gunships. The Egypt Defence Minister Abu Ghazala made a deal with Wilson that with U.S. money Egypt would supply arms to the Mujahideen without a problem.<sup>76</sup> Wilson made this deal in 1983 and helped the U.S. to have allies intensify their commitment to support the Mujahideen. This, again, was done with American money but with supplies from the above-mentioned countries.

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<sup>74</sup> George Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War: The Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History: The Arming of the Mujahideen by the CIA* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 106-107.

<sup>75</sup> Crile, *Charlie Wilson's War*, 141-146.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-146.

The U.S. was on track with getting allies to aid the operation in Afghanistan. The Reagan Doctrine had become part of U.S. foreign policy. Among all these allies, one was of the greatest importance of the U.S. The country was mostly dependent on aid coming from Saudi Arabia. The operation in Afghanistan and the security of the Middle East had become the most important objectives for the American government. Saudi Arabia was the strongest ally due to its financial power, but also due to its ties with other Middle Eastern countries. Israel was the enemy of many Middle Eastern countries, whilst Saudi Arabia had better ties with its Middle Eastern neighbours. Therefore, the U.S.-Saudi relation was of great importance.

### **Chapter 2.2: The continuation of the operation in the hands of Saudi Arabia**

By 1984, The U.S. was depending on its allies for the success of the operation to undermine the Soviets in Afghanistan. Pakistan was holding up to its end of the bargain to train the Mujahideen and deliver the arms supplied by U.S. allies. Workers of the Israeli Military Industry were researching a weapon capable of taking down Soviet attack helicopters. The Egyptian Defence Minister was helping the Mujahideen by supplying more advanced weapons from the Egyptian arms depots. The P.R.C. helped the Mujahideen by providing mules to transport U.S.-paid Chinese arms. All this help was quite expensive for the U.S., but their good relations with the Saudis helped to split the financial burden. The Saudis were the financial backbone of the operation: U.S. funding for the Mujahideen was always backed by the Saudis with the equal amount of money the U.S. provided. Thus, as the operation intensified over the years and U.S. funding increased, so did the Saudi funding. This Saudi determination to support the Mujahideen and keep good ties with the U.S. was quite extraordinary. The relationship between both countries was quite noteworthy for the time and would be so for the coming years. The aid from Saudi Arabia was not based on charity towards fellow Muslims or to just help an ally. Saudi help came with the price of Saudi influence over the operation and the groups that would benefit from the aid. This chapter starts with a history of U.S.-Saudi relations

from the end of the 1970s. After this, the focus is on how the U.S. maintained relations with the Saudis and what the costs were for this alliance. This links with the next chapter of this research that argues what the effect of the U.S.-Saudi cooperation was for the Mujahideen. This chapter states how the U.S.-Saudi relations were during the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, which explains how the Saudis gained much from their alliance with the U.S. The Saudis gained a lot from their relationship with the U.S., which helped the rise of Saudi Arabia as a prominent power in the Middle East.

President Carter had maintained close diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, mostly to keep the country as an ally in the Middle East. During Carter's presidency, the U.S. had three close allies in the Middle East: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. In 1981, only two allies remained as Iran had become a hostile regime towards the U.S. due to the Islamic Revolution and its new leadership. Luckily for the U.S., Saudi Arabia was still a strong American ally, furthermore, they controlled the Persian Gulf and had a large supply of oil.<sup>77</sup> Both countries worked to keep communism out of the Middle East through economic and military operations. As was mentioned in chapter 2.1, economically the U.S. encouraged Saudi Arabia to manipulate the oil prices by decreasing its price. The U.S. worked to compensate for the Saudis' loss of profit by increasing beneficial arms sales to the Kingdom.<sup>78</sup>

The high price of oil in the 1970s helped the Saudi state to accumulate quite some wealth from the oil profits. This increase in wealth was helpful for the Saudis to be able to counter the rise of Iran, as the latter was becoming quite a powerful country because it had a range of sophisticated weaponry. Israel, also a threat for Saudi Arabia, owned sophisticated U.S. weaponry and their biggest weapons manufacturer, Israeli Military Industry, was highly advanced with inventing new weapons and military equipment. As Saudi Arabia did not trust

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<sup>77</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 152-154.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

Israel, and the latter was increasing its military arsenal, Saudi Arabia also upscaled their military tools. President Reagan saw an opportunity to further deepen the relations between his country and Saudi Arabia: arms sales. In 1982, King Fahd became the new Saudi king after King Khaled died. The new king believed that the Kingdom was being threatened by the Soviets, who were involved in the war in Yemen, and by Iran, who was threatening the Saudi hegemony over the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>79</sup> King Fahd wanted to increase Saudi Arabian security and military capabilities. Reagan saw the Saudi Arabian quest for security as an opportunity to deepen the bond between both countries. To prevent other countries from helping the Saudis, Reagan and his administration made a deal with the new Saudi king. U.S. Congress was not pleased with an increase in relations with the Saudis, but the president succeeded in selling the arms, which resulted in a better bond with Saudi Arabia.<sup>80</sup>

However, while the U.S. public opinion was turning against the Saudis, Reagan was increasing U.S. ties with them. The American public opinion was against the Saudis because Saudi intentions were seen as unclear and a danger to Israel as the U.S. public knew Israel was an important American ally.<sup>81</sup> This did deter Reagan from continuing his progress to make Saudi Arabia the U.S.'s most important ally to secure the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia had become one of the U.S.'s most important allies worldwide, as they supported their efforts in the Middle East, but also in Latin America.<sup>82</sup> Both countries were focused on maintaining a strong alliance with each other, both with different purposes.

The new Saudi King, Fahd, had entrusted Prince Bandar bin Sultan to lobby for Saudi interests in the U.S. The American technological advancement was a subject for the Saudi rulers. Saudi Arabia had grown due to the country's oil revenue and increase in power as a

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<sup>79</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 154.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-161.

<sup>82</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 93.

consequence of American aid. However, King Fahd wanted to make sure that Saudi Arabia could defend itself against all the enemies it saw on the peninsula. Therefore, Prince Bandar was tasked with getting U.S.-built sophisticated aircraft to be brought to Saudi Arabia via an arms deal. This was where the importance of the alliance emerged again. Reagan saw the need to satisfy the Saudi demand for special surveillance aircraft called AWACS. If Saudi Arabia would become disillusioned by the lack of U.S. support, the U.S. could lose its ally in the battle against communism. Therefore, Reagan made it a personal case to make sure that the Saudis got what they wanted.<sup>83</sup> Despite Reagan's dedication to the deal, U.S. Congress tried to block the sale, which did not please the Saudi officials. This had no immediate effect on U.S.-Saudi relations concerning the ongoing operations against the Soviets. It did influence Saudi trust in the U.S. as an ally, which could help them modernize and secure their country.

The U.S. and Saudi Arabia focused on further strengthening their bond, with the Saudis mostly benefitting from the U.S. dedication to maintain their strong relations. U.S. Congress kept a close eye on the developments in the U.S.-Saudi relation. Both sides of the political spectrum in U.S. Congress blocked Saudi requests for more arms sales. This was a thorn in the side of the Saudi officials as they were increasing the country's defence capabilities. For some Republican and Democrat Congressmen, Saudi Arabia was a dangerous country that could use its arms to supply terrorists. It was clear that in the U.S., politics favoured Israel over Saudi Arabia. The Saudis had not made significant progress towards better ties with Israel, even worse, the Saudis were supporting the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).<sup>84</sup> Reagan could not get Congress to approve more arms deals that would supply the Saudis with more sophisticated arms. This frustrated Saudi officials even more, because they wanted some of the same arms that were being supplied to the Mujahideen, partially paid by the Saudis.

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<sup>83</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 160-161.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

Throughout the middle of the 1980s, relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia worsened because of U.S. Congress blocking arms sales to the kingdom. However, Reagan managed to keep the Saudi support going for the operation in Afghanistan. Defeating the communists was of great importance to both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, which kept their alliance strong on a military level. Anti-Soviet sentiments kept both countries allied and determined to end the Soviet presence in the Middle East. Reagan chose the covert way of keeping the alliance with Saudi Arabia going. Saudi Arabia had to keep their efforts going as it saw the threat of enemies in its region rising. As Iran started to intervene in Afghanistan as well, the Saudis increased their support for Sunni groups within the Mujahideen.<sup>85</sup> This is one of the clear examples of the Saudi agenda influencing the support for groups within the Mujahideen. The C.I.A. and ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, fully supported the Saudi preference for support. The ISI supported the country as it had partially the same agenda as the Saudis.

Cold war politics were still of great importance for the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. Reagan was the president that came into office when the Soviet Union had broken with détente. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan opened a new conflict in which the U.S. saw an opportunity to defeat the Soviets. Saudi Arabia also saw an opportunity in the possibility to free Afghanistan from the Soviets. The Saudis had an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. If the operation in Afghanistan would succeed, the Soviets would be pushed out of a part of the Islamic World and the Sunni Islam in Afghanistan could rise again via the Sunni groups within the Mujahideen. This would provide the Saudis with an ally that was neighbouring their enemy Iran. If these forces were armed and trained properly, they could become of use in the future for the Saudi spread of Islam. Saudi officials profited from their deals with the U.S. government and the Pakistani ISI. King Fahd was able to further modernize and secure its country

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<sup>85</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 169-170.

domestically, thanks to U.S. engineers and weaponry.<sup>86</sup> The king also managed to increase Saudi influence in the Arabian Peninsula and abroad. Saudi clergy managed to further spread their religion and influence political Islam throughout the Middle East and parts of Asia and Africa.

Saudi diplomats and clergy were not the only people who helped to further Saudi interests. Within Reagan's administration, there were proponents and opponents to the U.S.-Saudi relation being deepened. One of these proponents was Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense. Weinberger saw Saudi Arabia as a useful ally for the U.S. to keep the Middle East under control and help the U.S. get cheap oil.<sup>87</sup> Israel, the main ally of the U.S. in Saudi Arabia, was put aside by Weinberger as the country was seen as a burden to the U.S. instead of a strategic ally. With Weinberger's determination to create the strongest alliance in the Middle East with Saudi Arabia, the Saudis were able to gain even more from their alliance with the U.S. arms sales were increased to the kingdom and the Saudis kept on putting money into the operation in Afghanistan. Weinberger was successful in bringing the U.S.-Saudi alliance to its strongest peak since both countries had become allied. Unfortunately for Weinberger, the Iran-Contra affair became public, and Weinberger was indicted for involvement in the affair.<sup>88</sup>

In short, Reagan and his administration had managed to deepen the bond between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. As a part of the Reagan Doctrine, Saudi Arabia had become a strong ally in the fight against the Soviets. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia shared their goals to end the Soviet Union's existence in the world by any means possible. Saudi Arabia profited from its alliance with the U.S., as the U.S. tried to do what it could do to keep the Saudis on its side.

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<sup>86</sup> Granieri, *Beyond Cap the Foil*, 69-70.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

The Saudi intelligence service made use of this situation by influencing who would receive aid in the Mujahideen. This served the Saudi goal to spread its religious beliefs and increase its influence over the Islamic world. U.S. officials allowed the Saudis to undertake their political and religious agenda as the U.S. tried to avoid any direct involvement in Afghanistan. For the Mujahideen this meant that support kept coming and the flow of arms was increasing as the Soviet War in Afghanistan continued.

## Chapter 3: The religious nature of support

Saudi Arabia was supporting groups within the Mujahideen to increase its influence over the country, an operation focused on the future of Afghanistan. Around the same period, the U.S. government was focused on a strong operation in Afghanistan that would lead to an end of the Soviet occupation and the existence of the Soviet Union. To maintain a powerful resistance in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were needed to keep the operation going. This triangular cooperation between the U.S, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan was not an easily maintainable relationship. Both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan demanded aid and favourable international policies from the U.S. This chapter will analyse U.S. policy decisions made to ensure that the operation in Afghanistan continues and both allies are kept satisfied to keep on supporting the operation. The influence of Saudi Arabia and their religion on the Mujahideen are the focus. I argue that Saudi Arabia had the most influence on U.S. support for the Mujahideen. Saudi Arabia managed to influence both the U.S. and the Mujahideen, thanks to the strong position the Saudis were in. The U.S. was the greater power, however it relied on the smaller power, Saudi Arabia.

Another focus is on U.S. policymaking towards the operation in Afghanistan. The Mujahideen are the subject that showcases what the Saudi influence is on the operation. This chapter ends this research by answering the research question: To what extent were U.S.-Saudi relations an important factor in determining which groups within the Mujahideen received support from the U.S. government between 1979 and 1989? The question will be answered by providing an argument backed with key focus points. The first key point I argue that the U.S. has avoided direct involvement in the operation in Afghanistan, which led to an increase in power for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Second, I contend that Saudi Arabia is helped by the U.S. to increase its influence over the Mujahideen. Third, I argue that near the end of the operation

the U.S. tries to regain the dominant role over the operation. Last, I point out that Saudi Arabia's influence over the operation has left the U.S. powerless to further influence the future of Afghanistan. These points add to the argument that Saudi Arabia managed to train certain groups within the Mujahideen better than others, based on their religious ideals that were close to those of the Saudis. The Saudis were less powerful than the U.S., but in this case, the U.S. came to rely on the Saudis to channel the aid.

The previous chapter was made to give insight into the history of the relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The focus was on the history between both countries and the state in which the relations developed throughout the first half of the 1980s. The basis laid in the previous chapter adds to the understanding of how U.S.-Saudi relations had an impact on U.S. policymaking towards Afghanistan. The Saudis were able to take advantage of the U.S. approach to the operation in Afghanistan. Certain religious groups within the Mujahideen were preferred by the Saudis, due to religious similarities. Saudi officials followed the Wahhabism doctrine by financing the spread of their religion and some Mujahideen groups fitted in this strategy. This came forth out of the education system in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis had schools and education which had radicalized people for decades, which was not in the best case for the U.S. These effects and implementations of this Saudi religious policy were becoming a problem for the U.S. in the second half of the 1980s.

Pakistan's influence on the U.S. support for the Mujahideen was of importance as well. They opened training camps for the Mujahideen in the border region with Afghanistan. This was done to control the training and the supply of aid for the Mujahideen. These camps gave the Pakistani services the power to train the Mujahideen to their liking and without interference from U.S. officials. Due to similarities between the Pakistani and Saudi approach to which groups they favoured, it allowed the Saudis to finance some groups more than others.

These training and strains of support to certain groups within the Mujahideen happened from the start of the operation. However, for the continuation of the chapter, the focus is on the second half of the 1980s, as this period clearly showed the result of Saudi influence over the operation. The religious groups that were favoured by the Saudis were gaining more ground in the country. The effects of the operation in Afghanistan were becoming clearer for the U.S. and its allies. From 1985 until 1989, the operation was in its most concrete form, as the U.S. had set goals for the future of Afghanistan instead of mostly focusing on defeating the Soviets. The defeat of the Soviets remained the main objective of the operation, but there was an increased concern for the future of Afghanistan. The U.S. had to look at its allies and their intentions for the future of Afghanistan.

The first half of the 1980s had been focused on setting up the operation in Afghanistan with the U.S. not prioritizing which group received the most aid. The other allies did use this first part of the operation to prioritize those groups that received more support than others. President Reagan impacted the operation by increasing the cooperation between the U.S. and its allies in the region. The U.S. government chose to remain somewhat distant from the operation to avoid direct involvement in Afghanistan. This gave Pakistan and Saudi Arabia more room to direct the operation in their favoured way. An example of the Pakistani and Saudi influence on the operation was that groups within the Mujahideen that had an Islamic background linked to the Pashtun region, were prioritized over other groups.<sup>89</sup> U.S. officials knew that there were differences between the groups within the Mujahideen. The differences and the implications for the support of the Mujahideen were known as well, but they were not acted on. U.S. Department of State officials argued in 1982 that “most mujahidin leaders, particularly those near Pakistan, periodically go to Peshawar or Quetta to arrange for supplies from one or another of the six major political organisations, which the Pakistani Government

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<sup>89</sup> Tripathi, *Breeding Ground*, 80-81.

has recognized.”<sup>90</sup> The influence of Pakistani organisations and political parties was analysed by U.S. policymakers, but the conclusion was that it helped the Mujahideen and gave them shelter in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>91</sup> The Department of State acknowledged the influence of political parties and organisations in Pakistan, but the document was analytical and did not provide an argument on what the impact was of this influence.

U.S. policymakers were concerned with keeping Pakistan invested in Afghanistan to make sure that the Mujahideen was sufficiently trained. The U.S. tried to keep the Pakistani government as a tight ally that could provide aid to the Mujahideen, whilst strengthening their security forces against potential communist threats. As the Department of State argued in 1980 “we will continue to use appropriate bilateral contacts with traditional donor governments to press them to increase their assistance to Pakistan.”<sup>92</sup> The importance of U.S. leniency towards Pakistan was stressed, as the U.S. needed to get other allies involved and back down its non-proliferation policies towards the country to get its assistance.<sup>93</sup> Cold War policies were pointed out in this document, the Mujahideen were pushing the Soviets back which helped to halt a communist take-over of Afghanistan. The defeat of communism went above all other policies. This document showed one of the important points that were put forward in the previous chapter. The U.S. tried to make sure that its allies did the intense work that involved them deeply in the operation. To ensure the support of its allies, the U.S. made sure that Pakistan was satisfied with the aid it received from the U.S. and its allies.<sup>94</sup> The U.S.’s policymaking

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<sup>90</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *The Afghan Resistance Movement in 1981: Progress, But a Long Way to Go* (Washington, D.C., 1982), DNSA, ID: 1679078528, 3.

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *The Afghan Resistance Movement in 1981: Progress, But a Long Way to Go* (Washington, D.C., 1982), DNSA, ID: 1679078528, 1-4.

<sup>92</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Strategy for Pakistan Assistance*, by Matthew Nimetz, Briefing Memorandum (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679140105, 2.

<sup>93</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Strategy for Pakistan Assistance*, by Matthew Nimetz, Briefing Memorandum (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679140105, 2-4.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Economic and Military Assistance to Pakistan* (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679124833, 1-5.

was influenced by its allies but chose to allow the influence over its policymaking to ensure cooperation from its allies.

Pakistan made itself an important ally from the start of the operation. Its strategic location together with its willingness to take in refugees and Mujahideen fighters made them into one of the two most important allies. The document mentioned in the previous paragraph was part of a collection of documents that showed the U.S. its commitment to Pakistan. The non-proliferation efforts were placed in the background. “Under these, we believe it is imperative that other western donors join us in substantially increasing economic and military assistance so that Pakistan will feel that the West as a whole has stood with it in this crisis” the Department of State argued in a telegram in 1980.<sup>95</sup> The U.S. Department of State stressed the importance of a strong increase in support for Pakistan. This support was mostly in the form of money and some military supplies, provided by a combination of U.S. allies and the U.S. itself.<sup>96</sup> The U.S. put a lot of effort into maintaining a strong relationship with Pakistan. President Carter and Reagan focused on the allies fighting U.S. battles, whilst the U.S. kept on supporting their regimes. U.S. policymakers pointed out that a strong ally in the region was essential for the success of the operation.<sup>97</sup> To keep a strong operation going, the U.S. made sure that its allies maintained their pro-U.S. governments, to avoid a situation such as that in Iran in 1979.

The fact that Iran’s pro-U.S. government fell due to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, made the U.S. more focused on keeping its allies strong and stable. When the U.S. lost Iran as its ally in the Middle East, it not only gained an enemy, but it lost one of the two most important

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<sup>95</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Economic and Military Assistance to Pakistan* (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679124833, 2.

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Strategy for Pakistan Assistance*, by Matthew Nimetz, briefing memorandum (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679140105, 1-5.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Strategy for Pakistan Assistance*, by Matthew Nimetz, briefing memorandum (Washington, D.C., 1980), DNSA, ID: 1679140105, 2.

allies in the region. The effect of this loss had a great effect on the U.S. its efforts to keep the other regional allies strong and allied to the U.S. Iran tried to undermine U.S. efforts in the Middle East and South Asia by financing anti-U.S. fighters which were able to threaten the U.S. operations and their outcomes. In Afghanistan, Iran financed Shi'ite fighters, but the Iranian government had also opened talks between the Soviet Union and some pro-Shi'ite parties to regain control over Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup> Iran and Saudi Arabia shared similarities when focusing on the operation in Afghanistan. Both countries tried to gain influence over the country by financing groups that shared their ideas. Iran saw the Soviet Union as a useful ally to gain control over the region, whilst Saudi Arabia used the U.S. to gain influence. Both countries strived to gain control over the Middle East and other Islamic regions, both in their own but partially similar ways.

U.S. policies focused on the Middle East and the operation in Afghanistan reflected the overarching goal of the Cold War policies. The U.S. provided its allies with support on a national level to keep them satisfied in their relationships. In Saudi Arabia, U.S. military personnel helped the Saudi security forces to become better trained and equipped. The worst-case scenario for the U.S. would be that allies such as Saudi Arabia looked elsewhere for support and abandon their commitment to the U.S. This was a scenario that almost happened, as had been argued at the end of the previous chapter. Department of State official J. Edward Fox stated that:

The Saudi purchase of these missiles compounds the already serious trend toward missile proliferation in the region, but the Saudis are only the latest to join the group that includes Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, North Yemen, and Syria. Iran, the focal point of Saudi concern, has missiles that can strike at the heart of Saudi Arabia's economic

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<sup>98</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 37-89 (November 1, 1989. FOIA), C.I.A., ID: 0005564725, 5-6.

infrastructure. Iran's firing of a Scud missile at Kuwaiti oil facilities April 20 only reinforces Saudi concerns. Because of the volatile politics of the region and the large number of countries involved, it will be difficult to bring about the removal of missiles from the Middle East in the near term. We have begun holding bilateral discussions with other Middle East countries on the missile proliferation problem and potential regional solutions.

We do not believe that holding up notifiable sales is the solution to addressing these regional concerns. In particular, we believe that holding up or disapproving the long-term AWACS maintenance support contract would be inappropriate and counter-productive, not only to Saudi interests but also our own. This sale will support a critical military system that the Saudis are using in direct support of U.S. operations in the Gulf.<sup>99</sup>

The Reagan administration and its allies in the Senate see the backing of Saudi Arabia as a necessary policy to keep them from abandoning their relationship with the U.S. Controversial moves made by Saudi Arabia are disregarded and put away as regional affairs that do not concern the U.S.<sup>100</sup> These moves were for example the backing of the Arabian forces in the Arab-Israeli conflicts of 1948 and 1973. This linked to the U.S. way of conducting their operation in Afghanistan. If you would let your allies do the fighting for you, you needed to make sure that they stayed loyal and satisfied with you. If one of the allies decided to end its commitment to the operation, the whole operation would fail.

One way the U.S. managed to keep Saudi Arabia and Pakistan satisfied, was the sale of sophisticated arms and military equipment to both countries. The lack of technological

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<sup>99</sup> Department of State, *Department of State's Response to Congressional Concern regarding Proposed Sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679040291, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Department of State, *Department of State's Response to Congressional Concern regarding Proposed Sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679040291, 1.

advancement in both countries gave the U.S. an edge over them. This lack of technology had been a way for the U.S. to make sure that both countries relied on the U.S. The U.S. government used its technologies to help Saudi Arabia increase its internal security. This aid to Saudi Arabia was noticed in the U.S. In his own country, Reagan's policies were critically examined by the public, Congress, and the Senate, due to difference in opinion on U.S.-Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia's domestic policies were criticized by U.S. officials due to the threat of Saudi Arabia to the region.<sup>101</sup> Saudi Arabia was focused on increasing its dominance over the Arabian Peninsula, the region in which Israel has been present as well.

U.S. relations with Israel had been strong since the second half of the twentieth century. U.S. officials and the public were mostly pro-Israel, which was partially due to the strong American Jewish community in the U.S. This community had a strong lobby which was quite influential in the Senate and Congress.<sup>102</sup> Thus, U.S. policies and favours that were directed at Saudi Arabia were not passed without pro-Israeli politicians trying to prevent them.

The Jewish lobby in the U.S. was strong, but President Reagan managed to keep Saudi Arabia as a close ally as well, partially because the U.S. continued to try to prevent Iran from gaining influence over the Middle East. This was a strong move of the U.S., as they favoured the Saudis over the Iranians since the Islamic Revolution. The Saudis gained more influence over the region as one of their greatest threats in the Middle East was having trouble developing a strong dominance over the region.

U.S. policymaking towards Saudi Arabia was focused on maintaining a strong bond between both nations to ensure the future of mutual operations. The Iran-Iraqi war was one of

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<sup>101</sup> U.S. Executive Office of the President, National Security Study Directive, *U.S. Security Relationship with Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C., 1984), DNSA, ID: 1679052855, 2. Department of State, *Department of State's Response to Congressional Concern regarding Proposed Sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679040291, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 159-163.

the scenarios where U.S. policymaking was focused on aiding the Saudi-favoured party, which helped to better the U.S.-Saudi relation. These policy decisions were taken to ensure that countries that favour the Soviet Union were kept from gaining ground. The U.S. intervention in this conflict helped them to gain influence on two fronts. They improved their relations with Iraq by aiding the Iraqi troops. Next to this, the U.S. also gained the approval of Saudi Arabia for aiding their favoured side. These instances helped U.S.-Saudi relations to flourish during their period of intense cooperation.

The Mujahideen gained support from the increase in relations between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The support for them was maintained through financial and military support from their supporters. Thus, the Mujahideen gained from the U.S. domestic and international tactics to ensure support for the operation in Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> This paragraph and the previous ones have shown the active efforts of the U.S. to make sure that its allies remain invested in the operation. However, the U.S. government did not only please its allies, but they had also chosen to allow their allies to influence the Mujahideen in their favoured directions. This is a concern of the following paragraphs in which the support for the Mujahideen is analysed to argue what the effects of the Saudi influence over Mujahideen have been.

U.S. policymaking concerning the operation in Afghanistan had been well documented, which showed the dedication of the policymakers to prevent the operation from failing. The U.S. government documents offered an insight into the policymaking towards Afghanistan. These documents helped to determine what the U.S. did to accommodate Saudi wishes. The U.S. standing on the operation had remained the same, let the allies be directly involved in the training and financing of the Mujahideen. The U.S. had been able to play a role in which it was actively gathering support and money for the operation, whilst using Pakistan as the executor

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<sup>103</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Afghanistan: Public Diplomacy Action Plan* (Washington, D.C., 1987), DNSA, ID: 1679059606, 1-6.

of the most important parts of the operation. Saudi Arabia on the other hand was the financial backer of the operation, which gave them the possibility to finance specific groups more than others.

The Islamic parties within the Mujahideen received more support from Saudi Arabia. Thanks to the political and religious situation created by the Soviets and Afghani government, the Saudis managed to support groups that increased in size due to their aversion to the atheist nature of the government policies.<sup>104</sup> These groups within the Mujahideen thrived on the atheist policies of the Afghani government and the support received from the Saudis, which was not controlled by the U.S. The U.S. was not concerned with the consequences of the operation and financing of more extreme Islamic groups within the Mujahideen. The focus of the policymakers was on defeating the Soviets and preventing the Communist state of Afghanistan from becoming a reality. The fact that Saudi Arabia was backing the forces they favoured to dominate Afghanistan was known to U.S. policymakers. In 1989, members of the U.S. intelligence community argued that “both Saudi Arabia and Iran want to guarantee their own future influence in Afghanistan while limiting that of the other country. They will continue to aid their clients regardless of what other countries do. Both want to strengthen their clients for future negotiations.”<sup>105</sup> Saudi policies concerning Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion were focused on getting the country to fall under Saudi dominance via its preferred groups within the Mujahideen.<sup>106</sup>

Saudi influence on the Mujahideen was made possible in two ways. The first was the coordination of U.S. support towards Saudi favoured groups within the Mujahideen. The

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<sup>104</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Afghanistan: Seven Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, D.C., 1986), DNSA, ID: 1679076115, 15-16.

<sup>105</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 37-89 (November 1, 1989. FOIA), C.I.A., ID: 0005564725, 5.

<sup>106</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 37-89 (November 1, 1989. FOIA), C.I.A., ID: 0005564725, 5-6.

second way was by direct Saudi support for Islamic groups within the Mujahideen, helped by the Pakistani Secret Service, the ISI. Groups such as the Hezb-i-Islami and Ittehad-i-Islami received more arms and funds, as they were religiously more aligned to the Saudis. These groups were fundamentalist in origin and used their religion to unite against the government that did not accept their values. This was one of the reasons why Saudi Arabia backed these groups, they fitted within the Wahhabi strategy of the Saudi state to dominate the region.<sup>107</sup> This information and documentation provided an understanding of Saudi support. Previous information provided in this research showed that this support fitted within the Saudi dominance strategy and their religious motivation. Afghanistan was one of the first large support operations for the Saudi strategy. Therefore, Saudi financial support was unlimited with the condition that groups that were favoured by the Saudis were supported. Together with the ISI, the Saudis managed to get a well-funded, trained resistance group. The Pakistani and Saudi cooperation was based on different political agendas serving a somewhat similar purpose.

Mujahideen groups prioritized by the U.S. received less support than the groups favoured by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. One of the groups favoured by the U.S. was Jamait-Islami. Ahmad Shah was one of their important military leaders, he received a great part of the U.S. aid to strengthen his group. On the other hand, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami received aid from the Saudi and Pakistani services. The C.I.A. and several Congressmen knew that Massoud received fewer supplies and money from the Pakistani services, which led to an increase in money from the U.S. to Massoud.<sup>108</sup> However, this was done in 1989, before then Mujahideen leaders that were not favoured by ISI and Saudi Arabia received fewer supplies and money. Although it was not possible to assume that the C.I.A. had known of the fact that

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<sup>107</sup> Olivier Roy, "Islam in the Afghan Resistance," *Esprit* 64, no. 4: 85-87.

<sup>108</sup> Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 190.

some Mujahideen groups received more support than others, it was helpful that there was information on the support for the Mujahideen in the late 1980s.<sup>109</sup>

The future of Afghanistan was meant to be in the hands of the Mujahideen. However, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were able to influence these groups into shaping Afghanistan more towards their vision of an Islamic state and ally. This period was of great importance for this research as this was the point that gave way for Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to form Afghanistan's future. The groups within the Mujahideen that had received the most support were being formed to take over the country. The U.S. strategy was to leave the future of Afghanistan in the hands of the Afghans. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had been supporting their favoured groups since the beginning of the operation, which shifted the balance towards them instead of the people. The U.S. strategy and that of its allies gave way to more extreme groups coming to power after the Soviet withdrawal.

The Mujahideen was the protagonist of most U.S. documents that focused on the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, as they were tasked with shaping the future of the country. The different groups within the Mujahideen all had different ideas on the future of the country. This together with the fact that the Mujahideen had been left out of the peace talks in Geneva, led to rising tensions within the groups.<sup>110</sup> For this research, it was of importance that there was some insight into the state of the Mujahideen near the end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan. There were differences within the Mujahideen and the role of religion and regional background play an important role in these differences. Religious members of the Mujahideen which were

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<sup>109</sup> The reason it was not possible to assume that the C.I.A. had the information on the exact support numbers for the Mujahideen was, that there was a lack of information and documentation on the C.I.A. documents concerning Mujahideen support. The C.I.A. website and the DNSA had documents that contained information on the Soviet War in Afghanistan and support plans for Pakistan and Afghanistan, but these focused more on politics and the future of the region.

<sup>110</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role, and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal*, by Richard P. Cronin and Francis T. Miko, IB88049 (1988), DNSA, ID: 1679076400, 4-6.

of Pashtun descent had received significantly more support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. These members were also the biggest ethnic group within the Mujahideen, but not the best organized group.<sup>111</sup> Their leaders such as Hekmatyar were well-funded thanks to the Saudi and ISI preference for them. The U.S. knew these differences but did not act to prevent a shift in the internal balance of the Mujahideen.

The U.S. gave off a certain reluctance to make efforts to form the new Afghan government or to reform the Mujahideen to avoid direct involvement or because they did not care.<sup>112</sup> This is seen as in 1988 the Bureau of Public Affairs stated “we believe that Afghanistan’s future political course must be left to the Afghan people themselves to decide. The United States has no blueprint for Afghanistan. Nor do we favour any group or individual.”<sup>113</sup> The defeat of the Soviet Union and communism was the most important objective. The Mujahideen were a means to an end, their internal conflicts were not handled by the U.S. or its agencies. The focus of the U.S. policymakers was the realisation of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan by making sure that the Mujahideen remained an important force that kept pressuring the Soviet soldiers. The U.S. its biggest concern after 1988 was that the Soviets did not leave Afghanistan as promised, which would result in the lack of possibilities for the Mujahideen to topple the Communist Afghan government.<sup>114</sup> Luckily for the U.S., multiple countries and institutions kept an eye on the Soviet Union’s efforts to withdraw. The United Nations (U.N.) kept an eye on the withdrawal progress of the Soviets. "Working with Prince Sadrudin, we are confident that the UN effort will be directed in ways supportive of the

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<sup>111</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role, and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal*, by Richard P. Cronin and Francis T. Miko, IB88049 (1988), DNSA, ID: 1679076400, 5.

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Status Report on Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679075396, 2-3.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Status Report on Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679075396, 2.

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role, and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal*, by Richard P. Cronin and Francis T. Miko, IB88049 (1988), DNSA, ID: 1679076400, 8-15.

interests of the Afghan people" stated the Bureau of Public Affairs in 1988.<sup>115</sup> The U.S. and U.N. shared the same view on the future of Afghanistan, it had to be in the hands of the Afghan people.

The fact that the U.S. policymaking concerning Afghanistan's internal politics had been a hands-off approach, was not due to Saudi influence over the U.S. The U.S. had been focused on the defeat of the Soviets, which was accomplished at the start of 1988. Afghanistan's future was of much less concern to the U.S., they focused on a positive relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan with a focus on neutrality and non-alignment.<sup>116</sup> Thus, the U.S. did not abandon Afghanistan but focused more on aid for refugees and the safety of the country. There was no mention of U.S. help for the Mujahideen that focused on solving problems within the Mujahideen. The Congressional Research Service stated, "the Afghan resistance groups deeply resent not having been a part of the U.N. negotiating process and have rejected the Geneva accord, vowing to continue the fight until the PDPA government is toppled."<sup>117</sup> The Mujahideen had their objectives to gain back control over their country. Unfortunately for the Afghan people and refugees, the fighting would not cease after the communist presence in Afghanistan was gone.

The future of Afghanistan and the Mujahideen after 1989 was beyond the scope of this research, but it did have some significance. The U.S. intelligence services had been focused on the success of the Afghan Interim government that was formed in 1988. This interim government reflected the Pakistani and Saudi influence over the country. The prime minister and minister of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Border and Tribal Affairs were chosen from the

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<sup>115</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *Status Report on Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C., 1988), DNSA, ID: 1679075396, 4.

<sup>116</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role, and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal*, by Richard P. Cronin and Francis T. Miko, IB88049 (1988), DNSA, ID: 1679076400, 6-7.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Status, U.S. Role, and Implications of a Soviet Withdrawal*, by Richard P. Cronin and Francis T. Miko, IB88049 (1988), DNSA, ID: 1679076400, 6.

Saudi-Pakistani preferred groups within the Mujahideen.<sup>118</sup> "The failure of the resistance to fashion a credible political instrument has deprived the Mujahedin of a potentially powerful asset in the struggle... but the resistance has been weakened by internecine fighting" stated officials from the U.S. intelligence community in 1988.<sup>119</sup> The information in this report showed U.S. knowledge of the problems with the Saudi-Pakistani backed groups gaining the overhand in Afghanistan. It was clear that without U.S. support for other groups within the Mujahideen, the Saudi-Pakistani backed groups were able to steamroll over the opposition. In this sense, Saudi Arabia's influence on U.S. support for the Mujahideen had been more focused on U.S. support going to groups that needed help. They needed support to form somewhat of opposition to the groups under Hekmatyar and other more radical Islamic leaders.

At the beginning of the operation, U.S. support for the Mujahideen was directed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, as these two countries had better knowledge of the Mujahideen. However, as the operation in Afghanistan had neared its end, the U.S. services concluded that this support for the more radical Islamic groups led to an Afghanistan that was going to be led by Saudi-Pakistani sympathizers instead of the Afghans themselves. Leaders such as Hekmatyar and Rasul Sayyaf were able to create a substantial force of well-trained fighters who were well equipped, thanks to the Pakistani services favouring them over the other groups. The chances for a united Afghanistan ruled by a government that was representative of its populace were slim. The above-mentioned leaders made use of their presence in Afghanistan to engage in alliances with tribes in several regions. This resulted in parts of Afghanistan being under the sphere of influence of Mujahideen groups, which further fragmented the country in the case of internal conflict between the Mujahideen groups.

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<sup>118</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 37-89 (November 1, 1989. FOIA), C.I.A., ID: 0005564725, 2-4.

<sup>119</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, *Afghanistan: The War in Perspective*, SNIE 37-89 (November 1, 1989. FOIA), C.I.A., ID: 0005564725, 3.

The Mujahideen managed to continue their operations against the communist government after the Soviet withdrawal. As the Soviet war in Afghanistan ended and the Soviet backing for the Afghan government slowly ceased, the Mujahideen gained ground and power. The Afghan government stepped down in 1992 as the Mujahideen took over Kabul. The newly formed government showed the weakness of the Mujahideen, its fragmentation. The government was fragmented and the different Mujahideen leaders weakened the power of government due to ongoing conflicts. The continued support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to their preferred groups led to a fragmented weak government that was in no state to rebuild the country. Through the weakness of the Afghan government and the lack of U.S. support for the rebuilding of the country, new threats had arisen in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Fundamentalist ultra-orthodox Islamic fighters formed a new group that was set on reforming Afghanistan through Islamic law. The group was called the Taliban. The Taliban were successful in starting a conquest throughout Afghanistan. These fighters were partially formed from Mujahideen fighters and they received support from some of the Saudi-Pakistani backed groups. Those who had been supported by the U.S.-backed operation in Afghanistan were now planning to take over the country and rid it of U.S. influence. The Taliban would come to haunt the U.S. as they gained power in Afghanistan and started to harbour radical Islamic groups and figures, such as Osama Bin Laden. Thus, U.S. support for the Mujahideen had been used to support groups that prevented Afghanistan from being rebuilt by a stable government. Saudi support had led to an increase in influence over Afghanistan due to Saudi supporters becoming influential in the Mujahideen and Afghan government.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to answer the question: To what extent were U.S.-Saudi relations an important factor in determining which groups within the Mujahideen received support from the US government between 1979 and 1989? Through a qualitative analysis of U.S. policy documents and reports, the answer to this question was formed by arguments made based on these documents together with some secondary sources. The secondary sources laid the basis of this research by providing historical background. The primary sources were used to build an argument that provided the answer to the research question. The analysis and arguments have led to the conclusion that U.S.-Saudi relations were an important factor that determined which groups within the Mujahideen received support from the U.S. government. The U.S. government allowed the Saudi government to influence the support for the Mujahideen by giving the Saudi officials the power to choose which groups would receive power. The fact that the U.S. played more of a background role in the operation in Afghanistan, allowed its allies to finance those groups that were deemed useful for the future of an Afghanistan controlled by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The moment the U.S. realized that its allies had been financing specific groups instead of all groups equally, it was too late to restore the balance, as the Saudi-backed groups had gained influence over several parts of Afghanistan. U.S. policies towards Saudi Arabia had been focused on keeping the country invested in the operation. The success of the operation was of great importance for the U.S. government, as it would lead to the end of the Soviet Union. This blinded U.S. policymakers for the consequences of the operation for the future of Afghanistan. Thus, the U.S. policymakers failed to ensure the future of Afghanistan for the people of Afghanistan, which was supposed to be a part of the operation.

Although there was a lack of reports with numbers on the amounts of money provided to specific groups within the Mujahideen, the U.S. government documents provided sufficient

information to make claims on the Saudi influence over specific groups in the Mujahideen and the U.S. lack of influence thereover. Further research could focus on the precise numbers and reports on which groups within the Mujahideen received what amounts of money and support from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. If these reports become available in the future, it could provide this research and the academic debate with clear arguments on the flow of support towards specific groups and the percentages of aid that came for the U.S. and its allies. Future research is needed to connect the precise support numbers to the groups that benefited most from the aid. The aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is an interesting period to be researched with a focus on the consequences of the foreign support for the Mujahideen. Scholars can also choose to focus on the Mujahideen or a specific group within the Mujahideen. This research helps to give a more detailed analysis of the specific groups within the Mujahideen and the part they had during and after the Soviet invasion.

This research has focused on U.S.-Saudi relations and the implications for aid to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. The existing academic debate has focused on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from the U.S. focus on defeating the Soviets. The Mujahideen were seen as means to an end with some scholars paying attention to their role in the conflict. This research has focused more on how the U.S. gathered its allies to focus their efforts on the rebel forces of the Mujahideen. The U.S.-Saudi relations are the main focus of this research, whilst the Mujahideen are the case study to show what these relations meant. The depth of this research was focused on how the U.S., which was seen as one of the two world powers during the Cold War, was being used by Saudi Arabia to fulfil the Saudi agenda of Middle Eastern dominance. The focus of scholars was mostly on the U.S. trying to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, but this research focused on the U.S. allies their efforts to make use of the U.S. its determination. This research contributed to the existing academic debate and knowledge by determining the effects of the U.S. policymakers' strategy to keep the allies involved in the

operation. This allowed the allies to follow their agendas. In the case of Saudi Arabia, this meant that the Saudi and Sunnite influence over Afghanistan increased. The Mujahideen became more fragmented and gave other organisations such as the Taliban, the opportunity to bring new conflict and rule to the country.

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